

Exit 16B, Sunset Road West, to Beatties Ford Road. Turn right and proceed north for 4.8 miles until you reach Sample Road. Turn left onto Sample Road and continue 1 mile to the preserve entrance.

Traveling North on I-77

Directions

Open Daily 7:00 am until sunset
Latta Plantation Nature Preserve
 Monday-Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
 Sunday 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.
 Closed Thanksgiving & Christmas Day

Horn of Operation

www.parkandrec.com
 704.875.1391
 Huntersville, NC 28078
 5226 Sample Road
Latta Plantation Nature Preserve

Latta Plantation Nature Preserve



Facilities



Latta Plantation Nature Preserve is Mecklenburg County's largest nature preserve and protects over 1,290 acres of natural communities including the Beatties Ford Basic Forest natural heritage site. The preserve forms a green peninsula extending into Mountain Island Lake, the drinking water source for over 600,000 residents in Mecklenburg and Gaston counties. Its diversity of natural communities includes upland and bottomland hardwood forests, open fields, streams, and a Piedmont Prairie restoration site protecting the federally endangered Schweinitz's sunflower and Michaux's sumac. The Preserve is part of the Mountain Island Lake Important Bird Area, designated by the National Audubon Society due to its diversity of wintering waterfowl, breeding and migratory songbird species, and protection of bottomland hardwood forests, a threatened natural community in North Carolina.

Latta Plantation Nature Center serves as the gateway to the nature preserve and is the source for educational programs and information on the preserve's natural communities, flora, and fauna. The Center features live, native animals, a discovery hall, an outdoor amphitheater, and a gift shop. Outside, visitors can stop and observe nature in action at the National Wildlife Federation certified Backyard Habitat Garden which includes bird feeding stations, butterfly gardens, garden stream, and demonstration compost area. Self-interpretive trail guides are available for several nature preserve trails.

Latta Plantation Nature Preserve offers endless opportunities for outdoor recreation. Visitors can literally spend the entire day at the preserve. Canoe and kayak enthusiasts will find two landing areas that provide access to Gar Creek and Mountain Island Lake. Anglers will find numerous fishing opportunities on Mountain Island Lake (see Fishing). Two reservable medium (30 person) picnic shelters (#s 1 & 2) and a handicapped-accessible trail with eight reservable picnic platforms (#s 3-10) provide picnic opportunities and nearby restrooms for families, corporations, or individuals.

Other facilities located in the preserve include:

- **Carolina Raptor Center**, an education and rehabilitation facility dedicated to the conservation of birds of prey and home to the Southeast's largest eagle aviary,
- **Latta Plantation Equestrian Center**, a facility providing guided horseback rides, pony rides, horse shows, lessons, and tack store,
- **Historic Latta Plantation**, a restored 19th century federal-style home and living history farm of James Latta, open to public tours and interpretive programs.

Fishing

Fishing is allowed on Mountain Island Lake, but all anglers must purchase a daily fishing pass (\$1/County resident, \$2/non-County) at the Nature Center. Mecklenburg County residents can fish with live bait without a North Carolina fishing license. Mecklenburg residents using artificial bait and non-County visitors must have a valid North Carolina fishing license. North Carolina fishing licenses and bait are not sold at the preserve.

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department participates in the North Carolina Fishing Tackle Loaner program. Visitors can "checkout" a rod and reel for a day at a time from the Nature Center free of charge. Equipment must be returned in good condition.

Trails

Latta Plantation Nature Preserve has 16 miles of trails offering hikers, nature enthusiasts, and horseback riders the opportunity to explore a variety of terrain while enjoying scenic views of the lake, forests, and streams. It is the only Mecklenburg County property open to horseback riding. Due to the delicate nature of sharing trails with horses, mountain bikes are permitted only on paved roads within the preserve.

Visitors bringing their own horses can park their trailer in the designated horse trailer parking lot and base out of that location to explore the entire preserve. There is a \$3/horse equestrian trail user fee payable via a drop box located in the horse trailer parking lot. Visitors without their own horses can take a guided horseback ride from Latta Plantation Equestrian Center. Dogs are welcome on preserve trails, but must remain on a 6-foot or shorter leash at all times. All trails are marked with color symbols.

Hiking Only Trails

Beechwood Trail ▲ A moderate, 1.0 mile loop trail accessed from the horse trailer parking lot. This trail begins in a young, dry pine-hardwood forest and then proceeds along several seepage slopes through a mature hardwood forest containing oaks, red maples, tulip poplars, and some of the largest American beech trees in the nature preserve. Look for wildflowers along the rich, moist slopes in spring and early summer.

Audubon Trail ■ An easy, 0.5 mile loop trail accessed from the picnic area parking lot. Part of the trail passes through a mature bottomland hardwood forest containing sweetgum and tulip poplar trees while the remaining portions traverse a dry, early successional pine-hardwood forest. Nest boxes stationed throughout the trail provide opportunities to view woodland birds while benches provide the chance to see waterfowl on Mountain Island Lake. A 0.4 mile spur trail leads to the Gar Creek canoe access.

Treasure Tree Trail ● This easy, 0.7 mile loop trail is accessed from the horse trailer parking lot. This trail winds through various stages of forest succession including pine stands, a powerline right-of-way, hurricane-disturbed woodlands, and mature upland hardwood forest, providing the opportunity to view century old trees. Be sure to look for the unusually large and uniquely shaped sourwood specimen, a North Carolina Treasure Tree.



Cattail Trail ▲ Accessed from the paved 0.25 mile picnic loop trail, this easy, 0.5 mile loop follows the edge of a peninsula along Mountain Island Lake. After passing through a mature hardwood forest containing tulip poplars, oaks, hickories, and sweetgum trees, the trail's westernmost point culminates under the canopy of several large water oaks.

Piedmont Prairie Trail ● This moderate, 0.3 mile trail meanders through a mixed pine-hardwood forest, with occasional steep inclines, connecting the North Canoe Access with the southern edge of the Piedmont Prairie restoration site. Look for abundant Christmas ferns and spring wildflowers as the trail traverses several seepage slopes.

Horseback & Hiking Trails

Cove Trail ● This moderate, 2.3 mile trail can be accessed from Hill or Split Rock trails. Heading north from the Piedmont Prairie restoration site, the trail crosses a powerline right-of-way and then traverses the southern border of the Beatties Ford Basic Forest natural heritage site. Its looped section contains more rocky terrain that may not be suitable for all horseback riders, but does offer beautiful views of Mountain Island Lake. During the spring and summer, look for an Osprey nest on the utility pole along the trail's westernmost section.

Split Rock Trail ■ Accessed from either Hill or Piedmont Prairie trails, this moderate, 1.4 mile trail skirts the southern edge of the Piedmont Prairie restoration site, where the endangered Schweinitz's sunflower can be seen in bloom from mid-September to mid-October. Its looped section contains more rocky terrain that may not be suitable for all horseback riders, but does offer excellent views across Mountain Island Lake of Buzzard's Rock and Wash Rock overlooks.



Hill Trail ● This easy, 2.7 mile trail is the nature preserve's longest and the only one to connect trails in the southern peninsula with those in the northern tract. Starting at its southern terminus at the horse trailer parking lot, the trail primarily follows powerline right-of ways and gravel maintenance roads before traversing the eastern edge of the Piedmont Prairie restoration site and eventually the western edge of the Beatties Ford Basic Forest natural heritage site. The trail's northern terminus at the Latta Springs neighborhood provides the only public access to the nature preserve outside of the main entrance on Sample Road.

Shady Trail ▲ Accessed across the main road from the horse trailer parking lot, this easy, 1.6 mile loop begins in a young mixed pine-hardwood forest. The trail heads south towards Gar Creek where views of the inlet into Mountain Island Lake can be seen during the winter months. The trail skirts the edge between bottomland hardwood and upland hardwood forests before turning back north, crossing the main road and returning to the horse trailer parking lot via a powerline right-of-way.

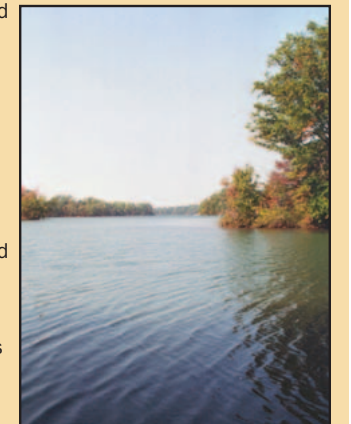
Buzzard Rock Trail ▲ An easy, 0.3 mile trail that passes through a mixed pine-hardwood forest in route to an overlook high above Mountain Island Lake. The Buzzard Rock overlook consists of a large, wooden deck nestled between a cluster of huge granite boulders. To preserve vegetation and minimize erosion around the overlook, horses must tie off at a hitching post located 100 feet before the deck.

Catawba Trail ■ Accessed from the Buzzard Rock parking lot, this easy, 1.2 mile trail passes through both upland hardwood and bottomland hardwood forests. The trail provides excellent views of Mountain Island Lake. A connector trail can be used to bypass the boat rental harbor and travel to the horse trailer parking lot, providing access to Shady Trail which can be used to travel west back towards Buzzard Rock.

Laura's Trail ● Officially named in 1998 in memory of Laura Anderson of the Carolina Berg Wanders, this easy, 0.3 mile trail passes through an upland hardwood forest with some of the largest tulip poplar trees in the nature preserve. The trail terminates at a large granite boulder cluster, known as the Wash Rock overlook, providing excellent views of Mountain Island Lake. Wash Rock was named after the rock which early settlers of the area used to wash their garments upon. To preserve vegetation and minimize erosion around the overlook, horses are restricted from entering the trail's final 500 feet.

Nature Preserve Rules

- For your safety and the protection of the preserve, please walk or ride with a friend and stay on designated trails. To prevent damage to fragile vegetation and erosion, do not create switchbacks or skirt wet areas.
- Motorized vehicles and bicycles are restricted to paved roads.
- Hiking only trails are for pedestrians only. Horses are restricted to designated horseback trails and should use paved roads only at designated crosswalks.
- All users must always yield to horseback riders. Announce yourself when approaching another trail user, especially from behind. Ask horseback riders how to safely pass their horses.
- Avoid natural surface trails for a minimum of 24 hours after a heavy rain, snow, or ice storm even if closure notices are not posted.
- Horseback riders bringing supplemental feed should use certified weed-free feed to help prevent the spread of invasive exotic plants. Proof of 12-month negative Coggins should be available for inspection.
- No weapons or firearms are allowed.
- Collection, removal, or disturbance of any natural or cultural object is prohibited.
- No alcoholic beverages are allowed (except with a valid shelter reservation and permit).
- All pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet.
- No swimming or wading is allowed.
- Children under the age of 16 are required to wear a helmet while riding bicycles, skateboards, or rollerblades. Helmets are recommended for horseback riders.

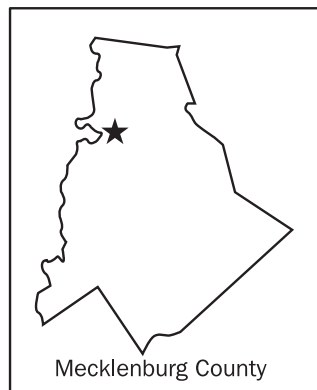




**Mecklenburg County
Park and Recreation**
*The Natural Place
To Be...*



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Legend

Horseback and Hiking Trails

- Split Rock Trail
- Cove Trail
- Hill Trail
- Shady Trail
- Buzzard Rock Trail
- Catawba Trail
- Laura's Trail
- Connector Trails

Hiking Only Trails

- Treasure Tree Trail
- Beechwood Trail
- Audubon Trail
- Cattail Trail
- Piedmont Prairie Trail

Streets

Nature Preserve

Streams

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| Parking | Canoe Launch |
| Picnic Area | Fishing |
| Restrooms | Fishing Pier |

