

CRANESVILLE SWAMP PRESERVE

A unique botanical and wildlife preserve



Alder Flycatcher

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Want to explore a unique botanical and wildlife preserve where few have ventured—a destination where seldom-seen plants from the last ice age may be enjoyed in a tranquil setting? Then head to the Cranesville Swamp, a sanctuary that stretches across two states and more than 1,700 acres.

Reports of the swamp were recorded during the 19th century, as explorers and settlers moved west from the eastern seaboard. It seems the swamp's name was also given during that time period because it was home to cranes, birds that are properly called blue herons. The swamp's location in Preston County, WV, and Garrett County, MD, helped it to escape most commercial and industrial development and become a window into the last ice age.

Glaciers did not cover Cranesville, but the sub-Arctic climate that caused them created a cooler environment than exists today. As glaciers began retreating 15,000 years ago because of warming temperatures, plant life was significantly affected, but unique circumstances allowed one area to retain some of the botanical characteristics that were disappearing elsewhere.

The Cranesville Swamp's uniqueness results from several factors, including altitude and its bowl-shaped configuration called a "frost pocket." West-to-east weather patterns containing moisture and cold air flow to the site, and the accompanying rain and snow are channeled from the mountains into the low lying pocket. Cold air is also trapped





Turkey and White Tail Deer live in and around the Cranesville Swamp area along with a community of other animal and bird species.





in the bowl, thereby creating a habitat typical of a more northern location.

A small group of dedicated teachers and students from West Virginia University is credited with the swamp's preservation. Following discussions the members decided to collaborate with The Nature Conservancy about the possibility of purchasing swamp property in Preston County, West Virginia. In 1960, the group's efforts were rewarded when The Nature Conservancy acquired a 259 acre tract for the purposes of establishing outdoor educational and environmental programs. The West Virginia Chapter of The Nature Conservancy subsequently formed in 1963 and assumed responsibility for managing the preserve. Two years later The National Park Service recognized the Cranestville Swamp as one of its first National Natural Landmarks. Over the years the conservancy acquired additional land through donations and purchases, thereby making it a 1,774 acre protected area that extends into Garrett County, Maryland.

The swamp is referred to as a boreal peat bog, meaning it formed thousands of years ago when peat moss grew in fresh water ponds. In addition to peat, paper birch, white cedar, tamarack, red spruce, eastern hemlock, Canadian yew, small cranberry, and the rare Canby's mountain lover thrive at the site. According to The Nature Conservancy, the swamp hosts a number of rare plants that are more typical of a Canadian and Alaskan climate.



Swamp trails, open swamp views and forested swamp areas, as well as a variety of fauna and flora offer unlimited photo opportunities.



Cranesville Church, located along a stream on the way into the Cranesville Swamp Preserve parking area.

Walking trails access most parts of Cranesville Swamp, but camping, pets, bicycling and operating motorized vehicles within the preserve are strictly prohibited.

The Cranesville environment also supports a community of bird species, some of which are listed as “In Need of Conservation” or rare; the Alder Flycatcher and Northern Waterthrush are cited by the National Audubon Society as examples. Audubon also notes, “Several northern forest birds rare as breeders in Maryland, despite being common at other seasons, nest at the swamp. These include the Canada Warbler, an Audubon WatchLists species, Golden-crown Kinglet, red-breasted Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush, and Magnolia Warbler.”

Deborah Landau, Conservation Ecologist for The Nature Conservancy Maryland/DC Chapter, invites guests to explore the botanical gem nestled in the mountains of Maryland and West Virginia. “Hiking through Cranesville Swamp gives visitors the opportunity to experience a wetland that is more reminiscent of something they’d find in Alaska, with cold-adapted species like larch trees that are found almost nowhere else in Maryland. The boardwalk across the swamp will take you through a lush display of rare plants of spectacular colors, while the wooded trails are lined with mature conifer and hardwood trees that tower above. Make sure to download our walking tour before you head out so you can enjoy your own personal guided tour.”

Visitors will find a network of five walking trails to access most parts of the preserve. Visitors should be aware that facilities are limited to trails, a boardwalk, and interpretive signs. Admission is free, and the trails are open year-round. See The Nature Conservancy, Cranesville Swamp website for more information.

<https://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/ unitedstates/westvirginia/placesweprotect/cranesville-swamp-preserve.xml>



Directions to Cranesville Swamp Kiosk and Boardwalk

From Maryland/DC – Coming from the DC area, take I-270 north to Frederick, then I-70 west to Hancock, and then I-68 west.

On I-68, take Exit 4, MD-42/Friendsville (only 4 miles from the WV line). At the exit, take a left at the first stop sign (Maple) and a right at the second stop sign (Friendsville Rd/42 North). Continue 1.5 miles on 42 north. Take a left onto Blooming Rose Road (there are two entrances for Blooming Rose, either one is fine) crossing back over I-68. Continue 3 miles on Blooming Rose Road. Take a left onto White Rock Road, continue 4 miles. At a Y-intersection, veer to the right to get onto Cranesville Road. Continue on Cranesville Road for 5 miles, to the corner of Muddy Creek and Cranesville Road; look for a little red house on the right; this is where the information kiosk is.

Note: the road on your right immediately before Muddy Creek is Lake Ford Road. This is the road that leads to the boardwalk. If you already have a trail map, you can proceed directly to the boardwalk by taking a right on Lake Ford Road, for 0.2 mile, then taking a right at the fork. Proceed another 0.2 miles, and look for preserve signs on your right.

From West Virginia – From Morgantown, WV (2 hours) take I-68 into Maryland. From here follow the directions above, starting with the second paragraph.