

Cover photo by: Ronny Roberts

Near the NC/SC border take Exit 90 onto Carowinds Boulevard. Go west approximately 2 miles to S. Tryon St./Highway 49. Turn left on Highway 49 and travel 4 miles. The Nature Preserve entrance is on the right.

Directions

Open daily 7:00 am until sunset
Monday - Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Sunday 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.
Closed
Thanksgiving and Christmas Day
McDowell Nature Center

Hours of Operation

McDowell Nature Preserve
15222 York Road
Charlotte, NC 28278
704.588.5224
Campground 704.583.1284
www.parkandrec.com

McDowell Nature Preserve



Facilities

McDowell Nature Preserve, in southwest Mecklenburg County, encompasses 1,108 acres of forested, rolling terrain along the banks of Lake Wylie. Over 90% of the nature preserve has been left undeveloped and offers wildlife viewing and hiking opportunities.

McDowell Nature Center serves as the gateway to the preserve and houses an exhibit area with a variety of informative displays on the preserve's natural communities and wildlife. The Center also contains public restrooms, a classroom, a gift shop and offices for staff.

McDowell Campground offers 56-sites which accommodate RVs and tent campers alike. These sites include: 13 RV sites, 26 Drive-To tent sites, 10 primitive tent sites, one cabin and six 9x12 Rent-a-Tents. The cabin and Rent-a-Tents each include two cots and can sleep up to six people. For more information or to make a reservation please call 704.583.1284.

The nature preserve also offers picnic areas and decks with tables and grills, a reservable picnic shelter, pavilion and waterfront deck, a canoe and kayak launch area, hiking trails, a playground, an accessible walking trail, and fishing.

An entrance fee to McDowell Nature Preserve is charged March 1 through October 31 on weekends and holidays only.

Boat access to Lake Wylie can be obtained at Copperhead Island at the end of Soldier Road. Facilities at Copperhead include ramps for motorboats, boat docks, a group camp site, and fishing piers. There is also a reservable picnic shelter that includes restrooms, electricity, charcoal grills, a volleyball court, and horseshoe pit.



Photo by: Osbourne Oakley



Hiking Trails

McDowell Nature Preserve has nearly 7 miles of trails offering hikers and nature enthusiasts the opportunity to explore a diversity of terrain while enjoying scenic views of the lake, forest and streams. A variety of wildlife can be viewed from these trails from dawn to dusk.

Cedar Ridge Trail ■

This short 0.5 mile trail section is only accessible from the Creekside Trail. An addition to the Creekside loop, it provides the option of an increased level of hiking difficulty. It also gives a "birds eye" perspective of the bottomland forest below. The trail climbs a steep ridge, passes through an area of very old, large trees and ends with a steep descent back to the main trail.

Chestnut Trail ●

A 1.2 mile, moderate trail with occasional steep inclines. This trail circles around a natural valley divided by a small creek and passes beneath the canopy of a mature hardwood forest, most of which was affected by a tornado in 2004. The forest floor is carpeted in wildflowers during the early spring. Watch for witch hazel blooming in winter.

Cove Trail ■

This 0.8 mile, moderate trail along the shoreline of Lake Wylie passes beside a deep cove of the lake in which wildlife including ducks, muskrats and mink are often seen. The numerous maples along this trail provide a breathtaking display in the fall.

Creekside Trail ●

This easy, 1.2 mile, loop trail is accessible from the Four Seasons Trail. It follows alongside a stream into a remote portion of the nature preserve. A variety of interesting habitats are encountered, including a dry oak-pine upland forest, a rich bottomland hardwood forest and an old field area. Wildlife, especially deer, are common sights.

Four Seasons Trail ▲

This paved, 0.4 mile, easy trail is constructed to be fully accessible. This trail features a bubbling Piedmont stream, and a creek ramp (for full access to the creek). Benches are provided at intervals along the trail.

Kingfisher Trail ▲

An easy 0.9 mile trail connecting the campground and picnic area. It follows along the shoreline providing a nice view of Lake Wylie. Spring flowers are abundant.

Pine Hollow Trail ■

This moderate 0.9 mile trail connects the Sierra Trail behind the Nature Center with the Four Seasons and Creekside Trails. Eastern red cedar are abundant.



Shady Hollow Trail ●

A moderate 0.6 mile trail. One end begins at the parking lot of the Nature Center and the other intersects the Kingfisher Trail near the picnic area. This trail passes through a dry pine forest and along a stream rich with a diversity of plants.

Sierra Trail ●

An easy 0.3 mile loop trail located directly behind the Nature Center. This trail provides excellent views of large hardwood trees, including many downed by Hurricane Hugo in 1989. Access the Pine Hollow and Chestnut Trails from this trail.

Educational Programs

McDowell Nature Center offers a variety of environmental education and nature programs to the general public, schools, teachers, and other organized groups. The center also participates in special events such as Earth Day, Big Sweep, and International Migratory Bird Day.

Natural Connections, a quarterly newsletter, has a complete description of public programs and special events. To be placed on the mailing list or to find out more about our group and public programs, stop by McDowell Nature Center or call 704.588.5224.

Nature Preserve Rules

- For your safety, please walk with a friend and stay on designated trails.
- No weapons or firearms are allowed.
- Hiking trails are only for pedestrians.
- Bicycles and motorized vehicles are restricted to paved roads.
- 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.
- Children under the age of 16 are required to wear a helmet while riding bicycles, skateboards, or rollerblades.
- No swimming or wading is allowed.
- Introduction of plants or animals to the nature preserve is prohibited.



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

Legend

- Cedar Ridge Trail
- Chestnut Trail
- Cove Trail
- Creekside Trail
- Four Seasons Trail
- Kingfisher Trail
- Pine Hollow Trail
- Shady Hollow Trail
- Sierra Trail
- Connector Trail
- Streams
- Streets
- Service Road
- Nature Preserve
- Campground
- Picnic Area
- Restrooms
- Handicapped Accessible
- Gate
- Fishing Pier
- Playground
- Privately Owned
- Specialty Park



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