

Sourlands Ecosystem Preserve



D&R Greenway's Sourlands Ecosystem Preserve is a nearly 1,000-acre assemblage of contiguous properties preserved by D&R Greenway.

We invite visitors to its extensive trail network where they can observe the richness of the unique Sourlands habitat.



Cutleaf Toothwort



Maidenhair Fern



Skunk Cabbage

Many partners have contributed to land preservation and conservation of the Sourlands. Thanks to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Program, Hunterdon, Mercer and Somerset Counties, and the municipalities of East Amwell, Hillsborough, Hopewell, Montgomery and West Amwell and our partner nonprofit organizations including Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space, our partner in land stewardship. Our deepest appreciation to the many volunteers who contribute their time and talent within this preserve.

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Photos by Jim Amon, Brenda Jones, Sharyn Magee and Jared Rosenbaum.

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Sourlands Songbirds

These birds are among the many that live in the Sourlands Ecosystem Preserve. They are neotropical migrants who breed here in the summer and return to Central and South America for the winter. Many require large unfragmented blocks of forest with thriving shrub understories in order to nest and feed. The contiguous forest preserved in the Sourlands provides an ideal spring and summer home for these beautiful birds.

There are more than eight miles of trails within the Preserve; for more details about these trails, please visit www.drgreenway.org.



Wood Thrush



Veery



Oven Bird



Pee Wee



Common Yellow Throat



Blue Winged Warbler



Baltimore Oriole



Black & White Warbler

The Sourlands: Central New Jersey's last great forest

The Sourland Mountains, projecting 20 miles north-eastward from the Delaware River at Lambertville, are the largest intact forest area in Central NJ, comprising 90 square miles with over 20,000 forested acres. Its

unique geology has preserved much of its original ecosystem, even as surrounding areas were developed.

The name "Sourlands" is believed to derive from the assessment of early European colonists who found the land difficult to farm. The Sourland's tough soils and limited availability of groundwater saved this remarkable wilderness from the waves of development that have swept much of central New Jersey.

If you look at a map of central New Jersey from 1888, you'll see the lowlands from Trenton to New Brunswick are shown as a carpet of agricultural fields, with tiny scattered woodlands interspersed. The Sourland ridge, however, bristles like a fierce mohawk of forest atop the otherwise tamed land.

Newer maps continue to show over 20,000 acres of still-contiguous forest. That continuity explains why the Sourlands are so rich in wildness at every level. The Sourlands are a habitat mosaic encompassing streams and wetlands, early successional and mature forests, boulder fields and agricultural lands. Its woodlands shelter a very rich and diverse native plant community similar to that of the Appalachian Mountains, not equaled in the valleys below.

These Sourland forests protect central New Jersey's watersheds and ensure groundwater recharge of the local aquifers.



Kentucky Warbler



Wood frog

D&R Greenway's Sourlands Ecosystem Preserve

The Sourlands Ecosystem Preserve is a fragment of the vast forest that was, but also a glimpse of what could be. It represents twenty years of vision and diligent land preservation by D&R Greenway Land Trust.

The Preserve offers a preview of what will be as we learn to cherish and tend wildness, to heal old wounds and restore biodiversity where it has been diminished. D&R Greenway's stewardship staff and volunteers work extensively on this preserve -- to protect rare species, re-establish the native flora of those areas degraded by past use, and maintain an accessible and inspiring trail network for those who wish to visit -- seeking a taste of mountain wilderness.

The Sourlands Ecosystem Preserve contains beautiful and intricate examples of those features which define this part of New Jersey's natural heritage: old, sometimes ancient, forest; massive boulder fields; perched wetlands and hardwood swamps. The preserve is home to rare medicinal plants cherished by the Native Americans, like bloodroot, black cohosh, and Virginia snakeroot. It is also critical habitat for over 70 species of neotropical birds who migrate thousands of miles every year to raise their young in this bountiful forest.

The trail network throughout the Sourlands Ecosystem Preserve covers more than eight miles of mostly mature upland forest strewn with lichen-etched boulders. These trails also traverse floodplain forest, young woodlands, and open meadows. Magnificent American beech trees stand as sentinels over the headwaters of the Stony Brook and around vernal ponds that are important incubators of frogs, toads and salamanders. Walking these trails will reveal all of the natural characteristics of the Sourlands.

A Preservation Vision for the Sourlands

D&R Greenway's vision is to create a 20-mile-long Sourlands Greenway consisting of a mosaic of public and private conserved lands linked by trails and bordered by preserved farms and grasslands in the valleys.

As of 2011, about 40% of the forested land in the Sourlands Greenway is preserved. Some of the largest holdings are managed by County Park Systems: Somerset and Hunterdon County Sourlands Nature Preserves, and The Ted Stiles Preserve on Baldpate Mountain. Holdings by the State of NJ include the former Lindbergh estate, and lands surrounding the United Water Company property in the Swan Creek watershed above Lambertville. D&R Greenway has preserved thousands of acres in the Sourlands, including the Sourlands Ecosystem Preserve, Cedar Ridge Preserve, Cattail Brook Preserve, and numerous other smaller preserves.



If you would like to learn more about D&R Greenway's work in the Sourlands, or are interested in becoming a stewardship volunteer, please contact us at 609-924-4646 or info@drgreenway.org.

Many partners, including state government, municipalities, landowners, and private nonprofit organizations have contributed to the land acquisition and planning for conservation of the Sourlands. We thank them for their shared vision and their support.

D&R Greenway Sourlands Ecosystem Preserve Trail Network



Shagbark hickories

There are more than eight miles of trails within the preserve; for more detail on these trails visit: www.drgreenway.org.

1,2,3,4 Northern Stony Brook (three loops) 2.5 Miles in Total

The Northern Stony Brook trails are a set of three linking loops. All are easy hikes through a variety of characteristic Sourlands habitats. The main loop—marked with yellow trail markers—starts

and ends at the Mountain Road parking lot. It travels through diverse mature forest, two wildflower meadows slowly returning to forest, the remains of an old homestead, and an area that is being restored to ecological health by removing the non-native *Ailanthus* tree. The yellow trail passes through forest with an exceptional shrub layer, including maple-leaf viburnum, spicebush, American hazelnut, and elderberry. This makes very rich bird habitat, and many species of warblers, including hooded, blue wing, Kentucky, and ovenbird can be found here. The two meadows are havens for butterflies and other pollinators—especially in late July, when wild bergamot is in bloom in the second meadow.

To the west of the main loop is a loop trail that is marked with blue trail markers. This trail mainly courses through a young forest that is dominated by twenty to thirty year-old Red maples. It also follows along the top of a ridge, affording great views down into a lowland forest. To



Wild bergamot

the east of the main loop is a loop trail that is marked with orange trail markers. This loop cuts through a mature forest, passing centuries-old oaks, beeches and hickories. Hikers visiting in spring will find unfurling ferns and wildflowers such as mayapple, spring beauty, trout lily, and two species of toothwort. An additional trail (#4 on map) links the loop trails to a particularly beautiful boulder-strewn branch of the Stony Brook.

5,8. Picnic Rock, 1.7 miles

Marked with green trail markers, this trail gets its name from a giant, flat-topped rock that is along the trail—a good place to stop and have a picnic. The trail traverses notable habitats including three botanically rich stream corridors, vast thickets of our native spicebush, and an upland forest area with a canopy of sugar maples, black birches, and tulip trees. The trail is not quite a closed loop; it begins and ends on Mountain Church Road (a fairly quiet country road), but the hiker would need to walk for about a third of a mile on the road to close the loop. This trail overlaps slightly with the southern portions of the Northern Stony Brook yellow and orange trails. Trail 8 is an extension from the Picnic Rock trail to Hopewell Wertsville Road opposite to Hunterdon County's Sourland Mountain Park. Its route is a boulder-strewn hardwood forest.

6. Double Crossing, 1.1 miles

Double Crossing directs the hiker across the Stony Brook on stepping stones twice—hence the name. The Double Crossing trail is an extension of the Picnic Rock trail, beginning to the south of Mountain Church Road. The section on the south side of the Stony Brook features an extensive beech grove and other trees of notable girth. In August, look in the Stony Brook streambed for the



Cardinal flower

spectacular blooms of cardinal flower and winged monkey flower. Also notable along the trail is the healthy forest understory layer, including small trees like ironwood and hop hornbeam, and shrubs like witch hazel, spicebush, pinxter azalea and highbush blueberry. The trail is marked with green trail markers and terminates at both ends of Mountain Church Road.

7. Featherbed Meadows West, .75 mile

This trail begins in wet meadows and leads into the core mature forested section of the preserve, there connecting to the Double Crossing trail. Marked with yellow trail markers, the trail starts by skirting the meadow edge. It is a good spot to observe goldfinches, swallows, blue-winged warblers, red-tailed hawks, and bluebirds. When the trail enters the woods, it crosses a tributary of the Stony Brook. The forest is interesting because its southern portion is much younger than its northern section. As a consequence the hiker transitions from a young post-agricultural forest into a much older and more diverse forest.

9. Sourlands Foothills, 1.1 miles

This trail is the first leg of a series of trails that will connect the Sourlands Ecosystem Preserve to Hopewell Borough. It traverses varied terrain that hint at the landscape history of the Sourlands, post-agricultural forests alternating with old woods which were once farm woodlots. The trail currently ends at the Featherbed East parking lot, on the corner of Featherbed Lane and Hopewell Wertsville Road. The portion of the trail emanating from the Double Crossing loop begins in a mature forest with great patches of ferns including New York fern, interrupted fern, rattlesnake fern, and Christmas fern. Don't miss the tree that fell directly on a triangular rock and was split exactly in half from crown to root. The trail proceeds into a preserve with a shrub layer dominated by highbush blueberry, heads east for a spell, crosses the road, then heads south through young woodland towards the Featherbed East parking lot.

