

Boyd Big Tree Preserve

The 1,025-acre Boyd Big Tree Preserve Conservation Area straddles Blue Mountain. The large trees of the area are home to deep forest birds, especially warblers. Summer through autumn, the old field blooms with wild flowers, especially butterfly weed. In late July and early August, butterflies and field birds like sparrows flock to the field.



Tiger swallowtail butterfly on butterfly weed

Directions

GPS: Lat. 40.35907 Long. -76.86732

From US 322 take the PA 443/Fishing Creek Exit. Turn east onto Fishing Creek Valley Road, PA 443. The conservation area is 2.6 miles on the right.

Learn, Experience, Connect

The Boyd Big Tree Preserve Conservation Area offers educational programs year round. Many programs feature wildlife, forest, and field ecology. Contact the Little Buffalo State Park office or explore the online calendar of events, <https://events.dcnr.pa.gov>, for more information on programs and other learning experiences.

What is a Conservation Area?

This designation is for land donated to the Bureau of State Parks and managed for the purposes of preserving open space, conserving natural resources, and providing opportunities for passive, non-motorized, low density outdoor recreation and environmental education activities. A conservation area is characterized as a large area with few improvements and no through roads. Recreational facilities and development are minimal. Conservation areas are used for low impact recreation, serve as outdoor classrooms, and act as examples of proper stewardship and resource management.

What is a Restrictive Covenant?

A restrictive covenant is a condition that is written into a deed, either by the seller or person donating the property, that must be adhered to by the person or organization that assumes possession of the property. Some of the restrictive covenants placed on the transfer of this property include:

- The land is intended for use, enjoyment, and education of all citizens of the commonwealth. Environmental, outdoor, and forest resource management education will be emphasized.
- Only passive outdoor recreational activities will be allowed. Horseback riding, biking, and motorized equipment, with the exception of official use equipment and accommodations for disabled people, are prohibited.
- Acceptable forestry practices will govern resource management. Generally, only dead and downed trees should be harvested, except on forest demonstration areas.

Research and educational programs such as warm season grasses, butterfly trails, sugar maple plantation, and aspen management have been suggested for consideration in the field portion of the preserve.



Eastern bluebird on a nest box

Recreational Opportunities



HIKING: 10.8 miles

The Boyd Big Tree Preserve Conservation Area boasts an extensive trail system, with most trails forested and some quite steep.

Pond Loop Trail: 1.2 miles, pink blazes, easiest hiking

This trail skirts the spring-fed pond which is a popular watering hole for wildlife. The pond is a haven for a number of amphibian species during the early spring and summer months.



Lower Spring Trail: 1.1 miles, lavender blazes, easiest hiking

A great trail for cross-country skiing, Lower Spring Trail passes through the heart of the conservation area.

East Loop Trail: 1.9 miles, lime green blazes, more difficult hiking

This trail runs toward the eastern end of the conservation area and follows the power line for about 0.3 mile.

Creek Trail: 0.9 mile, medium blue blazes, more difficult hiking

This trail winds down to the creek near an American beech grove, and then angles up the slope toward the western edge of the conservation area.

Janie Trail: 2.8 miles, red blazes, most difficult hiking

The longest and most challenging trail in the conservation area, Janie Trail follows the ridgetop and comes down the mountain on a steep slope.

Upper Spring Trail: 2 miles, light blue blazes, more difficult hiking

This trail provides a nice cross-sectional view of the conservation area. This is an excellent trail to see some of the area's largest trees. These large second growth oaks, hickories, and beeches could be old growth stands in the future.

History

Alexander Boyd (1926 – 2013) was president of the Union Deposit Corporation. He donated the conservation area to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in September of 1999 to set aside the area for the perpetual management and protection of big trees, and as an environmental education study area. He received a Conservation Landowner of the Year award in 2001 from the Pennsylvania Wildlife Federation and Audubon Pennsylvania for his donation. It was Mr. Boyd's hope that the conservation area would be utilized for recreation like cross-country skiing, hiking, and dog walking, as he once did.

Coach Trail: 0.9 mile, yellow blazes, easiest hiking

A great trail to watch and listen for warblers in the spring and early summer, Coach Trail follows the base of the ridge and loops at the conservation area's western edge.

Tell us about your hike at: www.ExplorePATrails.com

HUNTING AND FIREARMS: About 800 acres are open to hunting, trapping, and the training of dogs during established seasons. Common game species are black bears, deer, turkeys, grouse, rabbits, and squirrels.

Hunting woodchucks, also known as groundhogs, is prohibited. Dog training is only permitted from the day following Labor Day through March 31 in designated hunting areas. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania Game Commission rules and regulations apply. Contact the Little Buffalo State Park Complex office for ADA accessible hunting information.

Use extreme caution with firearms at all times. Other visitors use the park during hunting seasons. Firearms and archery equipment used for hunting may be uncased and ready for use only in authorized hunting areas during hunting seasons. In areas not open to hunting or during non-hunting seasons, firearms and archery equipment shall be kept in the owner's vehicle or enclosed trailer. Exceptions include: law enforcement officers and individuals with a valid *Pennsylvania License to Carry Firearms* are authorized to carry a firearm concealed on their person while they are within a state park.

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING: Pond and Lower Springs trails are recommended for cross-country skiing.



Near the entrance of the conservation area is an old cemetery shaded by trees. Stroh's Cemetery is a historic part of Fishing Creek Valley, with burials dating back to 1819. Initially, this cemetery was a family graveyard. In time, it transitioned into an affordable cemetery for residents in the community. Though many of the headstones are now missing, there are over 130 graves.

Wildlife Watching

There are many opportunities to see wildlife, but please observe from a safe distance and do not feed wildlife. The conservation area's many trails offer good chances for seeing white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, squirrels, grouse, black bears, and a variety of songbirds depending on the season. Nest boxes in the field are homes to bluebirds and tree swallows. Please enjoy viewing the birds, but do not disturb the boxes.



AMERICAN CHESTNUT

Once, American chestnut trees were one quarter of all trees in the Appalachian Mountains, and their nuts were important food for many animals and people. With trunks that could be five feet in diameter and very straight, chestnuts were an important lumber tree.

In 1904, a fungus from Asia began infecting the chestnuts and in 45 years the American chestnut was functionally extinct. The fungus attacks the trunk of the tree, but not the roots, so trees sprout but become infected and die when about 15 feet tall.

Near the main parking lot is a fenced enclosure of American chestnut trees. The American Chestnut Foundation is backcross breeding these trees with Chinese Chestnut, which is immune to the fungus, to create an American chestnut with immunity to the fungus. More information on this research can be found through the American Chestnut Foundation.

BUTTERFLIES

The 47-acre field at the entrance to the conservation area is designated butterfly habitat and is maintained without the use of pesticides. Milkweed flourishes and is a host plant for monarch butterflies. Butterfly weed is a common flower in the field and provides food for many species, including tiger swallowtail and fritillaries. Peak butterfly viewing is late July to early August.



Monarch butterfly on milkweed

Nearby Attractions

Information on nearby attractions is available from Visit Hershey and Harrisburg. 877-727-8573. www.VisitHersheyHarrisburg.org

Straddling Peters Mountain, the 803-acre **Joseph E. Ibberson Conservation Area** is dominated by large hardwood trees. The large block of nearly unbroken forest is a haven for wildlife like forest warblers and other forest interior animals. A main attraction to the conservation area is the elaborate trail system. Contact the Little Buffalo State Park Complex office at 717-567-9255.

Along PA 443 north of Harrisburg is the 40-acre **Fort Hunter Mansion and Park**. A settlement fort in the 1750s during the French and Indian War, this Dauphin County park has playgrounds, picnic areas, and tours of the mansion. 717-599-5751

The city of **Harrisburg**, the historic capital of Pennsylvania, has many attractions, including: PA State Museum, State Capitol, Governor's Mansion, Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts, National Civil War Museum, and much more.

HAWK MIGRATION

As the southernmost ridge of the Appalachian Mountains, Blue Mountain is a vital pathway for migrating raptors that follow the mountains on their journey south. Northwest winds strike Blue Mountain, deflecting the wind into updrafts that allow birds to save energy on their migration south.

The most common birds that migrate through the conservation area are broad-winged, sharp-shinned, Cooper's, red-shouldered, and red-tailed hawks. Less common birds that migrate through are bald and golden eagles, kestrels, goshawks, and osprey. Raptors migrate from September through early December.

GEOLOGY

Most of the conservation area is in Fishing Creek Valley. The conservation area straddles Blue Mountain, which is the southern edge of the Ridge and Valley Province of Pennsylvania. From the conservation area north for about 70 miles are parallel, long, sinuous mountains and wide valleys that are the remnants of much higher mountains.

The conservation area is on the southern edge of the Appalachian Mountains, which were raised up by the collision of the continents of North America and Africa. These mountain-building events, called orogenies, folded and bent the rock layers and lifted them up. The Appalachian Mountains were once very tall, but 220 million years of erosion have worn away the tops of the mountains, leaving behind wide, flat valleys, and short, steep mountains of hard rock.

The bedrock under the conservation area is tilted, and composed of different types of rock of different ages, which dictate the current landscape.

The sandstone on the southern border of the conservation area to the top of Blue Mountain was laid down 430 million years ago in a shallow sea near the beach. These hard rocks resist erosion and are the top of the mountain, today.

The soft shales and thin sandstone on the north side of the mountain were laid down in deeper water and are composed of the shells of sea creatures. The red shale of the bottom of the mountain was created when the area was slightly above water. The bedrock under the valley of the northern border of the conservation area was under water and is composed of soft shales and siltstones and were laid down 380 million years ago.

A hike on Pond Trail to Lower Spring Trail to Janie Trail can reveal the transition from fertile valley soil to rocky, sparse ridgetop soil and crosses 50 million years of bedrock formation.

A Pennsylvania Recreational Guide for Boyd Big Tree Preserve Conservation Area



Boyd Big Tree Preserve Conservation Area
c/o Little Buffalo State Park
1579 State Park Road
Newport, PA 17074-9428
717-567-9255
LittleBuffSP@pa.gov

Make online reservations at:
www.visitPAparks.com or call toll-free
888-PA-PARKS (888-727-2757), 7:00 AM to
5:00 PM, Monday to Saturday.

www.visitPAparks.com  [visitPAparks](https://www.facebook.com/visitPAparks)

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Protect and Preserve Our Parks

Please make your visit safe and enjoyable. Obey all posted rules and regulations and respect fellow visitors and the resources of the park.

- Be prepared and bring the proper equipment. Natural areas may possess hazards. Your personal safety and that of your family are your responsibility.

- Alcoholic beverages are prohibited.

- Because uncontrolled pets may chase wildlife or frighten visitors, pets must be physically controlled, attended at all times, and on a leash, caged, or crated. Electronic fences and leashes are prohibited.

- Do your part to keep wildlife wild! Enjoy wildlife from a safe distance and do not feed or approach wild animals.

- Please park only in designated areas and obey all traffic regulations.

- Please recycle. Place trash accumulated during your stay in proper receptacles or take it home with you.

- Soliciting and posting signs are prohibited without approval from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

