Residents Can Protect The Watershed By:

* Planting or leaving buffers of native vegetation along streams and wetlands.
* Planting native species that need less water.
* Not mowing your lawn right down to the stream bank or wetlands.
* Not throwing leaves or grass clipping into streams or wetlands.
* Leaving naturally occurring debris such as logs or rocks in a stream, they provide shelter for aquatic life.
* Properly maintaining your septic system.
* Installing water-efficient toilets and shower heads.
* Using environmentally friendly products.
* Properly disposing of oil and other household chemicals.

Reed Branch

Environmental Links

www.elktownshipnj.gov	Elk Township
www.sjlandwater.org	South Jersey Land and Water Trust
www.gcnatureclub.org	Gloucester County Nature Club
www.state.nj.us/dep	NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection
www.tnc.org	The Nature Conservancy
www.njconservation.org	New Jersey Conservation Foundation
www.anjec.org	Assoc. of NJ Environmental Commissions
www.delawareriverkeeper.org	Delaware Riverkeeper Network

Written and Photographed by Michael A. Hogan/www.hoganphoto.com

Elephant Swamp Nature Trail

Elk Township, New Jersey

This guide was produced by the Elk Township Environmental Commission with a funding from a New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Recreational Trail Grant

The Elk Township Environmental Committee meets the 2nd Wednesday of each month at the Elk Township Municipal Building

Elk Township Environmental Committee

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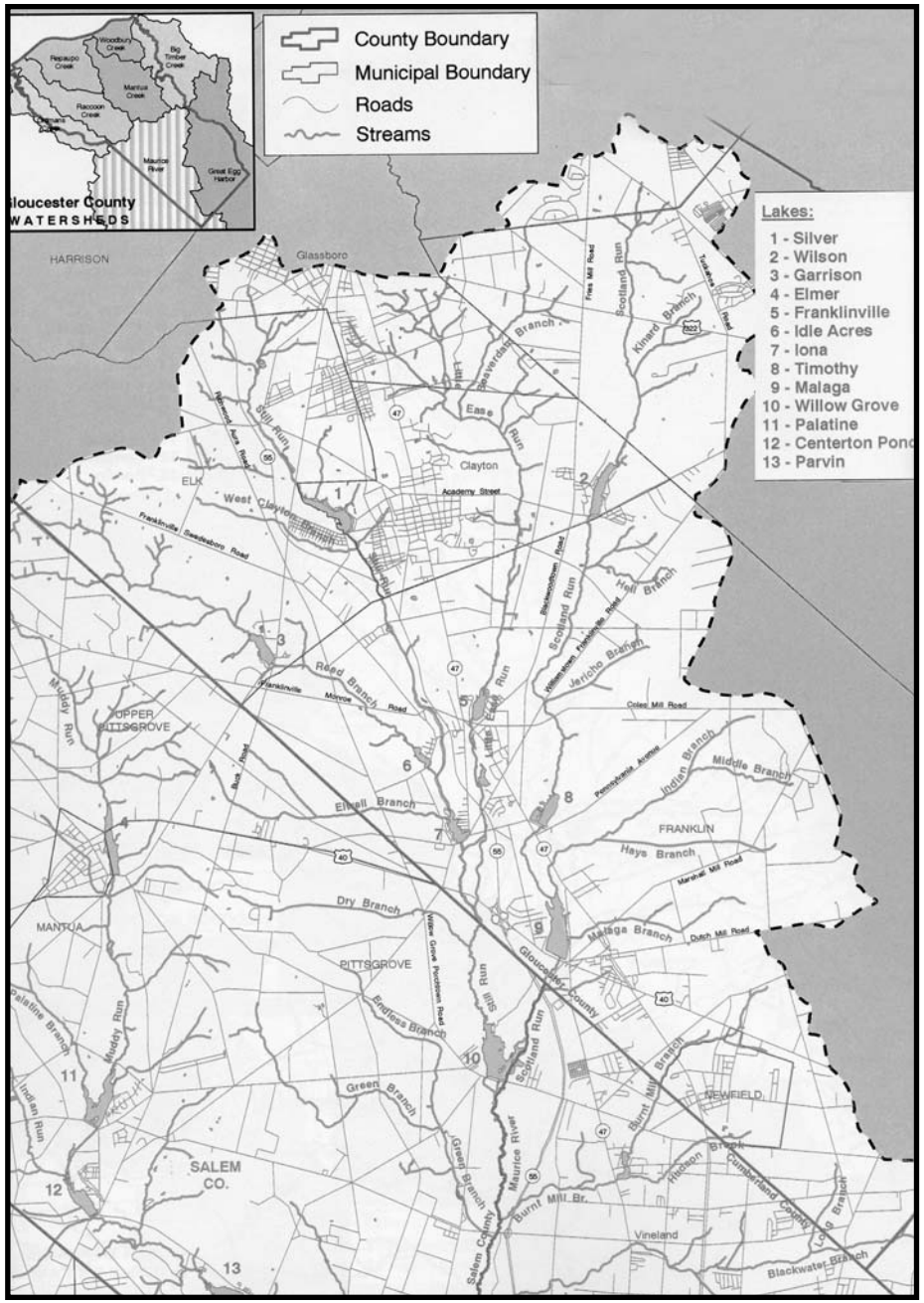
Don Brovero
Tony Creta
Wayne Swanson
Michelle Doyle

Map of the Upper Maurice River Watershed



A watershed is the area of land that drains into a body of water such as a stream or lake. The nature and health of a stream's life is directly influenced by its watershed.

Elephant Swamp History.

Elephant Swamp is not just a beautiful, scenic place; it is steeped in mystery and intrigue. Legend has it that in the 1800's while the circus was traveling by train through Elk Township along the rail line from Monroeville, an elephant got loose in the swamp, and was never seen again. When you take a walk along the path in Elephant Swamp, listen closely for the footsteps of a wandering elephant.

The nature trail in Elephant Swamp follows the Pennsylvania-Reading Railroad line that was built in 1878. In the 1980's the railroad tracks were removed

Elk Township History

Jacob and Leonard Fisler, from Switzerland, who purchased land here in 1791, settled Elk Township. Elk Township was originally noted for its lumbering business, but at present is known as a farming community, with some of the finest orchards in the country to be found in the area. The roads in Elk Township are said to follow the paths of elks, (hence, maybe the name of Elk). No history can be found to authenticate where the name of Elk originated. It was originally called "Shoestring Township" because of its shape which resembles a shoestring, says Mr. Oscar Carr, one of the oldest living residents of the area.

It is believed that the earliest residents in Elk Township settled in the Ewan-Bridgeton Pike area where the oldest homes still standing date to the mid-1700's. The Township, set aside in April 1891, has a current population of 3,514 (2000 census). It was separated from Franklin, Harrison, Clayton, and Woolwich Townships. Elk Township comprises several small settlements, namely: Aura, Ferrell, Hardingville, Lake Garrison, Lake Gilman, Lawns, Lakeview Park, Clayton Park, and parts of Ewan & Clayton. There are also several new areas of development, namely: Still Run, Covey Estates, Hampton Hills, and Meadowbrook.

Station #1: Plants Along the Trail

There are many kinds of plants that grow along the trail, some bloom only at certain times, others bloom all summer long.

The long-bristled smartweed is a common member of the buckwheat family that produces clusters of tiny, pink flowers and blooms from mid-summer into fall. Its small, oil rich, black seeds are eaten by songbirds and water fowl. Other kinds of smartweeds found along the trail and stream include the swamp and pale smartweed.

Long-bristled Smartweed
Polygonum cespitosum

The pokeweed is a member of the pokeweed family, grows up to 10 feet tall, and is common along the edges of fields and woods. It has a red stem, large leaves, and loose clusters of tiny white flowers that bloom from mid to late summer. It produces dark purple berries in the fall which are eaten by birds and was once used by early settlers as a dye.

Pokeweed
Phytolacca americana

The daisy fleabane is a member of the sunflower family that grows up to 5 feet tall and blooms from summer into fall. It has many, tiny white and pinkish flowers and is common along the edges of fields and woods. It is named from the belief it could repel fleas.

Daisy Fleabane
Erigeron annuus

The sweet goldenrod is a common member of the daisy family that blooms in late summer to early fall. Butterflies feed on the flowers nectar and its crushed leaves have a licorice scent. Slender and rough-leaved goldenrod are also common along the trail.

Sweet Goldenrod
Salidago odora

Station #2: Oaks

Along the trail there are many kinds of oaks. Oaks are members of the beech family of trees, with 65 species found in North America and about 900 species world wide. Oaks common in southern New Jersey and along the trail include white oak, post oak, chestnut oak, black oak, willow oak, blackjack oak, southern red or spanish oak and scarlet oak.

Oaks are divided into two groups. Whites oaks have blunt leaves, light gray bark, and their acorns mature in one year. Black oaks have pointed leaves, dark gray bark, and their acorns mature in two years. Many animals feed on its acorns including birds, squirrels, chipmunks, mice, and turkeys. Squirrels and birds also build nests in its high branches.

The southern red, post and willow oaks are southern species that reach their northern limit in the middle Atlantic states. The willow and post oaks grow along streams and in wet soils. The black, scarlet, chestnut, blackjack southern red and white oaks grow in dry, well drained uplands.

Oak is an important commercial hardwood and was used locally in early shipbuilding, barrel making, construction and for railroad ties. The bark contains tannin and was once used for tanning leather. They are also a popular shade and street tree and widely planted in cities in the mid-Atlantic and southern states.

White Oak
Quercus alba

Chestnut Oak
Quercus dentata

Black Oak
Quercus velutina

Willow Oak
Quercus phellos

Station #9: Plants Along the Stream

There are many kinds of plants that grow in and along the stream, some bloom only at certain times, others bloom all summer long.

The Jack-in-the-pulpit is a member of the arum family and is named for the curving hood that covers its flower. It is common in wetlands and blooms in late spring. It produces a cluster of green berries that turn bright red in the fall and are eaten by squirrels and birds.

The cinnamon fern grows up to 3 feet tall and is common in shaded wetlands. It is named for its frond which is a light brown color when mature. Other ferns found in the area include the bracken fern, royal fern, and sensitive fern.

The spotted touch-me-not or jewelweed is a member of the touch-me-not family that has a orange, tubular flower and blooms from mid summer to fall. It is named for its ripened seed pod that explode when touched, expelling its seeds in all directions.

The invasive Japanese stiltgrass was introduced from Asia in the 1800's when it was used for packing material for porcelain from China. It has spread to most to the eastern United States. It can produces thousands of seeds and spread rapidly in disturbed, shaded areas and can crowd out native species. It is common along the shaded portion of the trail and along Reed Branch.

Woodland Jack-in-the-pulpit
Arisaema atroruens

Cinnamon Fern
Osmunda cinnamomea

Spotted Touch Me Not
Impatiens capensis

Japanese Stiltgrass
Microstegium vimineum

Station #8: Red Maple, Gums and Pitch Pine

The red maple grows in wet woods, wetlands, and along streams. It can grow up to 80 feet tall and produces winged, red seeds in early May. Colonists made brown and black dyes from its bark and its wood is used for furniture. There are 13 species of maple found in North America and about 125 species world wide.

Red Maple
Acer rubrum

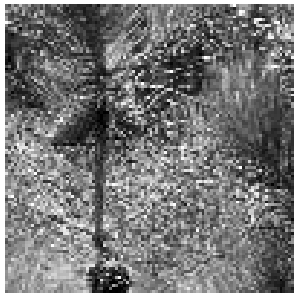
The sweet gum tree is a member of the witch hazel family and grows up to 100 feet tall. This important timber tree is used for furniture, plywood, and pulpwood. It grows in and along the edges of old fields and wetlands. It produces a long stemmed, green, ball-like fruit that turns brown in the fall. Its seeds are eaten by songbirds and squirrels.

Sweet Gum
Liquidambar styraciflua

The black gum or tupelo also grows up to 80 feet tall in wet woods and along swamps. It has shiny leaves and a small fruit that ripens in the fall which is eaten by birds and mammals. Its wood is used for pallets, pulpwood and firewood.

Black Gum
Nyssa sylvatica

The pitch pine is the most common pine tree in the Pine Barrens and grows up to 70 feet tall. It produces cones that take a couple of years to mature and its seeds are eaten by wildlife. It has needles that are usually in bundles of 3 and it is fire resistant. Pitch pine resin was used by colonists to produce turpentine and for axle grease.



Pitch Pine
Pinus rigida

Station #3: Shrubs

The lower part of the forest is known as the understory or shrub layer. Plants common here include the black huckleberry, inkberry, high bush blueberry, mountain laurel, teaberry and sweet pepperbush.

High Bush Blueberry
Vaccinium corymbosum

By 1916 the commercially cultivated blueberry had been developed in southern New Jersey from native plants through cross pollination and breeding. Along with the cranberry it is one of the few commercial crops that thrive in the Pine Barrens' acidic soil.

The mountain laurel is a member of the heath family that grows up to 20 feet tall. It has large clusters of white and pink flowers that bloom in June. Its hard wood was used for eating utensils and tool handles. The smaller sheep laurel has clusters of pink flowers

Mountain Laurel
Kalmia latifolia

The teaberry is a small member of the heath family that grows up to 6 inches high. It has a small, bell-shaped flower that blooms in the spring and a small red berry that ripens in the summer. Its berry was once used to flavor candies, medicine and chewing gum.

Teaberry
Gaultheria procumbens

The sweet pepperbush grows to 10' tall and a member of the white alder family. I has cylindrical clusters of tiny white flowers bloom in August, drawing bees and hummingbird with their delicate scent..

Sweet Pepperbush
Clethra alnifolia

Station #4: Frogs and Reptiles

The fowler's toad is grayish-green with a white line down the middle of its back and breeds in vernal ponds during rainy nights in the late spring and early summer. It feeds on insects and has a very loud nasal "waah" call.

Fowler's Toad
Bufo woodhousei fowleri

The northern water snake grows up to 40 inches long and feeds on fish and frogs. It can be observed sunning on logs and spends most of its time in the water. Other snakes found in the area include the eastern garter snake, rough green snake, northern black racer and eastern hognose snake.

Northern Watersnake
Nerodia sipedon

The eastern box turtle is found in woodlands, grows up to 8 inches long, and feeds on insects, foliage, and berries. It is able to draw its legs and head inside its closed shell and in the winter it digs into the soil up to two feet deep to hibernate. The snapping turtle, painted turtle and red bellied turtle are also common in the area.

Eastern Box Turtle
Terrapene carolina

The eastern fence lizard grows up to 7 inches long, is brownish-gray, and the male has a blue patch on its stomach. This common lizard feeds on small insects. The five lined skink, marbled salamander and red backed salamander are also found in the area.

Eastern Fence Lizard
Sceloporus undulatus

Station #7: Atlantic White Cedar

Atlantic white cedar can be seen along the wetlands in this area. Common the Pine Barrens, it grows up to 90' tall and 3' in diameter. Record sized trees have measured 125' tall and 5' feet in diameter. Harvested and cut by area mills, early settlers used it for siding, shingles, and ship building.

Atlantic white cedar swamps provide habitat for many threatened and endangered animal species including the pine barrens tree frog, northern pine snake, bog turtle, and timber rattlesnake. Rare plants such as the swamp pink lily, curly grass fern, and dragons mouth orchid are also found in them.

Large stands were once found in the Pine Barrens, Hackensack Meadow-lands, and near Sandy Hook. The historical population was approximately 115,000 acres of which about 30,000 acres survive.

Loss of wetlands habitat, lack of proper management, over-harvesting, and a rise in the ocean level have caused the decline in cedar stands. Deer browsing is also a major problem. The New Jersey Forest Service is currently developing plans to preserve the remaining stands.

Atlantic White Cedar
Chamaecyparis thyoides

White Cedar Leaf

Station #6: Wildlife

There are many species of wildlife that are found in the area they include the white tail deer, raccoon, gray squirrel, opossum, eastern cottontail rabbit, and chipmunk. The white tail deer grows up to 3 and 1/2 feet tall and feeds on vegetation. It has a white tail it flashes when it senses danger or when it runs.

White Tail Deer
Odocoileus virginianus

The eastern gray squirrel grows up to 10 inches long, with a long bushy tail, and is gray with a white stomach. It is active during the day and feeds on fruits, flowers, seeds, buds, and acorns. It builds three types of nests. A winter and summer twig and leaf nest called a dray, built high in the branches of a large tree. It also uses tree dens which are holes or cavities in the trunks of large trees and are lined with leaves and grass.

Eastern Gray Squirrel
Sciurus carolinensis

The eastern coyote grows up to 60 inches long and weighs up to 50 pounds. It eats whatever food is seasonally abundant and feed on mice, squirrels, rabbits, fawns, house cats, carrion, amphibians, garbage, insects and fruit. They have become more common in southern New Jersey and a growing population lives in elephant swamp.

Eastern Coyote
Canis latrans

The raccoon grows up to 33 inches long, weighs up to 30 pounds, has a black mask, and a black-ringed tail. It is common near wetlands and feeds on a wide variety food including insects, frogs, small fish, fruits, berries, and seeds. It is active throughout the year and makes dens in hollow logs and trees.

Raccoon
Procyon lotor

Station #5: Birds

There are many kinds of birds found in the area. Some spend the entire year in and are called year-round residents. They include the Carolina chickadee, chipping sparrow, blue jay, red bellied and downy woodpecker, American goldfinch, and white-breasted nuthatch.

White-breasted Nuthatch
Sitta carolinensis

Other birds migrate to the area in the spring to nest and raise their young during the summer. They are called summer residents and include the scarlet tanager, gray catbird, American robin, ovenbird, and ruby throated hummingbird. Some of these birds spent the winter months in Central and South America.

Oven Bird
Seiurus aurocapillus

The Cooper's hawk is a year-round resident and is designated as a threatened species in New Jersey. It feed on small birds and rodents and has a wing span of up to 29 inches. Other common birds of prey include the American kestrel, sharp-shinned hawk and red-tail hawk.

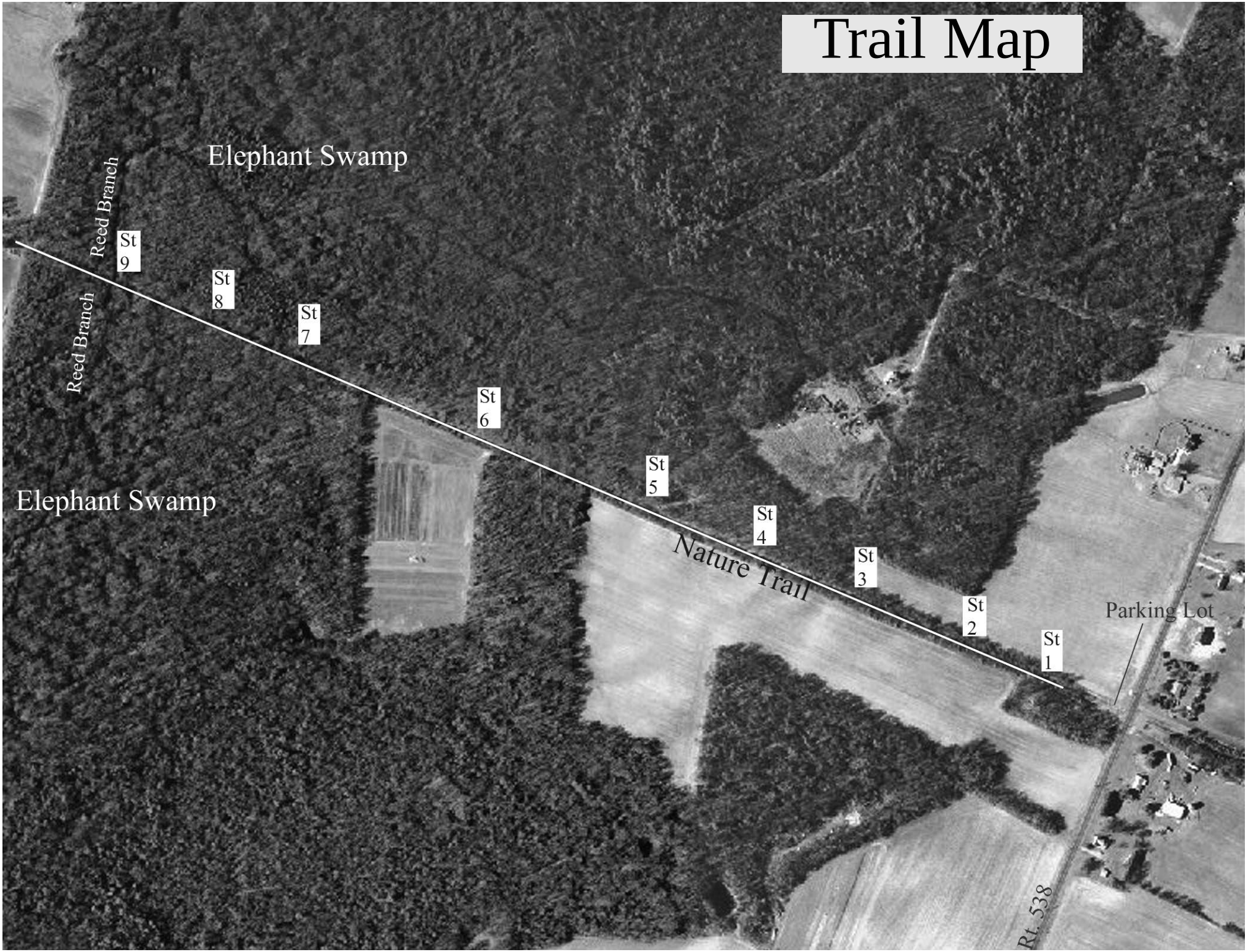
Cooper's Hawk
Accipiter cooperii

The downy woodpecker is a small black and white woodpecker with a red patch on the back of its head. It feeds on insects and seeds and along with the red bellied woodpecker, is common in the area.

The best way to observe birds in along the trail is to stand quietly and not make any sudden movements. This allows the birds nearby to become use to your presence. Once they feel safe and that you are not a threat they may go about their daily routine. and might come very close.

Downy Woodpecker
Picoides pubescens

Trail Map


Elephant Swamp
Reed Branch
Reed Branch
Elephant Swamp
St 9
St 8
St 7
St 6
St 5
St 4
St 3
St 2
St 1
Nature Trail
Parking Lot
Rt. 538