

Fall Forest Exploration

DCR Myles Standish State Forest

TRIP-TIP SELF-GUIDED ADVENTURE

Welcome

Myles Standish State Forest is a wonderful place to explore in the fall. This DCR Trip Tip self-guided adventure features three fun family activities all located within a few minutes of driving time of one another in Myles Standish State Forest in the towns of Plymouth and Carver. This Trip Tip features:

Bike Ride along the Camping Ponds Loop Paved Bike Paths

East Head Reservoir Hike

Cutter Field Road Bird Watching

Born of fire and ice and shaped by human hands, Myles Standish State Forest is home to both a rich geologic history and unique forest ecosystem. The area's landscape was formed over 10,000 years ago when the glaciers of the last ice age retreated, dropping loads of sand and stone. The sandy soil of these glacial deposits retains little rainwater and the vegetation is prone to forest fires during dry spells in the summer. The natural forest community that is found throughout much of the forest (the pitch pine/scrub oak association or "pine barrens") is uniquely adapted to these conditions and is found in only a few places in the world—including Myles Standish State Forest! As you enjoy your time here, keep in mind the complex history that has shaped this landscape and remember that, over time, it will continue to change.



This Trip Tip gives you the information needed and some fun ideas to explore the great outdoors at Myles Standish State Forest in the fall. With a little preparation and a sense of adventure, people of all ages can safely enjoy our outdoor spaces during the beautiful autumn months.

Look through this guide to help plan your outing. Choose one adventure, two adventures, or make it a multi-day adventure. Complete them in any order, you decide. We hope you enjoy this Trip Tip tour.

Share Your Adventure!

Share your Trip Tip adventure with others through word of mouth, or on social media using the hashtags **#massdcr** and **#dcrtip**.

Things To Know, Before You Go

- Observe all posted rules and regulations.
- Carry-in and carry-out all of your belongings, including trash and dog waste.
- Wear weather-appropriate clothing and sturdy footwear. Consider sunblock and insect repellent. Bring drinking water and a snack.
- All pets must be on a 10-foot-long maximum leash and attended to at all times. Clean-up after your pet and dispose of waste either in a trash barrel or off-site.
- Be aware of hunting seasons and wear blaze orange when appropriate. For hunting season information, please visit www.mass.gov/dfw.
- Wear a bicycle helmet when biking. Riders age 16 or younger are required by law to wear a helmet.
- Take note of the estimated time, distance, and level of difficulty for each trail and bike path and plan accordingly. Keep together as a group. Limit the size of your group to 12 or less in order to lessen impacts. Hike only as fast as your slowest hiker. Stay on designated trails. Follow trail etiquette and yield accordingly.
- Bring a map and share your plans with someone. MSSF trail map can be picked up at Headquarters located at 194 Cranberry Road, South Carver or downloaded here: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/myles-standish-trail-map/download>. Be aware that some trails may not be well marked and some trails may not be identified on the trail map.

Exploring by bike:

Bike Ride along the Camping Loop Paved Bike Paths Myles Standish State Forest

Headquarters Parking Lot, 194 Cranberry Road, South Carver, MA
Phone: (508) 866-2526

Website: <https://www.mass.gov/locations/myles-standish-state-forest>

Hours of Operation: Dawn to dusk.

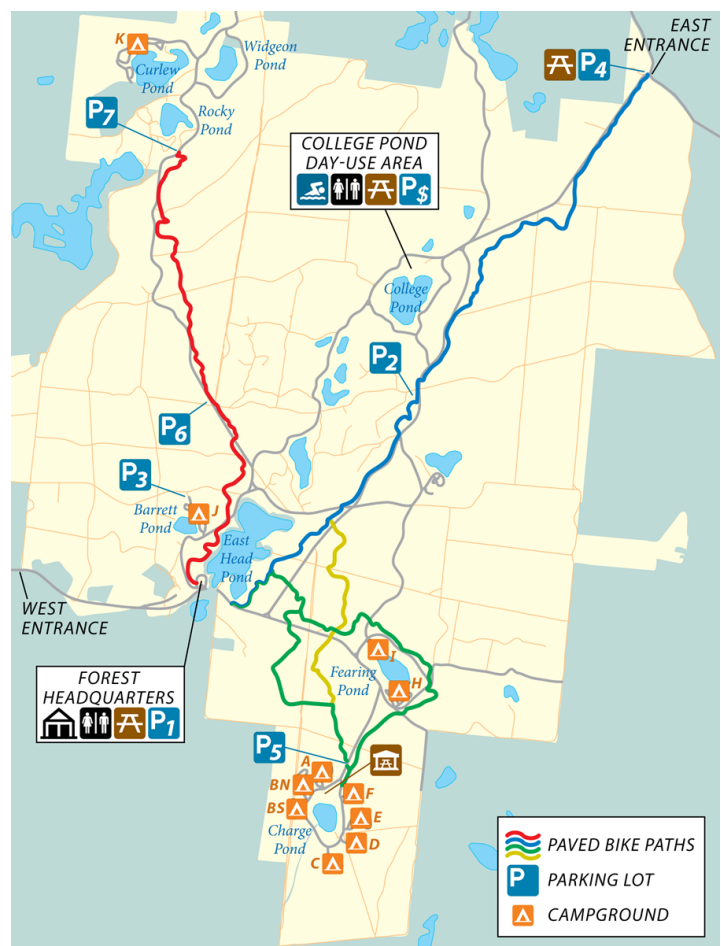
Park at the Headquarters Parking Lot; no parking fee required.

Restrooms are available in the back of the Interpretive Center from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Biking the Forest!

Distance: 6.25-mile loop **Difficulty:** Easy

Marked in green on the accompanying map, this leisurely 6.25-mile bike ride among beautiful pines and ponds is an adventure that everyone will enjoy.



Begin at **Headquarters Parking Lot 1 (P1)** at 194 Cranberry Road, South Carver. From the southeast corner of the parking lot (the entrance to the parking lot), cross the gated foot bridge on your left and head up the paved road. The paved bike path will be on your left-hand side after you cross over the East Head Reservoir and go up the road a few minutes.

Carefully follow the signs at the trail intersections towards **Fearing Pond**. *You will cross a few automobile roads so proceed with care.* When the bike path crosses Cutter Field Road, Fearing Pond will be on your right, through the large day use area parking lot. This is one of our largest and most beautiful ponds. Why not stop and enjoy the view?

When you come back out of the Fearing Pond Day Use parking lot, continue down the bike path which will take you to **Charge Pond**. You will arrive at a sign at a fork directing you straight to Charge Pond via an automobile road or right to **Parking Lot 5 (P5)**. If time allows, a stop at this pond is a nice break.

To return to **Headquarters**, return to the bike trail and take the first left hand turn towards **Parking Lot 5 (P5)**. The bike trail picks back up at the rear of the parking lot. Follow the signs towards **Headquarters (HQ)**.

Camping Pond Loops Information

A unique feature of the ecosystem within Myles Standish State Forest is the dry, sandy soil that rests beneath most of the forest's landscape. The trees that you'll find along the bike paths are indicative of this type of nutrient-poor soil, as most of the tree species within the forest are highly adapted over thousands of years to live in these inhospitable growing conditions, namely pitch pines and scrub oak.

The bent, gnarled pines with the rough bark are **pitch pines**. This tree is a "pioneer species"—the first to grow in this dry, sandy, fire-prone places where other trees cannot. Also, look for a bush with oak leaves. That's a **scrub oak**, the smallest oak tree species in the world. Each of these types of trees thrive in the sandy soil found in the forest.

Near Fearing Pond and Charge Pond, you will see a part of the forest where the trees have been cut down. In some areas, these trees were non-native **red pine trees** that were planted many decades ago. An insect called the **red-pine scale** killed the trees a number of years ago. To prevent forest fires and allow native trees to grow back in their place, the dead red pines were removed.

In other areas, the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Bureau of Forest Fire Control and Forestry along with MassWildlife are restoring native **Pine Barrens** habitat through **forest thinning** and the use of **prescribed fire**. This work provides globally rare habitat and also reduces risk to human health and property in the event of a wildfire. For more information about the **Myles Standish 10 Year Pine Barrens Restoration Project**, please visit <https://www.mass.gov/guides/myles-standish-10-year-pine-barrens-restoration>.

Fearing Pond is the location of the last **Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC)** structure in Myles Standish State Forest. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a New Deal program of the 1930's, provided jobs for young, unemployed men during the Great Depression. The CCC made valuable contributions to forest management, flood control, conservation projects, and the development of state and national parks, forests, and his-



toric sites. The hundreds of men stationed at the CCC camp in Myles Standish State Forest undertook a variety of forest management projects. These duties included building fire roads to reach remote areas of the forest, which are highly at risk of wildfires due to the lack of moisture in the soil. In return, the men received the benefits of education and training, a small paycheck, and the dignity of honest work. The CCC log bathhouse at Fearing Pond is an example of classic CCC architecture. The large stone firepit next to the bathhouse was also built by the CCC and is still in use today. Check it out!

Extend Your Experience!

There are 15 miles of paved bike paths throughout the forest. Explore more by downloading a guide to recommended paved bike path routes here: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/recommended-paved-bike-path-routes/download>.

East Head Reservoir Hike Myles Standish State Forest

Headquarters Parking Lot, 194 Cranberry Road, South Carver, MA

Phone: (508) 866-2526

Website: <https://www.mass.gov/locations/myles-standish-state-forest>

Hours of Operation: Dawn to dusk.

Park at the Headquarters Parking Lot; no parking fee required.

Restrooms are available in the back of the Interpretive Center from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.

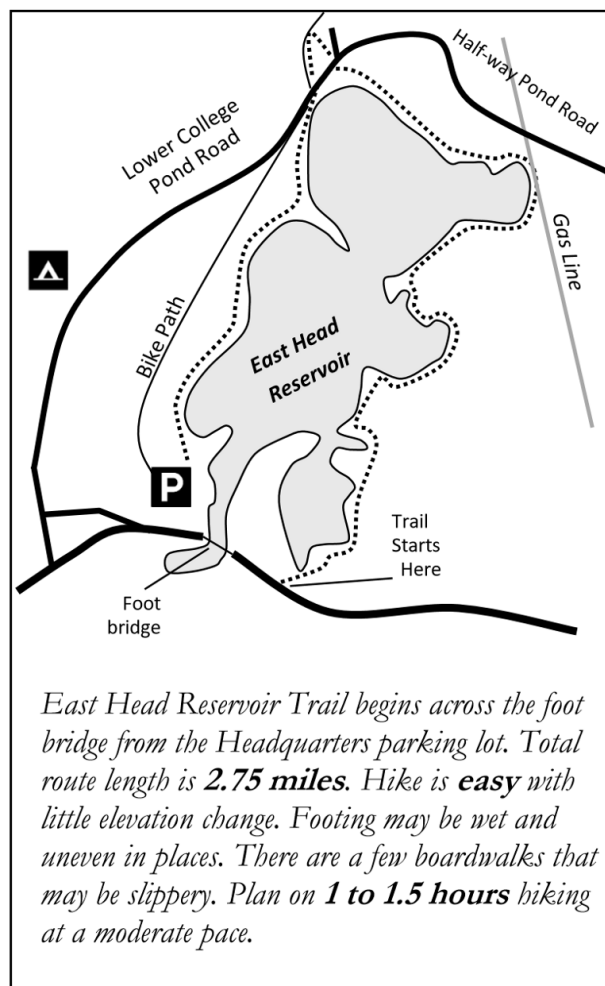
Exploring by foot:

Hike Around the East Head Reservoir!

Distance: 2.75-mile loop **Difficulty:** Easy

This hiking trail is about 2.75-miles long and is mostly flat. Hiking time is usually between 60 and 90 minutes. Blue triangle markers guide your way. Begin at the Headquarters Parking Lot located at 194 Cranberry Road, South Carver. From the parking lot entrance, head left to cross a gated foot bridge. The East Head Reservoir Trail starts just after the second gate on your left-hand side. The trail ends behind Forest Headquarters.

You will see 14 numbered posts along the trail. There is a brochure with corresponding information about the natural features you'll see along the trail. Download the self-guided Interpretive Trail Brochure here, www.mass.gov/doc/east-head-reservoir-trail/download.



*East Head Reservoir Trail begins across the foot bridge from the Headquarters parking lot. Total route length is **2.75 miles**. Hike is **easy** with little elevation change. Footing may be wet and uneven in places. There are a few boardwalks that may be slippery. Plan on **1 to 1.5 hours** hiking at a moderate pace.*

Cutter Field Road Bird Watching Myles Standish State Forest

Cutter Field Road Parking Lots

Phone: (508) 866-2526

Website: <https://www.mass.gov/locations/myles-standish-state-forest>

Hours of Operation: Dawn to dusk.

Follow signs to Camp Squanto. When you turn right onto Cutter Field Road, park at any of the paved pull out parking lots on the left-hand side of the road. No parking fee required. **No restrooms** at this location.

From any of the Cutter Field Road parking lots, head north towards the Quail Management Area with seven mowed fields that are alive with bird activity in the fall. Hike as far as you want through the fields to take some time to watch the birds that fly over and graze in these strips of managed grasslands.



Bird Watching Challenge

Myles Standish State Forest is home to over 130 distinct species of birds and is designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by Mass Audubon. An Important Bird Area is a site providing essential habitat to one or more species of breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds. The state forest is a significant breeding site for the regional high conservation priority species such as the: Whip-poor-will, Brown Thrasher, Prairie Warbler, Eastern Towhee, and Field Sparrow. With strips of open grasslands, Cutter Fields is one of the best places in the forest to identify birds. Here are a few birds you might see in this area:

Northern Cardinals: Northern cardinals are year-round residents of Massachusetts, having migrated from the Southeast over the last few decades. They can be found in a variety of habitats, ranging from woodland thickets to suburban gardens. Males have an unmistakable appearance due to their red rose plumage, pointed crest, and black mask. Females have more subdued tan and brown feathers. You might see them hopping on the ground or between branches in search of insects, seeds, or plant buds to eat. Listen for the song of a slurred whistle lowering in pitch.



Eastern Towhee: Eastern towhees often settle in open woodlands and undergrowth within forests. They are known to rummage through the leaf-litter in forests in order to find dead leaves to make a nest and find insects, seeds, and fruit to eat. Their nests are formed in low bushes less than 5' above ground. Males have black upper bodies, red sides, and white bellies while females have brown upper bodies, red sides, and white bellies. Listen for their wavering song that sounds like the phrase "*drink-your-teeee.*"



Eastern Bluebird: Eastern Bluebirds live and breed in various semi-open habitats found in Massachusetts, such as forest clearings, farmland, and open pine woods. They are easy to identify due to their bright blue backs and brick-red breasts. Many of these birds died out because of extensive use of DDT and other pesticides in the area. Over the years, the population has steadily increased thanks to the construction of birdhouses that replicate cavities in trees lost to logging or development. You can find these birdhouses in several places at MSSF, mainly at the Forest Headquarters and Cutter Field areas. Their call consists of 3-4 musical notes that sound like “*chur-wi.*”



Prairie Warbler: Prairie Warblers typically breed in shrubby habitats, such as overgrown fields, young pine thickets, and dry open woodlands. As a sandy pine barren with an undergrowth of scrub oak, MSSF harbors more prairie warblers than anywhere else in the state, with most settling in areas of the forest that burned 10 to 20 years ago. They have black stripes on their sides, yellow bellies, and chestnut-colored dots on their back. Listen for a short “*zee zee zee zee zee zee zee*” sound that goes up in pitch.



Osprey: Ospreys are large hawk like birds, with a prominent brown and white pattern on its sides and a white head. They form nests near coastlines, lakes, rivers, and other bodies of water so that they can fly over the water and hunt fish, which makes up almost the entirety of their diet. Aside from bald eagles, they are the only hawk that dives into the water for food. These birds are excellent hunters, taking less than 15 minutes on average to catch a fish. Once their prey is targeted, they will dive into the water feet first, grab the fish with its talons, and fly back to a perch to eat. Osprey are known to hover over and hunt at some of the larger kettle ponds in MSSF, such as Fearing Pond. Their call consists of a series of sharp whistles (“*cheep, cheep*”).



Great Horned Owl: Found throughout North America and much of South America, Great Horned Owls can live in practically all habitats across the two continents, from swamps to deserts to coniferous forests. This species gets its name from the long tufts that protrude from their ears and resemble horns. They are effective at hunting a variety of mammals, ranging in size from rats and squirrels to skunks and raccoons, as well as birds, reptiles, and insects. These owls, which can grow to be as large as many types of hawks, primarily hunt at night, as they have remarkably good hearing and good vision in low light. Listen for a resonant hooting of 3 to 8 hoots. (“hoot hoot, hoot hoot”).



Extend Your Experience!

Download more self-guided hikes at the DCR Myles Standish State Forest website: <https://www.mass.gov/location-details/myles-standish-state-forest-interpretive-programs>. These self-guided materials include:

- Rocky Pond Cranberry Bogs Self-Guided Interpretive Trail
- Frost Pocket Loop Self-Guided Interpretive Trail
- Suggested Hikes & Rides
- Recommended Paved Bike Path Routes

Thank you for joining us for this Fall Forest Exploration Trip Tip at Myles Standish State Forest! During your next Trip Tip, perhaps you’ll visit a park that you didn’t know about before. Maybe you’ll meet a new bird or try a new recreational activity. Autumn rambles are great opportunities to enjoy the outdoors and colors of fall. We hope that you will be invigorated to take even more Trip Tip adventures all year long!

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) oversees over 450,000 acres of state parks, forests, beaches, bike trails, parkways, watershed lands, and dams across the Commonwealth. DCR’s mission is to: *Protect, promote and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural and recreational resources for the well-being of all.* For more information visit: <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/department-of-conservation-recreation>.

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

251 Causeway Street, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02114
617-626-1250

