

A Pennsylvania Recreational Guide for

Cook Forest

Cook Forest State Park

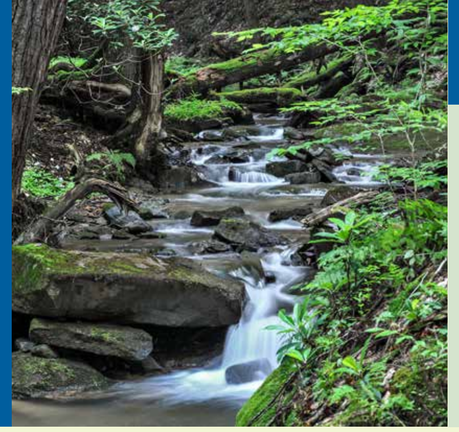
Pennsylvania
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Pennsylvania State Parks Mission

The primary purpose of Pennsylvania state parks is to provide opportunities for enjoying healthful outdoor recreation and serve as outdoor classrooms for environmental education. In meeting these purposes, the conservation of the natural, scenic, aesthetic, and historical values of parks should be given first consideration. Stewardship responsibilities should be carried out in a way that protects the natural outdoor experience for the enjoyment of current and future generations.

PAStateParks

2025



Explore Pennsylvania Wilds

Pennsylvania Wilds is two million acres of public lands for hiking, biking, fishing, boating, hunting, and exploration in northcentral Pennsylvania.

Highlights of the area are elk watching, scenic PA 6, Pine Creek Gorge (PA Grand Canyon), the darkest skies in the east at Cherry Springs State Park, old growth forest at Cook Forest, and hundreds of miles of backpacking trails, bike paths, and trout fishing streams. www.pawilds.com



Photo: View from the Old No. 9 Fire Tower, Cook Forest State Park

Cook Forest State Park



The 8,611–acre Cook Forest State Park and 3,136–acre Clarion River Lands lie in scenic northwestern Pennsylvania. Known for its stands of old growth forest, the park's Forest Cathedral of towering white pines and hemlocks is a National Natural Landmark. A scenic 13–mile stretch of the Clarion River flows through Cook Forest State Park and is popular for canoeing, kayaking, and tubing.

Reservations

Make online reservations at www.pa.gov/state-parks or call toll-free 888–PA–PARKS (888–727–2757), 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday to Saturday.

Directions

GPS DD: Lat. 41.33292 Long. -79.20915

From the east, take Exit 78 off of I-80, then PA 36 north directly to the park in Cooksburg.

From the west, take Exit 60 off of I-80, then take PA 66 north to Leeper. From Leeper, follow PA 36 south seven miles to the park.



Natural Resources

OLD GROWTH FOREST AREAS
There are eleven old growth areas in the park, totaling over 2,300 acres. Most stands are dominated by ancient eastern hemlocks and white pines but also contain ancient understory trees like white and chestnut oaks, black cherries, red maples, and cucumber trees. Many white pine and hemlock trees in these areas approach 375 years old. Scientists believe these old growth areas began growing following a large forest fire in 1644. Some trees survived the fire and date back to the early 1500s.

FOREST CATHEDRAL NATURAL AREA
The Forest Cathedral Natural Area is home to one of the finest stands of big and tall white pines and eastern hemlocks in the Northeastern U.S. Many of these magnificent trees exceed three feet in diameter with the tallest pines approaching 180 feet. It is fitting that this forest remains in the midst of the area that saw the greatest logging boom in the history of Pennsylvania. In the late 1800s, thousands of acres of old growth forests were cut for construction industries. The Forest Cathedral is a National Natural Landmark and has been set aside for protection as a state park natural area.

SWAMP NATURAL AREA
The Swamp Natural Area is located at the extreme northeast corner of the park containing approximately 180 acres of old growth forest heavily dominated by ancient hemlock and select white oak surpassing 300 years old. A portion of the Baker/North Country Trail skirts trail skirts the edge of this old growth forested wetland.

CLARION RIVER
Twenty-one miles of the Clarion River flow through the park. The river corridor contains plants like cardinal flowers, rhododendrons, mountain laurels, and many species of old growth trees. Possible wildlife sightings include bald eagles, ospreys, river otters, fishers, and black bears.

The Clarion River is designated a National Wild and Scenic River for its scenic beauty, water quality, and archaeological significance.

Sections of the river provide a glimpse into the past. The river was used as a transportation route and signs of settlements are located along the riverbanks. The most prevalent signs that can be seen are bracket dams and log landings from the logging era.

Learn, Experience, Connect

Cook Forest State Park offers a wide variety of programs year round. Programs cover varied topics like old growth forest ecology, river ecology, history, and guided tours. The Log Cabin Environmental Learning Classroom offers indoor space for programs. Displays feature historic logging and rafting tools, models, and artifacts.

Curriculum-based environmental education programs are available to schools and organized groups. Call the park office to schedule a group program. A variety of professional development workshops are also offered for teachers.

Contact the park office or explore the online calendar of events, https://events.dcnr.pa.gov, for more information on programs and other learning experiences.



History



John Cook was one of the first permanent European settlers to the area. He arrived in 1826 to determine the feasibility of building an east to west canal along the Clarion River for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. John purchased 765 acres and settled with his wife and 10 children in 1828. At the mouth of Toms Run, present day Cooksburg, John built his one-story cabin and the first of many water-driven sawmills. He worked his mills, logged with oxen, rafted logs to Pittsburgh, and also engaged in flatboat building through the years.

One of John's sons, Anthony, bought 36 acres from his father and then gained the rest of the acreage when his father died in 1858. Anthony erected three sawmills, one flouring mill, one planing mill, a boat scaffold, several dwellings, and a store. Around 1870, he built his house, now known as the Cook Homestead, near the intersection of the Cooksburg bridge and the Clarion River. Many of the large homes on River Road are still maintained by the Cook Family and descendants. After Anthony's death, the business was managed under A. Cook Sons Company.

Anthony Cook's son, Anthony Wayne, spearheaded a 17–year campaign to save the last remaining old growth timber in Cook Forest. To help raise the final funds to purchase the land from the A. Cook Sons Company, the Cook Forest Association formed in 1926 and was endorsed by Governor Gifford Pinchot, the Honorable Simon B. Elliott, and natural resource groups. In 1928, Cook Forest became the first state park acquired to preserve a natural area. The Forest Cathedral was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1968.

Civilian Conservation Corps

On March 31, 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to provide employment and restore our nation's natural resources.

In 1934, CCC Camp SP-2 was built in the present-day River Cabins Area along River Road. This camp with barracks, mess hall, and shower houses served 200 enrollees and staff until it closed in 1937. The buildings were moved in 1937 and used to construct CCC Camp SP-6 at Raccoon Creek State Park in Beaver County.

Work of the CCC in Cook Forest remains. Buildings and cabins were constructed, trails and roads were built, and forest resources were preserved by these hard-working men.

Historic Areas

MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN: Built in 1950 on Longfellow Trail, the fountain was dedicated to the original members of the Cook Forest Association who were instrumental in raising additional funds needed to purchase the land from the A. Cook Sons Company.

OLD NO. 9 FIRE TOWER: The 87.5–foot fire tower, built in 1929 by the Commonwealth's Department of Forests and Waters, gave firefighters a 15– to 20–mile view of the area. The tower was retired from service in 1966. Periodically, the observation cabin on top of the tower is open during programs.

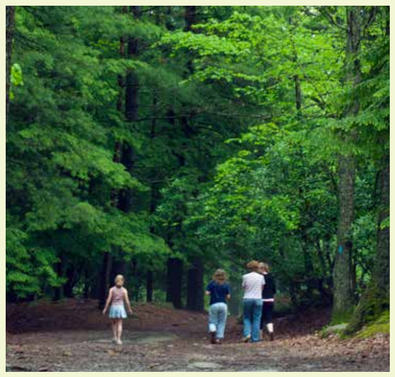
SENECA POINT OVERLOOK: At Seneca Point Overlook, look for bowl shaped depressions in the rock outcrops which are believed to have been made when prehistoric peoples of the Woodland Period (2850 BC – 1050 AC) ground acorns. Cook Forest State Park is home to six known sites of significance to American Indians.

BRACKET DAMS: The stone and earthen foundations of bracket dams can be found along the banks of Toms Run. One set of remains can be observed upstream from the Swinging Bridge. Bracket dams created an artificial flood to raise the water level for floating logs to the Clarion River.

COBBTOWN: Two and a half miles up Toms Run Road are the scant remains of Cobbtown, one of many temporary logging boomtowns of the area. This town was in operation from 1861 to the 1890s.

Recreational Opportunities

Spend the Day



HIKING: There are over 47 miles of hiking trails and 4.3 miles of multi-use trails within Cook Forest State Park. An additional 24 miles of multi-use trails and 8 miles of hiking trails are located within the Clarion River Lands. Trail hiking guides for Cook Forest and the Clarion River Lands are available online and at the park office.

BIKING: Bikes are permitted on all one-way, dirt roads within the park. A 13–mile bicycle route follows lightly traveled roads within the park and a portion of Heffron Run Trail. Biking on hiking trails is prohibited except on the bicycle route portion of Heffron Run Trail. There is also a 5.5–mile bicycle route which connects the Rail 66 Country Trail (Knox-Kane RR) to the Log Cabin Environmental Learning Classroom using a combination of township roadways and Toms Run Rd.

HORSEBACK RIDING: A loop trail begins at a small parking lot on Forest Drive, connects to Old Logging Road Trail, and winds through beautiful pine plantations. Twenty-four miles of additional trails are located downstream of Gravel Lick Bridge in the Clarion River Lands.

PICNICKING: Picnic tables and charcoal grills are available throughout the park. Picnic pavilions may be reserved up to 11 months in advance for a fee. Unreserved picnic pavilions are free on a first-come, first-served basis. Pavilions 1, 2, and River Road are ADA accessible.

FISHING: The Clarion River provides fishing for trout, warmwater game fish, and panfish. Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission regulations and laws apply.

About 2.5 miles of Toms Run is stocked with trout. A special fishing pond stocked with trout is located by the park office and is available for use by children ages 15 and younger, and people with disabilities. An ADA- accessible pier provides access.

SCENIC VIEWS: Two scenic views are along Fire Tower Road, about 1.5 miles from PA Route 36.

Seneca Point: The rock ledges of Seneca Point Overlook give a view of the Clarion River Valley. A viewfinder fit with an EnChroma color blind lens is located at Seneca Point Overlook. The lenses are designed to enhance the color vision of those with a red-green color vision deficiency. Any park visitor can utilize the viewfinder to experience the colorful beauty of nature and to view foliage more vividly.

The rock ledges are hazardous. Do not walk or climb on the rock outcroppings outside of the fenced area.

Fire Tower: An 88–foot climb up Old No. 9 Fire Tower gives a breathtaking view of the entire area. On a clear day, visitors can view points of interest that are up to 20 miles away.

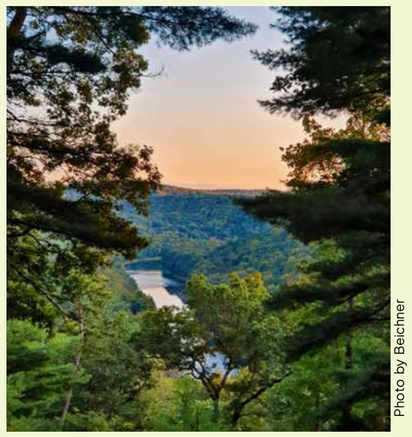


Photo by Beichner



BOATING: The Clarion River provides approximately 120 miles of paddling opportunities – 25 river miles from Clear Creek State Park through the Clarion River Lands. Cook Forest State Park provides access to the river with three hand-carry public launches with parking. Required launch permits can be purchased at the park office.

Popular paddling trips are from Clear Creek State Park, Barnett Launch, and Four-mile Launch to Cooksburg Launch. Overnight parking is available with a no cost permit obtained at the park office. For paddlers traveling overnight on the river, there are two canoe-in campsites at Thompsons Eddy, reservable for a fee, for one night only. See the **River Camping** section for additional information.

Canoes, kayaks, and tubes are available for rent from private businesses nearby. To plan a float on the Clarion River and to review paddling safety tips and regulations, see the Clarion River Water Trail map at the park office or at https://pfbc.pa.gov/WaterTrail.htm.

The Clarion River is a Class 1 river, a beginner's waterway with slower moving water and a few faster riffles and waves. As the water level rises from weather events, the difficulty navigating the river and velocity of the water changes. When the United States Geological Survey (USGS) river gauge at Cooksburg reads 6 feet, the park closes its launches. River height can be checked on the USGS website. https://waterdata.usgs.gov/pa/nwis

Non-powered boats launched in the park must display one of the following: boat registration from any state; launch permit or mooring permit from Pennsylvania State Parks, available at most state park offices; launch use permit from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

HUNTING AND FIREARMS: Over 11,000 acres of Cook Forest State Park and Clarion River Lands are open to hunting, trapping, and the training of dogs during established seasons. Common game species are deer, squirrel, bear, and turkey. During designated hunting seasons, an ADA access road and parking lot on the eastern side of the park are open by permit for people with disabilities. Over 10,000 acres of adjacent state forests and over 500,000 acres of Allegheny National Forest are also open to hunting.

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 park 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.

SAWMILL CENTER FOR THE ARTS: A local, non-profit craft organization housed in the historic sawmill offers traditional crafts in a gift shop. Demonstrations and classes on various crafts are presented throughout the summer and fall. The Verna Leith Sawmill Theater presents plays, musicals, and other entertainment throughout the summer season. 814–927–6655. www.sawmill.org



Stay the Night



RUSTIC CABINS: The cabins open in early April and close in mid-December. Two cabin colonies provide rustic, minimally furnished cabins that sleep 4, 6, 8, or 10 people. Occupants must provide their own bedding, cookware, and tableware. A shower house and potable water are nearby. Four cabins are ADA accessible. Dogs are permitted in designated cabins for a fee.

CAMPING: Some full–hookup and electric sites
The campground opens in mid-April and closes in mid-October. The park has 200 campsites, each with a picnic table and fire ring. Electric only sites are available with either 30 or 50–amp hookups. Full-hookup campsites have on-site water, 50–amp electric, and sewage hookup. Shower houses, coin-operated laundry facilities, and a sanitary dump station are available. Pets are permitted at designated sites for a fee.

ORGANIZED GROUP TENTING: Organized groups can rent this rustic area year-round. Access in the winter months may be difficult. The four sites each accommodate 20 people.



RIVER CAMPING: A canoe/kayak camping area with three sites is at Thompson Eddy, downstream of Gravel Lick Bridge. This area is for individuals and groups traveling on the Clarion River by canoe or kayak. Use of this area is limited to one night and is for tent use only. Cost is based per person, and group size is limited to 10 people per site.

Enjoy the Winter

ICE SKATING: A lighted ice skating area is along River Road. Ice thickness is not monitored. For your safety, make sure ice is at least 4" thick for a single skater and 7" thick for a small group. Always carry safety equipment.

SLEDDING: A slope is available for sledding near the ice skating area along River Road.

SNOWSHOEING AND CROSS–COUNTRY SKIING: Snowshoeing is permitted on all trails. Trails recommended for cross-country skiing are labeled on the map. Fire Tower Road, Toms Run Road, and part of Forest Drive are groomed for cross-country skiing.



Photo by HerpA

Nearby Attractions

Information on nearby attractions is available from:
Pennsylvania Great Outdoors Visitors Bureau. 814–849–5197. https://VisitPaGo.com
Cook Forest Vacation Bureau. 412–353–9620. www.CookForest.org

Clear Creek State Park encompasses 1,901 acres in Jefferson County. The park occupies a scenic portion of the Clear Creek Valley and offers camping, swimming, hiking, fishing, cabins, yurts, canoeing, hunting, and picnicking. 814–752–2368

Clear Creek State Forest covers 14,431 acres and provides hunting, fishing, camping, and hiking. Much of the state forest is along the Clarion and Allegheny rivers. 814–226–1901

Allegheny National Forest, Pennsylvania's only national forest, is approximately 517,000 acres and includes land in Elk, Forest, McKean, and Warren counties. 814–728–6100

Information and Reservations

Cook Forest State Park
100 Route 36
P.O. Box 120
Cooksburg, PA 16217
814–744–8407
CookForestSP@pa.gov

An Equal Opportunity Employer
www.pa.gov/state-parks

Make online reservations at www.pa.gov/state-parks or call toll-free 888–PA–PARKS (888–727–2757), 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday to Saturday.

Electric Vehicle Charging Station

A 2–plug, first-come, first-served, electric vehicle charging station is available for public use between the Children's Fishing Pond and park office. There is a 4–hour maximum time limit. Overnight charging is prohibited. Please move to another parking space once your vehicle has been charged or the maximum time-limit has been reached.

Access for People with Disabilities

This symbol indicates facilities and activities that are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible for people with disabilities. This publication text is available in alternative formats.

If you need an accommodation to participate in park activities due to a disability, please contact the park you plan to visit.

In an Emergency

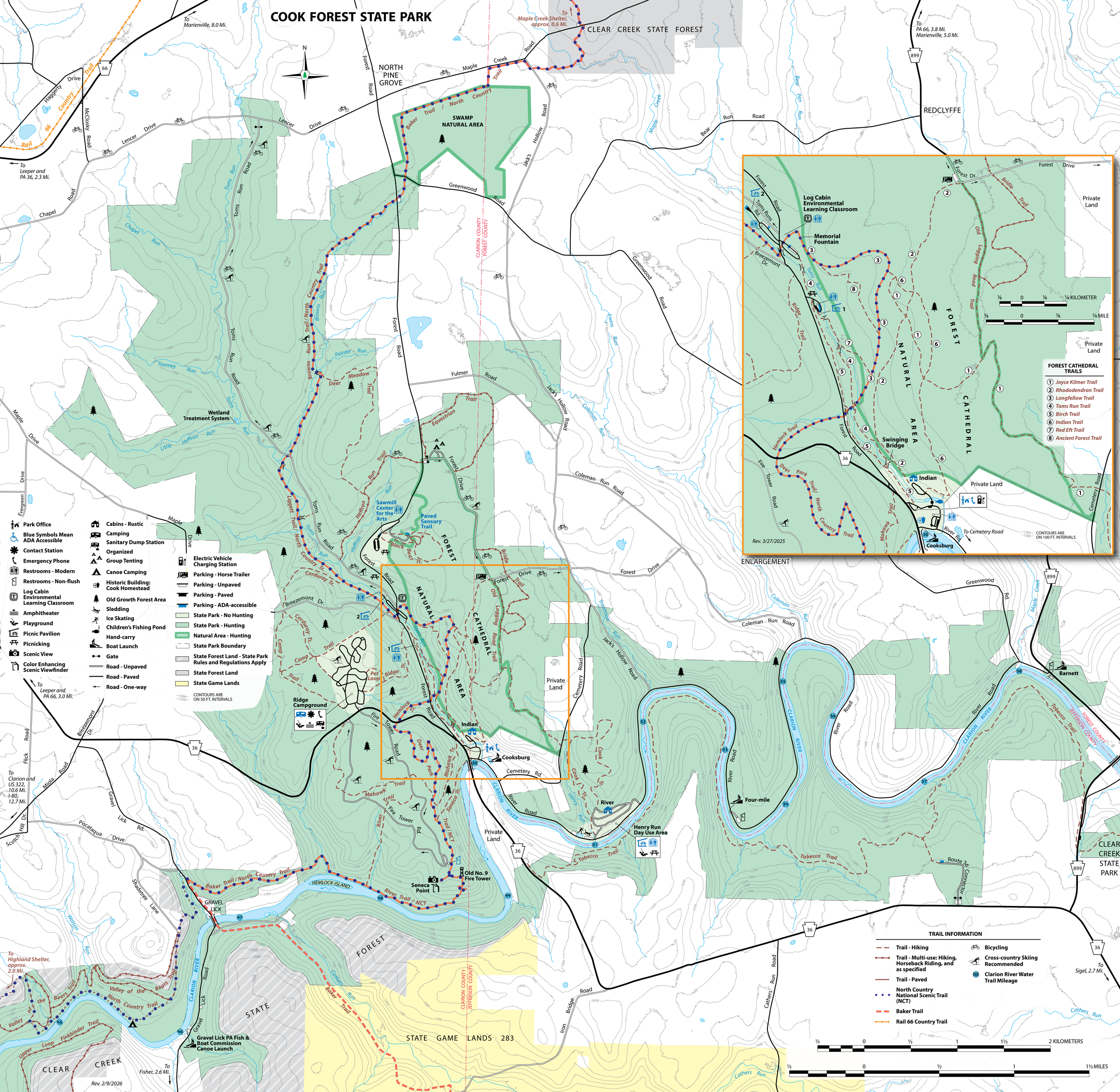
Call 911 and contact a park employee to summon medical, fire, or safety professionals.

Call or text 988 to contact a crisis center counselor during a mental health or substance abuse crisis.

Directions to the nearest hospital are posted on bulletin boards and at the park office.

NEAREST HOSPITAL
Clarion Hospital
1 Hospital Drive
Clarion, PA 16214
814–226–9500





COOK FOREST STATE PARK
CLEAR CREEK STATE FOREST
NORTH PINE GROVE
REDCLYFFE
SWAMP NATURAL AREA
Baker Trail / North Country Trail
Wetland Treatment System
Sawmill Center for the Arts
Paved Sensory Trail
FOREST NATURAL AREA
FOREST CATHEDRAL
Ridge Campground
Indian
Cooksburg
Barnett
Four-mile
River
Henry Run Day Use Area
Old No. 9 Fire Tower
Seneca Point
GRAVEL LICK
Gravel Lick PA Fish & Boat Commission Canoe Launch
STATE GAME LANDS 283
CLEAR CREEK STATE PARK
CLARION RIVER
Tobecco Trail
Private Land
Log Cabin Environmental Learning Classroom
Memorial Fountain
Swinging Bridge
Indian
Cooksburg
Rev. 3/27/2025
ENLARGEMENT
FOREST CATHEDRAL TRAILS
1 Joyce Kilmer Trail
2 Rhododendron Trail
3 Longfellow Trail
4 Toms Run Trail
5 Birch Trail
6 Indian Trail
7 Red Eft Trail
8 Ancient Forest Trail
Park Office
Blue Symbols Mean ADA Accessible
Contact Station
Emergency Phone
Restrooms - Modern
Restrooms - Non-flush
Log Cabin Environmental Learning Classroom
Amphitheater
Playground
Picnic Pavilion
Picnicking
Scenic View
Color Enhancing Scenic Viewfinder
Cabins - Rustic
Camping
Sanitary Dump Station
Organized
Group Tenting
Canoe Camping
Historic Building: Cook Homestead
Old Growth Forest Area
Sledding
Ice Skating
Children's Fishing Pond
Hand-carry
Boat Launch
Gate
Road - Unpaved
Road - Paved
Road - One-way
Electric Vehicle Charging Station
Parking - Horse Trailer
Parking - Unpaved
Parking - Paved
Parking - ADA-accessible
State Park - No Hunting
State Park - Hunting
Natural Area - Hunting
State Park Boundary
State Forest Land - State Park Rules and Regulations Apply
State Forest Land
State Game Lands
CONTOURS ARE ON 50 FT. INTERVALS
TRAIL INFORMATION
Trail - Hiking
Trail - Multi-use: Hiking, Horseback Riding, and as specified
Trail - Paved
North Country National Scenic Trail (NCT)
Baker Trail
Rail 66 Country Trail
Bicycling
Cross-country Skiing Recommended
Clarion River Water Trail Mileage
2 KILOMETERS
1½ MILES
Rev. 2/9/2026