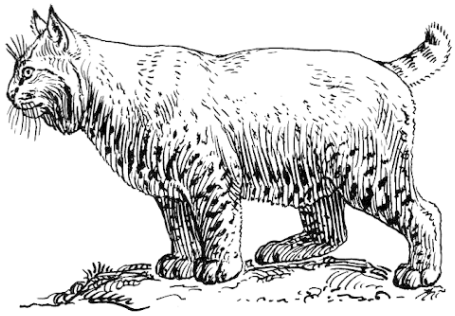
# Winter Wanders

At DCR State Parks in the
upper Connecticut River Valley



## TRIP-TIP SELF-GUIDED ADVENTURE

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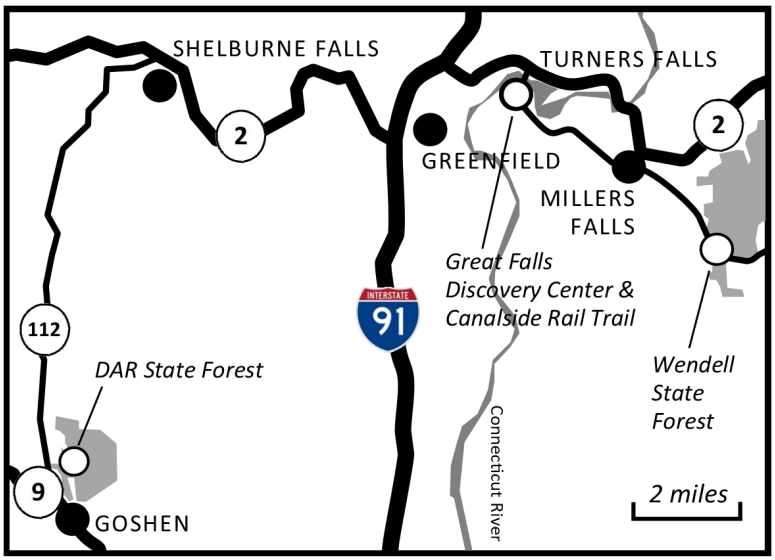
## Welcome

Wandering in DCR state parks this winter you are guaranteed to discover something new. You might even discover something new about yourself. This Trip-Tip self guided adventure features three state parks located within one hour of one another in the upper Connecticut River Valley. With this guide, and a little preparation, each adventure offers a fresh look at how to enjoy winter in unique park settings, in spite of and because of the cold, through active recreation. Perhaps you'll discover more stamina for winter sports, the legacy of how our parks were built, or a congregation of resting waterfowl. This Winter Wanders Trip-Tip features:

- ***Embrace Winter*** at **Wendell State Forest** in Wendell
- ***Take a Winter Rest Stop*** at the **Canalside Rail Trail** in Turners Falls
- ***Step in to Winter*** at **D.A.R State Forest** in Goshen




Choose one park, two parks, or make it a multi-day adventure. Visit them in any order, you decide. Challenge yourself to visit all the parks with your family during February Vacation Week, or anytime this winter. 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 **#dcrtriptip**.

## Things To Know, Before You Go

Remember, at all DCR parks and watersheds:

- Carry-in, carry-out all of your belongings, including trash.
- Stay on designated trails.
- Pets on 10-foot maximum leash at all times. Clean-up after your pet. dispose of waste off-site.
- Observe all posted rules and regulations.
- Be aware of hunting seasons and wear blaze orange when appropriate.

*Embrace Winter*

# Wendell State Forest

392 Montague Road, Wendell, MA 01378
**Phone: (**413) 659-3797
**Website:** www.mass.gov/locations/wendell-state-forest
**Hours of Operation:** Dawn to Dusk.
**Parking:** Free, ample parking during winter at headquarters and in the snowmobile lot on Montague Road, approximately 1/4-mile from headquarters.
**Restrooms:** Due to Covid-19 safety precautions, there are no restrooms available this winter.

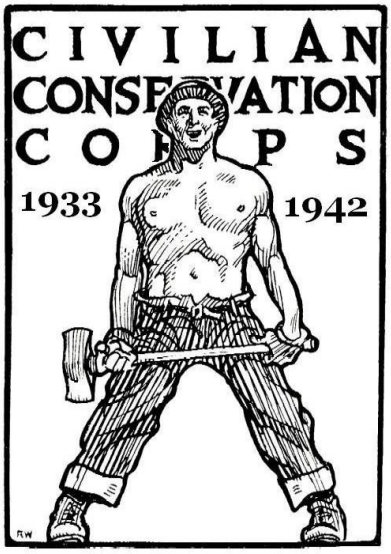
Wendell State Forest is a winter lover's paradise. It features 7,566 acres of rolling forested hills, streams, ice-covered ponds, trails, and a picnic area. Although winter *can* be its busiest season, the park's many acres and miles of roads and trails ensure there is plenty of space for everyone. **Bundle up with layers and sturdy, warm shoes.**

The following winter adventures are just the tip of the iceberg for ways to enjoy Wendell State Forest. You'll shake off any winter blues, get moving, and enjoy the forest.

## Sledding

**Grab your sled** and zoom down a local favorite sledding hill that is conveniently located very close to the park headquarters parking lot. If you and your sled tackle winter's cold embrace head on, and then walk up the hill several times in order to zoom on back down, you are bound to warm up! How many times can you sled the hill? Can you go one more time? Sure you can! How does the breeze feel as you zoom down hill? How fast can you go? One more time!

## Ruggles Pond Hurricane Picnic




You've likely worked up an appetite, so let's serve up some hurricane history for your picnic. For your next winter wander, walk downhill from the park headquarters on Ruggles Pond Road (closed to cars in winter). **Click here for a trail map.** Walk past the pond dam. On your left you'll see a picnic pavilion. Take note of the interpretive sign by the edge of Ruggles Pond and the kiosk photographs featuring the Wendell's Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) Camp S-62, 116 Company. These men helped build this park in the 1930s. Now use your searching skills at the pavilion to find a clue to a story about resourcefulness, and forgetting.

In September 1938 a hurricane swept through New England bringing down forests of trees. What do you do with all those fallen trees? One answer was to have the CCC harvest and store logs in ponds for future lumber to be sold and used later. A great idea … except, over the years, some logs were forgotten. That's what happened here at Ruggles Pond. Seventy years later, about 2008, DCR dredged the pond to maintain it for recreation. Up came the logs from the 1938 hurricane — discovered again and used to build this picnic pavilion! Can you find the stamp "**US**" on

the timbers in the rafters? This is the government stamp for the Northeast Timber Salvage Administration used to mark the salvaged hurricane timber. What might you build with a pond full of logs?

The pavilion may be crowded with stored picnic tables during winter. You can find plenty of other picnic tables nearby that are all ready for you to brush off the snow. Winter picnics include hot chocolate, to stay warm. What else will you pack for your hurricane picnic? Be surprised at how warm a winter picnic can feel. Bon appetite!

## Extend Your Experience!

If you have more zoom left in you, Wendell State Forest has a lot to offer. Embrace the exhilaration of warming up through movement as you explore the cold terrain. Wendell State Forest has excellent cross country skiing trails, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, hiking, and ice skating on Ruggles and Wickett ponds. The **Ruggles Pond Loop Trail** is a 2 mile hike, designated as a Healthy Heart Trail. The trailhead is on the far side of the beach. It joins the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail/New England Trail on other end of the pond and circles back to the other side of the dam.

## *Take a Winter Rest Stop*

# Canalside Rail Trail

**Locations:**

- Unity Park, 56 First Street at Unity Park, Turners Falls, MA 01376
- Great Falls Discovery Center, 2 Avenue A, Turners Falls, MA 01376
- Intersection of Avenue A and 11th Street
- Migratory Way via G Street.

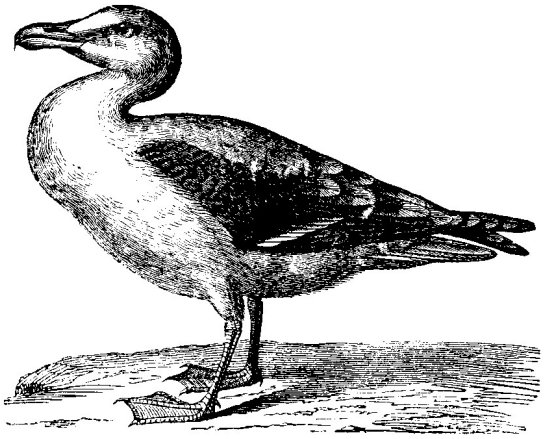
**Phone:** 413-863-3221
**Website:** www.mass.gov/locations/great-falls-discovery-center.
**Hours of Operation:** Dawn to Dusk.
**Parking:** Free parking at any one of the locations above.
**Restrooms:** Due to Covid-19 safety precautions, there are no restrooms available this winter.

A number of locations along the Canalside Rail Trail in Turners Falls provide excellent winter waterfowl viewing. **Click here for trail map**. The birds enjoy a rest stop on the open waters of the power canal and sometimes above the hydroelectric dam near Barton Cove. And, you may not even need to get out of your warm car to see the ducks, gulls, and geese! This means your birding adventure gets a green light even if trails are icy, so **bring your binoculars and a bird guide.**

## A View of Barton Cove

A first stop on the Canalside Rail Trail takes you above the Turners Falls Dam at Unity Park on First Street. Your first question, what's the status of the river today? Anywhere there is open water, you will likely find waterfowl. If the waters above the dam are completely iced over, you may *not* see waterfowl here. Oddly enough, some birds like gulls find the ice is no problem for a rest .... brrrrr!!

If the river is ice, there are more chances to see waterfowl, described below as you continue your wanderings. Your best chance at this stop for finding a spot on the river that is not frozen is closest to the dam. You may also see or hear the resident bald eagles flying nearby as they prepare their nest at Barton Cove. Use your binoculars to spot people ice fishing across the cove. If there is open water, perhaps you'll see Canada geese, a variety of ducks, gulls, and mute swans. The dam creates a reservoir, like a lake, in the river which is a great location for birds to feed and rest in winter. But, please do not feed the waterfowl. It creates unnatural behavior and leaves a big mess behind. Keep the "wild" in wildlife.



You can practice your waterfowl identification all along the rail trail - numerous species have been found here, some of them rare! How many mute swans can you count? They're hard to miss – so huge and white – even if they are quiet.

## Wandering to the Great Falls Discovery Center

Your search for birds leads you to wandering with a purpose. Head southwest on the **Canalside Rail Trail** for a 5-10 minute walk, or a short drive via First Street, to enjoy the four-acre park surrounding the **Great Falls Discovery Center** at 2 Avenue A. Listen to the roar of the water in the canal. You may see the river either roaring or frozen still below the dam. Watch your step as portions of the trail and surrounding areas may be icy. What birds do you see or hear at this stop? Are they water loving birds or tree loving birds? You may hear a noisy blue jay or a calling chickadee. Enjoy open play areas for leashed dog walks or making snow people and picnic tables. Parking is located in the plowed lot off Avenue A and 2nd Street. Accessible parking is available on Avenue A.

## A Winter Home for Waterfowl

For your next waterfowl stop continue walking south on the **Canalside Rail Trail** for about 1.5 miles to where the canal widens near a bench and a few tall pine trees. Or, you can continue driving south along Avenue A and park at the intersection of 11th Street and hop on the rail trail right there. The open waters of the power canal don't ice over in winter because of the constant movement of water. Ah … what a nice place to rest. You may rest your eyes on hundreds of geese and ducks. Honk, honk! Depending on trail conditions, for additional birding, another options is to drive across the 11th Street bridge over the canal, and then head south on G Street which becomes Migratory Way for about a mile. Park at the parking lot before the gate and enjoying walking on the plowed roadway. You will have found birds by now for sure. Guaranteed! For additional information, you can view the **Turners Falls Area Birding Guide.**

## Extend Your Experience on Avenue A

Take a walk downtown south along Avenue A, through the **Turners Falls Historic District**. Village streets are regularly plowed and sidewalks are cleared of snow. Take a step back in time and see the many canal mills, worker housing, businesses, and churches which all sprang to life in the 1870s.

## Extend Your Experience at Unity Park

The Town of Montague's Unity Park offers picnic tables, a playground, ballfields, and a skate park. Come back in the summer if the snow has hampered their enjoyment during your winter visit.

## Extend Your Experience with a Geologic Walking Tour

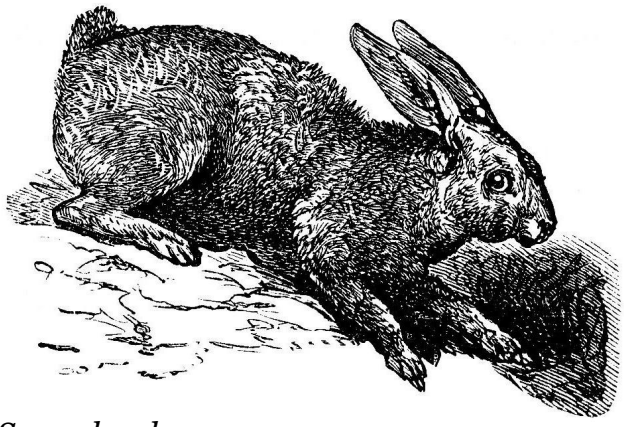
If there's not too much snow, the **Geologic Walking Tour of Turners Falls** features a number of stops that just might be accessible in late winter, and it has a wealth of information on local geology.

## *Step in to Winter*

# Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) State Forest

78 Cape Street, Goshen, MA 01032
**Phone:** (413) 268-7098
**Website:** www.mass.gov/locations/daughters-of-the-american-revolution-dar-state-forest
**Hours of Operation:** dawn to dusk
**Parking:** Free parking in winter is available at the main lot. Roads beyond the lot are not plowed.
**Restrooms:** There is one "Sani Can" available at the park.

DAR was donated in 1929 by the Daughters of the American Revolution to Massachusetts for a state forest. This 1,500 acres of forest has lakes and streams in the hill town of Goshen. The main parking area is plowed in winter, but the roads in the park are not—so you will need to pick another mode of transportation to get around the park. At DAR in winter, you can hike, cross country ski, skate, snowmobile, snowshoe, and go ice fishing too. Which one is your favorite? Be sure to download a copy of the **trail map** prior.



*Snowshoe hare*

### Snowshoe Adventure at Upper Highland Lake

Step into winter with giant feet. Go snowshoeing! Imagine you're a snowshoe hare with giant fluffy feet bounding across the snow with ease. **Bring your own snowshoes** and some energy. Pack trail mix and water. This adventure is about 1.5 miles. You can also choose to cross country ski or hike this winter wander too. Park at the main lot and then head north to see the vast expanse of snow and ice that is the Upper Highland Lake in winter.

Can you find the interpretive sign about the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) at the edge of Upper Highland lake near the main parking area? The CCC built dams for Upper and Lower Highland Lakes, campsites, and roads. If you started your adventures in Wendell, this sign will look familiar. Head east along the lake's edge until you come to the **Universal Access Healthy Heart Trail**. This path takes you through the forest along the shore. Depending on the timing of the latest snowfall and the latest breezes, you may see leaves and branches on the forest floor, in sharp contrast to the white snow. It's a perfect time to practice your tree identification. Do you see the bundle of five long needles of the white pine? The short stubby needles of the eastern hemlock? Perhaps the lobes of a stray oak leaf? Are there any trees in the forest that are new to you?

At the end of the Accessible Trail you may come to a **giant stuffed bear** on a park bench. This bear reminds summer campers to properly dispose of their trash and to protect their food from bears in the summer. This white bear covered in snow forgot to snuggle up in its winter den. Where do you suppose the DAR bears are denning?

You never know, you just might wander into wildlife. Continue left (north) further up the road to the **Wildlife Viewing Area**. Viewing wildlife in winter may be more difficult, but tracks in the snow are a good clue to who's out and about. The winter species you are more likely to see are: beaver, squirrels, red tailed hawks, and deer, maybe even a bald eagle and owl. DAR's trail names give away some clues too — Moose Run, Bobcat Trail, Black Bear Trail, Turkey Trail, and Beaver Pond Loop. Head back to the Upper Highland Lake parking area, or adventure can continue.

## Extend Your Experience

There are so many trails in DAR. You may be up for a longer adventure depending on your stamina and the weather. Consider trekking to **the fire tower** on Moore Hill via the **Long Trail.** Bring your skates to go gliding on Upper Highland Lake. Or investigate the ice fishing on the Lower Highland Lake, or find curious **balancing rock**.

**Thank you for joining us for this Winter Wanders Trip-Tip!** You can wander both aimlessly and with a purpose. In our parks, adventure and discovery awaits if you do. During this series of winter wanderings, perhaps you visited a park that you didn't know about before. Maybe you saw a new bird or tried a new sport. Winter wanders bring you opportunities to experiment on how you can embrace winter and discover wildlife and culture along the way. We hope that you will be invigorated to take even more outdoor adventures all year long!

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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.

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dcr MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION