

A Pennsylvania Recreational Guide for

Kings Gap Environmental Education Center

Kings Gap Environmental Education Center



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



Top 10 Activities

1. Discover the history of the Cameron-Masland Mansion and the grandeur of the surrounding estate.
2. Take in the park's incredible views of the Cumberland Valley.
3. Enjoy a weekend stay in the historic stone mansion.
4. Learn something new – participate in an educational program.
5. Stroll through the Mansion Garden among the flowers, herbs, and pollinating insects.
6. Hike on over 26 miles of trails with varying levels of difficulty.
7. Traverse the Pines Area in fresh snowfall on snowshoes or cross-country skis.
8. Explore amphibian life at vernal pools in the Forest Pools Area.
9. Picnic on the mansion terrace or Forest Heritage Overlook with family and friends.
10. Navigate through the woods on a permanent orienteering course.



Kings Gap Environmental Education Center



Kings Gap Environmental Education Center's unique attractions are its mountainous terrain, extensive forests, and panoramic views, which may be experienced while driving the winding road to the mansion area or while hiking the trails. The sweeping view of the Cumberland Valley from the Cameron-Masland Mansion is impressive at any time of the year. Consisting of over 2,600 acres of forest on South Mountain, there are more than 26 miles of hiking trails, permanent orienteering courses, picnicking, hunting, sightseeing, and other recreational opportunities.

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. 40.09321 Long. -77.2683

From Interstate 81, take Exit 37. Travel south on PA 233 for 2.3 miles. Turn left onto Pine Road and continue 2.2 miles. Turn right onto Kings Gap Road.

The Cameron-Masland Mansion is 3.5 miles from the park's entrance. Follow the winding, paved road to the top of the mountain. In the Mansion Area, follow the one-way directional signs. Parking is available in several lots adjacent to the education building and mansion.

Learn, Experience, Connect

Kings Gap Environmental Education Center provides a diverse array of environmental education and recreational programs. Programming is offered year-round to schools, civic groups, and the community. Kings Gap also teaches outdoor skills that promote healthy, lifelong, outdoor enjoyment.

Curriculum-based environmental education programs are available to schools and organized groups. Formal education programs are grade-specific and generate learning through discovery. Call the center office at 717-486-3799 to schedule a group program. A variety of professional development workshops are offered for teachers.

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

Formal Education Programs

SCHOOLS: Field experiences for homeschool and traditional students in grades pre-K through 12 offer hands-on opportunities to explore their natural world with inquiry-based lessons, aligned with Pennsylvania academic standards.

COLLEGES: Programs are provided upon request. Internship opportunities are available for students seeking degrees in environmental education, resource management, biology, hospitality, and other related fields.

EDUCATORS: Both credit and non-credit training opportunities are offered on a variety of natural history curricula which are designed for easy integration into the classroom. In-service and pre-service workshops are also available.



Public Programs



SUMMER CAMPS: During the summer months, youths ages 4 to 17 are invited to participate in day camps. This series of outdoor learning programs offers young people opportunities to explore and learn about the environment in four age-specific levels.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS: A variety of programs are offered on a regular basis for the community. Recreational programs include guided trail hikes, orienteering, and archery; while natural history programs cover such topics as honeybees, birding, owls, and seasonal pools. Large public events are also offered throughout the year.

Recreational Opportunities

Spend the Day

PICNICKING: Picnic tables are located throughout the park. Drinking water is only available in the Mansion Area. Restrooms are available at the Mansion, Pines, and Kings Gap Hollow areas. A picnic pavilion in the Mansion Area may be reserved up to 11 months in advance for a fee. If unreserved, it is free on a first-come, first-served basis.

HIKING: 26 miles of trails
See **Hiking** section on reverse side.

ORIENTEERING: The park offers orienteering courses as well as opportunities to learn the skill of orienteering, using a map and compass to navigate a course. Additional information on orienteering and copies of course maps are available in the education building foyer. Programs are offered in fall and spring.

SIGHTSEEING:



Scenic Views: Admire the landscape or watch for wildlife from the Mansion Terrace, Scenic Vista Trail, Ridge Overlook Trail, Forest Heritage Overlook, and picnicking areas along the road.

Historic Estate: The Cameron-Masland Mansion, mansion garden, ice house, carriage house, water tower, and generator building are historically significant structures from the estate.

The mansion is open for self-guided tours on select Sundays and during special events.

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING AND SNOWSHOEING: All 26 miles of trails are open for skiing and snowshoeing. Cross-country skiing is popular in the Pines and Forest Pools areas. Check the trail description for difficulty.



Stay the Night

Make overnight 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.

MANSION WEEKEND STAYS: Experience the beauty of Kings Gap by reserving a weekend getaway. Rooms for two guests and suites for four guests are available Friday to Sunday, from late April to mid-November.



SPECIAL EVENT FACILITIES: From sweeping views of mountains and the Cumberland Valley to the historical backdrop of the Cameron-Masland Mansion and surroundings, Kings Gap offers a unique setting for meetings, retreats, special events, and trainings.

Indoor and outdoor event spaces, meeting rooms, food service, and overnight accommodations are available for rent from mid-April through mid-November. Contact the center office for additional information, availability, pricing, and to make a reservation.

HUNTING AND FIREARMS: About 2,400 acres are open to hunting, trapping, and the training of dogs during established seasons. An additional 138 acres, which includes the Pines and the Forest Pools areas, are open to archery-only deer hunting in the appropriate season. Common game species are deer, turkeys, and squirrels.

The mansion and education building are included in a 56-acre, posted no hunting area. Hunters should be aware of "Safety Zones" both posted and not posted. Contact the center office for additional information on hunting areas.

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 center 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.

ORGANIZED GROUP TENTING: Located in the Kings Gap Hollow Area, this wooded space features six tenting platforms, a communal fire pit, and nearby restrooms. The group site may be reserved by organized groups from mid-April to late October.

Wildlife Watching



Five-lined skink

Straddling South Mountain, Kings Gap's dramatic elevation change features three distinct forest habitats.

The dry ridge tops contain chestnut oak forests where woodpeckers, deer, turkeys, and fox squirrels flourish. Orchids, trailing arbutus, and trillium can be seen in the spring. The summer understory is ripe with huckleberry. Five-lined skinks can be seen basking in the sun around the buildings. Turkey vultures often soar over the park on warm air currents from the ridge tops.

On the lower slopes of the mountain is a forest of oak and tulip trees. In the tree canopy, songbirds seek food while avoiding prowling hawks. Summer brings blooms to native wildflowers like mountain laurel and wild azalea. More remote areas of the park, such as Irish Gap and Pinebrook areas host a variety of wildlife including foxes, coyote, and black bears.

At the foot of the mountain are coniferous and vernal pool habitats. The pines were planted in the 1950s, providing a home to wildlife including saw-whet owls. Although impacted by invasive plants, the understory includes native spicebush, a food source for butterflies and bluebirds. In the spring, vernal pools are a safe haven for amphibians and their young.

Timber Rattlesnakes

All areas of the park are home to a variety of snakes. The timber rattlesnakes of South Mountain are an isolated and declining population. For this reason, it is unlawful to hunt, take, catch, or kill timber rattlesnakes in the South Mountain region. As with all wildlife, keep your distance for safe viewing.



History



The relatively young forests of Kings Gap reflect the influence of the charcoaling industry from the 1700s through the late 1800s. Before the use of coal, wood charcoal fueled the nearby iron furnaces. The forests of South Mountain were clear-cut on a 25-year cycle to satisfy this need. Evidence of this era can still be found in the many charcoal "hearths" that dot the mountain.

From 1906 to 1951, the property was owned by James McCormick Cameron, who built a 32-room, stone mansion as a summer home. As a consequence of the charcoaling industry and poor forestry practices, wildfires were common. This influenced Cameron to construct the building with solid Antietam quartzite and reinforced concrete. Many of the estate's buildings remain and are visible in the park, including the original water tower.

In 1951, the C. H. Masland and Sons Carpet Company purchased the estate to be a meeting space for business functions and overnight accommodations for clients. Remnants of this era are still visible inside the Mansion, including original Masland carpet.

In 1973, the Commonwealth purchased the property and opened it to the public as a state park. The park is one of several state parks specifically dedicated to providing environmental education for the community and students of all ages.

Information and Reservations

Kings Gap Environmental Education Center
500 Kings Gap Road
Carlisle, PA 17015
717-486-5031
KingsGapSP@pa.gov

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

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@KingsGapEEC

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 Education Building.

NEAREST HOSPITAL
UPMC Carlisle
361 Alexander Spring Road, 17015
717-249-1212

Electric Vehicle Charging Station

A 2-plug, first-come, first-served, electric vehicle charging station is available for public use at the Education Building parking lot. 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.

Nearby Attractions

Information on nearby attractions is available from the Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau.
www.VisitCumberlandValley.com

Visitors enjoy many recreational opportunities at **Pine Grove Furnace State Park** including two mountain lakes, the Appalachian Trail and AT Museum, biking, swimming, fishing, and camping. 717-486-7174

The 85,000-acre **Michaux State Forest** offers general recreation such as hunting, fishing, and hiking.
717-352-2211

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission raises trout and other fish for release into Pennsylvania lakes and streams at the **Huntsdale State Fish Hatchery.**
717-486-3419



HIKING: 26 miles



All trails are hiking only. Sturdy footwear is recommended due to the rocky footing on most trails. Trails are marked, but taking a trail map on your hike is strongly recommended. Distances listed are one way.

TRAIL DIFFICULTY RATINGS:
Easiest: Grade is gentle with few obstacles.
More Difficult: Grade is steeper and trails narrower with embedded rocks or roots on the trail surface.
Most Difficult: Grade is steep and provides a definite physical challenge. Elevation gain or loss is severe.

Black Gum Trail: 0.8 mile
More difficult hiking | Connector trail | Yellow squares
This linear trail between Forest Heritage Loop and Scenic Vista Trail follows the southwestern contour of the mountainside and has an abundance of black gum trees.

Buck Ridge Trail: 1.8 miles in the park, 6 miles total
Most difficult hiking | Point-to-point trail | Yellow squares
Trailhead amenities: modern restrooms in Mansion Area
Beginning in the Mansion Area, this challenging, rocky trail tackles two hills before entering Michaux State Forest. The trail then follows a network of foot paths and old logging roads leading to Pine Grove Furnace State Park.

Cold Spring Overlook Trail: 1.3 miles
Easiest hiking | Connector trail | Red circles
Splitting off Buck Ridge Trail, this trail travels toward and along the park's eastern boundary, providing views of Cold Springs Hollow before linking with Maple Hollow Trail.

East Watershed Trail: 0.8 mile
Easiest hiking | Out-and-back trail | Yellow squares
From the Pond Parking Area, the trail wanders along a bubbling creek toward Old Boundary Trail.

Firebreak Trail: 0.5 mile
Most difficult hiking | Out-and-back trail | Red circles
From Kings Gap Hollow Area, this trail offers a more direct, uphill route to Old Boundary Trail.

Forest Heritage Loop: 1.8 miles
More difficult hiking | Loop trail | Red circles
This trail reveals another part of the area's rich history, passing several charcoal hearths that have been unused for over 100 years. Maple Hollow and Rock Scree trails provide access to this trail.

Forest Pools Loop: 1.2 miles
Easiest hiking | Loop trail | Yellow squares
This trail meanders through mixed forest and past several vernal pools.

Irish Gap Hollow Trail: 2.3 miles
Easiest hiking | Point-to-point trail | Yellow squares
Following along Irish Gap Hollow Run, this trail connects Irish Gap and Pinebrook access areas. It has many wooden bridges and natural stone crossings, as well as the remains of an old rock dam.

Kings Gap Hollow Trail: 1.5 miles
More difficult hiking | Connector trail | Blue triangles
Connecting Pump House Parking with the Mansion Area, this trail wanders along the pristine Kings Gap Hollow Run, past a small pond, and climbs in elevation through an oak forest.

Locust Point Trail: 1.0 mile
Most difficult hiking | Connector trail | Yellow squares
Connecting Old Boundary and Two Hollows trails, this route travels through woods to an opening among fallen locust trees.

Maple Hollow Trail: 1.3 miles
More difficult hiking | Loop trail | Blue triangles
This trail traverses a hollow with rich soils, plentiful water, and resulting maple forest.

Nature Trail: 0.2 mile
Easiest hiking | Loop trail | Blue triangles
Trailhead amenities: modern restrooms
This short trail loops around the Education Building, guiding walkers on a mostly level path through open forest.

Old Boundary Trail: 2.0 miles
Most difficult hiking | Connector trail | Blue triangles
Between Two Hollows and Buck Ridge trails, enjoy the solitude of the forest while following the original boundary of the park. This is one of the park's most challenging trails.

Pines Loop: 0.8 mile
Easiest hiking | Loop trail | Red circles
Trailhead amenities: non-flush restrooms
Soft pine needles cover this trail taking hikers through the heart of a coniferous forest grove which was planted in the 1950s.

Pools Connector Trail: 0.3 mile
Easiest hiking | Connector trail | Blue triangles
This trail connects the Forest Pools Area to the Pines Area, creating a picturesque link to enjoy both habitats.

Ridge Overlook Trail: 0.8 mile
Most difficult hiking | Connector trail | Yellow squares
Accessed from Rock Scree or Kings Gap Hollow trails, this ridge-top trail has boulder outcrops and offers a view of the valley below.

Rock Scree Trail: 1.9 miles
More difficult hiking | Connector trail | Blue triangles
Connecting the Pines and Mansion areas, the trail has a 600-foot elevation change over the ridge and rocky outcrop where Antietam quartzite was quarried for the mansion's construction.

Scenic Vista Trail: 2.3 miles
More difficult hiking | Point-to-point trail | Red circles
Trailhead amenities: non-flush restrooms at Kings Gap Hollow Area
Traveling between the Mansion and Kings Gap Hollow areas, this trail meanders through the forest and boasts a scenic vista mid-way, providing an excellent resting point.

Tadpole Trail: 0.8 mile
Easiest hiking | Connector trail | Red circles
This connector provides a shortcut through the Forest Pools Area and allows more flat hiking opportunities for visitors.

Two Hollows Trail: 1.3 miles
More difficult hiking | Connector trail | Red circles
This trail links Irish Gap Hollow Trail to the rest of the park, ending at Pump House Parking.

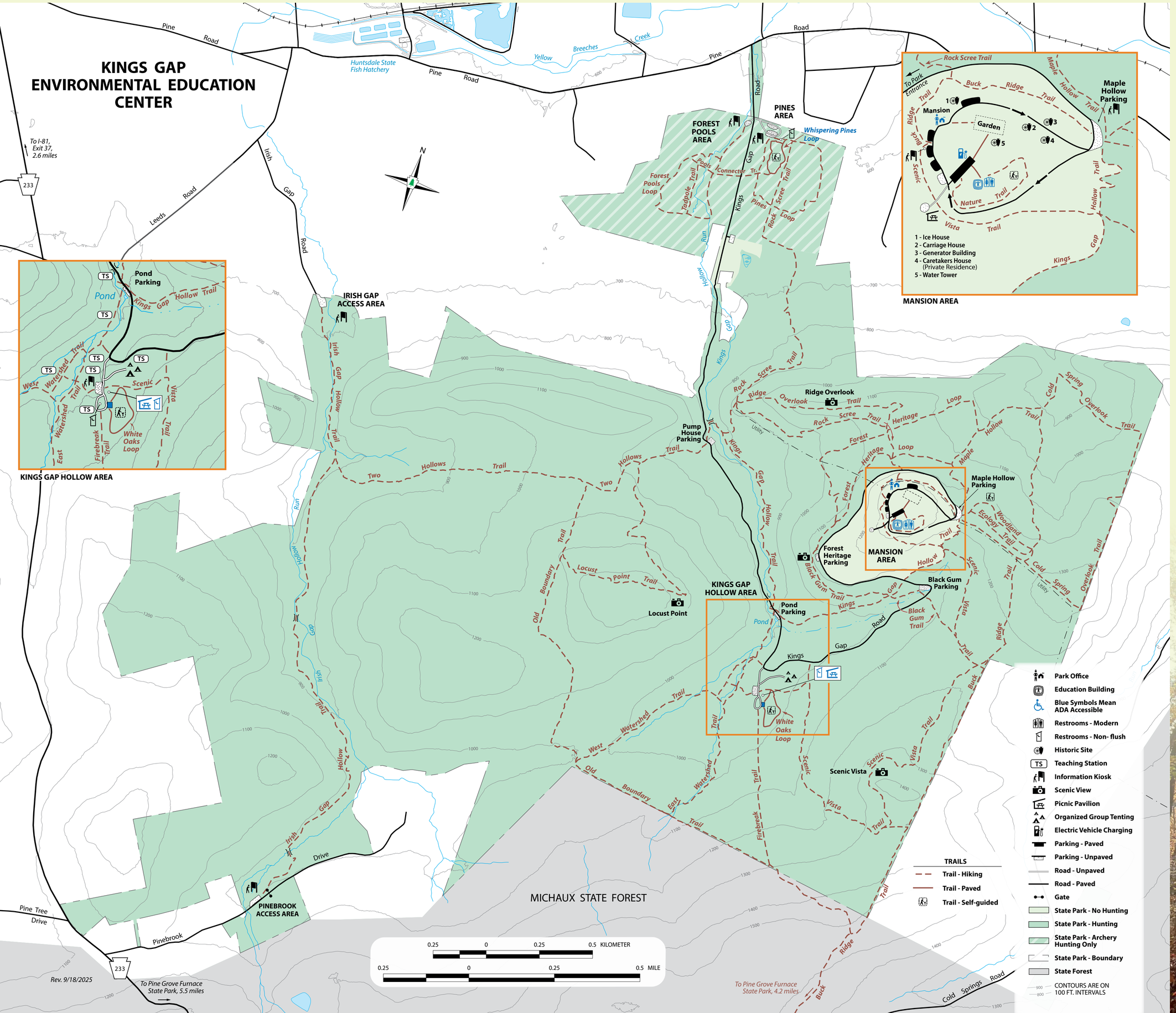
West Watershed Trail: 0.6 mile
Easiest hiking | Connector trail | Red circles
Breaking off East Watershed Trail, West Watershed travels near a rippling creek ending at Old Boundary Trail.

Whispering Pines Loop: 0.3 mile
Easiest hiking | Loop trail | Yellow squares
Trailhead amenities: non-flush restrooms, picnic tables
♿ This paved, ADA-accessible path takes hikers on a self-guided experience. Signs along the trail educate about the history of the forest and the trees that grow there.

White Oaks Loop: 0.3 mile
Easiest hiking | Loop trail | Blue triangles
Trailhead amenities: non-flush restrooms
This paved trail has educational signs about the ecology of the forest.

Woodland Ecology Trail: 0.6 mile
Easiest hiking | Loop trail | Red circles
Accessed from Maple Hollow Parking, this trail connects with Maple Hollow Trail at the halfway point of the loop. Signs placed along this mossy trail help hikers to interpret forest ecology and identify plants. Hikers can enjoy wild azalea and mountain laurel blooming in May.





Trail Tips

Be Prepared

- Let someone know your plans and check the weather forecast before your adventure.
- Wear sturdy shoes and dress in layers. Wear orange during hunting seasons.
- Bring drinking water and a snack. Do not drink from streams, springs, or ponds without properly treating the water first.
- Take a park map – many areas of the park do not have cell reception.

Protect and Preserve Our Parks

- Obey all posted rules and regulations and respect fellow visitors and the resources of the park.
- Park hours are sunrise to sunset. Overnight camping is prohibited along trails.
- All trails are foot traffic only – No bikes, horses, or vehicles.
- Because uncontrolled pets may chase wildlife or frighten visitors, pets must be physically controlled, attended at all times, and on a leash.
- Stay on blazed trails – each trail is marked with either red circles, blue triangles, or yellow squares. Utility lines and service routes may intersect hiking trails. These are not trails and do not have blazing.
- Do your part to keep wildlife wild! Enjoy wildlife from a safe distance and do not feed or approach wild animals.
- Leave no trace – Do not litter, pick flowers, stack stones, or leave logs overturned.
- Be courteous of other trail users. Pass on the right or yield to other hikers.

Enjoy Your Hike

- When possible, begin your hike uphill and return downhill.
- Establish a steady, comfortable hiking pace.
- Don't forget to stop and breathe – Take a few moments to enjoy your surroundings and rejuvenate.
- Leave your music behind and enjoy the sounds of the forest.
- Stay quiet to observe more wildlife.

