

Cranesville Swamp, Garrett County, MD and Preston County, WV



Cranesville Swamp is a boreal peat bog relic left behind from the Pleistocene Epoch. It is a permanently wet area where partially decomposed plant debris has collected and compacted into peat. It should really be called a wetland complex, because it has many different types of wetlands such as sedge meadows, marshes, bogs, and swamps. Peat is nutrient poor and very acidic, so most trees are unable to survive in the harsh climate. The swamp formed in the last Ice Age 15,000 years ago, when glaciers came close to but never reached Maryland. Even though they did not reach the state, they created a colder climate in which only northern flora could survive.



Kent Mason

The boardwalk that winds through the majestic peatland. Many wildflowers and shrub species can be found among the grasses.



Alexandra Cohen/TNC

A red pine plantation is just one example of the many types of stands at Cranesville.

Thus, Cranesville has become the coldest, wettest part of the region. With the retreating of the ice and a warmer climate, the northern flora moved back north, but in some places like Cranesville a small piece of the northern forest and bog remains in a relict colony. Scientists know many plants are relicts because of pollen found in peat that did not decay. This type of area can only exist so far south because of the frost pocket effect. A frost pocket effect occurs when an area has a colder microclimate than its surroundings, because of a combination of natural circumstances such as the persistence of cool air in the high mountain valleys. Due to

this climate, there is a shorter growing season, which has affected the types of plants and animals found here. Modern climate change might move flora and fauna farther north, unless people, such as in organizations like The

Nature Conservancy, can properly control ecological elements.

There are a variety of landforms at

Visiting

- All trails under 2 miles
- 1,500 foot boardwalk for easy exploration
- Stay on the boardwalk, plants fragile
- Designated parking lot

Key Elements

- Bog copper
- Nashville warbler
- Northern saw-whet owl
- Montane peatland wetland
- American larch
- Red spruce

Cranesville, which leads to many different types of rocks, soils and flora. The trees and plants that grow in this area are tamarack or larch (*Larix laricina*), goldthread, cotton grass, sundew (an insectivorous plant), and threatened small cranberry.

There are also red spruce and white pine trees that have been restored by the thousands. Small pockets of virgin forest remain, however, that were somehow missed by the logging locomotive named the Swamp Angel that passed directly through the wetland in the late 1800s. The more dominant plants include sedges, cranberry, and sphagnum moss, and there are many types of blueberries visitors can pick in the summer. Birds that frequent the area include common raven, golden-crowned kinglets, alder flycatcher, Northern saw-whet owl, and Nashville warbler, which has become increasingly rare. An interesting mixture of other animals live at Cranesville, including American beavers, bobcats, American black bears, and endangered bog copper butterflies (*Lycaena epixanthe*). The area has cultural significance for birders, botanists and others interested in northern flora and fauna.



David Dadurka/TNC

Bee balm blooming in the swamp.

Contact

The Nature Conservancy of Maryland/DC
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For more information:
www.nature.org

This site was protected by the Conservancy in stages, beginning in 1960. Since that time, the Conservancy has acquired almost 2,000 acres which will be held in trust in perpetuity. In 1964 it became part of the National Audubon Society's Cranesville Swamp Important Bird Area, intersecting the Maryland Non-Tidal Wetland of Special Concern. Cranesville Swamp was one of the first National Natural Landmarks to be designated by the National Park Service in 1965. All told, 19 different plant communities occur in Cranesville, ranging from shrubby wetlands to hardwood forest. Management focuses on

maintaining the visitor facilities, reestablishing red spruce, invasive plant control, and managing a permitted hunting program to control the deer population. The Maryland Chapter takes the lead on ecological management. There is also an audio tour available to enhance a visit to the preserve.

Watch Out For!

- Mosquitoes
- Ticks and biting flies
- Exposed tree roots

Directions (GPS Coordinates: 39.524758,-79.480838)

From Frederick: Take I-70 west to I-68 at Hancock. Continue on I-68 about 65 miles to Exit 14. Follow US 219 (Garrett Hwy) south for 19 miles. Turn right (west) on Mayhew Inn Road, and after 1.4 miles turn left on Bray School Road. In 1.6 miles at the "T" intersection, turn right on MD 15 (Oakland Sang Run Road). After 1 mile, turn left on Swallow Falls Road and follow for 2.6 miles to a sign for

Youghiogheny Mountain Resort. At the sign, take a hard right on Cranesville Road. After about 4 miles, turn left onto Muddy Creek Road and immediately park on the gravel at the corner of the intersection. A kiosk with brochures, trail guides and other information can be found here. To get to the trailhead for the swamp, visitors must take a left back onto Cranesville Road and take the next left onto Lake Ford Road. Take a sharp right curve in the road and stay to the right at the fork. Stay to the right at the next fork in the road, and Cranesville Swamp is 0.2 miles down the gravel road.