The Division of Nature Preserves and Natural Resources is responsible for the protection and conservation of Mecklenburg County’s parks designated as Nature Preserves.

Nature Preserves provide habitat for both common and rare plants and animals, preserve the beauty of Mecklenburg’s natural areas and provide sites for educational activities and the observation of wildlife and natural communities. Staff offer more than 5,000 programs annually, perform natural resource management on over 26 preserves protecting over 7,500 acres, maintain more than 10 miles of nature trails and operate three nature centers and a public campground.

Nature Centers
The Division of Nature Preserves and Natural Resources operate three nature centers at three of their largest preserves. They provide great opportunities to learn, explore and discover what nature has to offer. The nature-themed programs are free or low cost for all residents to enjoy. With public programs to field trips, outdoor recreation opportunities and special events throughout the year there is always something exciting for visitors.

Amenities and Other Facilities
The 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 Lake Wylie. Numerous fishing opportunities are available. Anglers ages 16 and older must have a NC State Fishing License. Picnic shelters can be used on a first-come, first-served basis.

Latta Plantation Nature Preserve
Latta Plantation Nature Preserve is the County’s largest nature preserve and protects over 1,400 acres. The preserve forms a green peninsula extending into Mountain Island Lake, the drinking water source for over 700,000 residents in Mecklenburg and Gaston counties. It 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 bird species.

Greenways
Greenways are linear parks that connect people and places by linking neighborhoods, offices, parks, schools and shopping areas. They also protect water quality and wildlife habitat while providing alternative ways to move through our city, suburbs and small towns. The Mecklenburg County greenway system is quickly becoming one of the finest in the nation. Greenways are vegetated natural buffers that improve water quality, reduce the impacts of flooding and provide wildlife habitat. Greenway trails provide recreation, transportation, fitness and economic benefits for all to enjoy. There are currently 38 miles of developed and 110 miles of undeveloped greenways in Mecklenburg County.

Center for Biodiversity Studies
The James F. Matthews Center for Biodiversity Studies (CBS) is located at Reedy Creek Nature Center. At CBS you will find scientists hard at work studying the plant and animal life of the Piedmont region. The CBS houses a wonderful natural history collection, documenting the unique plants and animals that occur in our area. Our namesake, Dr. James F. Matthews, Professor Emeritus of Biology at UNC Charlotte, continues to contribute to knowledge of the natural history of the Piedmont as regular volunteer at CBS.

Reedy Creek Nature Preserve and Nature Center
Reedy Creek Nature Preserve protects over 900 acres of natural, forested habitat within Reedy Creek Park. There are over 10 miles of hiking trails for the outdoor enthusiast, giving visitors the opportunity to explore a variety of terrains while enjoying scenic views of small lakes, forests, fields, streams and wildlife. Reedy Creek Nature Preserve is also home to Reedy Creek Nature Center and the Dr. James F. Matthews Center for Biodiversity Studies.

Amenities
Anglers will find numerous fishing opportunities in both Dragonfly and Slider Ponds. Those 16 years of age and older must have a NC State Fishing License. The adjacent 116-acre Reedy Creek Park offers three reservable large (80 person) picnic shelters, a reservable indoor (150 person) picnic shelter, five reservable small (15 person) picnic shelters, numerous picnic tables, an 18 hole disc golf course, two volleyball courts, a basketball court, a playground and swing garden, two softball fields, a soccer field, boat ramps and Brawleyham Park dog park.

Reedy Creek Nature Center features live, native animals, an exhibit hall, a classroom 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 and demonstration compost area. Self-interpretive trail guides are available for several nature preserve trails.

McDowell Nature Preserve and Nature Center
McDowell Nature Preserve protects over 1,700 acres of forested fields and shoreline habitat along the shores of Lake Wylie. With over eight miles of hiking trails, wildlife viewing opportunities, picnic areas and playgrounds, there is plenty to do for an entire day. McDowell is also home to the county’s only public campground.

Amenities
The property includes shelter rentals, a large pavilion and a waterfront deck. The year-round (weekends only December through February) campground accommodates everything from motor homes to primitive camping and offers full service Rent-A-Tent camping where tents, cots and other gear are provided and set-up prior to your arrival. Numerous fishing opportunities are available. Anglers ages 16 and older must have a NC State Fishing License. Picnic shelters can be used on a first-come, first-served basis or reserved for special events. McDowell Nature Center serves as the gateway to the over 1,700-acre McDowell 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, an exhibit 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 and demonstration compost area. The preserve has a wide variety of recreational opportunities including hiking, fishing and canoeing.

Camping
Would you like to take the “Great Urban Escape?” McDowell Campground has 56 campsites ranging from RV to primitive sites. Group camping is available at Copperhead Island just a few miles up the road. Campsites may be reserved seven days a week. Unreserved campsites are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Reservations can be made by calling 980-314-2267 (CAMP) between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday – Sunday.

Natural Resources
The Natural Resources Section is responsible for the protection and management of natural resources in Mecklenburg County natural areas including those in parks, greenways, nature preserves and natural heritage sites. Total acreage of these unique land assets currently stands at about 31,600 acres with about 7,600 acres protected as Nature Preserve. The Division contributes to regional environmental leadership and research by partnering with other public agencies and non-profit organizations in neighboring counties and throughout the state.

The Division strives to achieve the goals specified in the adopted Mecklenburg Community Vision 2015 by “protecting our natural resources” and identifying and actively working to protect “environmentally sensitive areas.” The primary focus of the Division is to preserve natural resources, including all native plant and animal species and natural community types that comprise Mecklenburg County’s unique natural heritage.
The Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department’s Division of Nature Preserves and Natural Resources manages over 7,600 acres of parkland that provide wildlife habitat, protect high quality forests, provide water quality protection for our lakes and streams and countless opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors with 35 miles of hiking trails, picnic areas, fishing piers, canoe/kayak launchies and wildlife viewing areas.

Our greenway system has over 42 miles of paved trails and continues to grow every year. Greenway properties protect water quality and wildlife habitat while also providing a high-quality alternative transportation option for walking, running or biking. This map will help you find a trail near your house or workplace. For more, visit www.parkandrec.com

**Nature Preserves**

Nature Preserves are open daily 7 am to sunset.

- **Big Rock** - 4300 Elmstone Dr
  - 32 Acres • Hiking Trails
- **Clark's Creek** - 5442 Hucks Rd
  - 46 Acres • Hiking Trails, Picnic Shelter, Playground
- **Coward's Ford** - 3321 Hucks Rd
  - 109 Acres • Picnic Tables, Wildlife Observation Deck
- **Greenwood** - 5326 Newkirk Rd
  - 17 Acres • Hiking Trails, Picnic Shelter, Bathrooms (Opening in 2017)
- **Hickory Hill** - 2300 Rocky River Rd
  - 520 Acres • Hiking Trails, Nature Center and Center For Biodiversity Studies, Picnic Shelter, Playground, Bathrooms
- **Meckaphile** - 4320 York Rd
  - 900 Acres • Hiking Trails, Picnic Tables
- **Rural Hill** - 640 Neck Rd
  - 607 Acres • Hiking Trails, Historic Rural Hill
- **Sherman Branch** - 1220 Rocky River Rd
  - 210 Acres • Hiking Trails, Watchman Biking, Picnic Tables
- **Shinnabarrow** - 4821 York Rd
  - 352 Acres • Hiking Trails
- **Steele Creek** - 5720 Thompson Rd
  - 480 Acres • Hiking Trails, Nature Center, Picnic Shelter, Playground, Bathrooms
- **Whitmarsh** - 4701 Newkirk Rd
  - 30 Acres • Hiking Trails
- **Whitfield** - 13007 Robert Walker Dr
  - 137 Acres • Hiking Trails
- **West Branch** - 13007 Robert Walker Dr
  - 85 Acres • Hiking Trails

**Greenways**

Many greenways also have neighborhood connections and access points. For directions and detailed maps, please refer to our website at parkandrec.com.

- **Brier Creek (Plaza Midwood)**
  - 0.43 Miles • Parking at 9701 Masonic Dr or 1628 Masonic Ln
- **Brier Creek (Meyers Park)**
  - 0.81 Miles • Parking at Alexander Graham Middle School or 2200 Lawntyme Ln
- **Campbell Creek**
  - 1.1 Miles • Parking at 216 Whippoorwill Lane Rd (great lot across from fire station)
- **Four Mile Creek (Matthews, NC)**
  - 0.8 Miles • Parking at 10143 Pinecrest Pl, Matthews, NC 28105
- **Irwin and Stewart Creek Complex**
  - 1.6 Miles • Parking at 750 North Symphony Ln (Boy's Upper Patio), 125 Greensfield Ave (Southwest Park), 10143 Manchester Dr, 5401 Beatties Rd, 1170 Latta Ave or 1004 Freedom Dr
- **Irwin Creek #2**
  - 0.83 Miles • Parking at 1744 Clanton Rd or 1520 Clanton Rd
- **Little Sugar Creek (Mallard Section)**
  - 9.65 Miles • Parking at 200 North Davidson St, 756 E 12th St or 624 Parkwood Ave
- **Little Sugar Creek (Birkdale Section)**
  - 2.17 Miles • Parking at 150 Westpark Avenue, 1462 Horsehead St, Freedom Park, 1665 Stirling Rd or North Side of Westfield Rd between Tranquility Ave and Brandywine Rd (on street parking)
- **Little Sugar Creek (Huntingshown Farms Section)**
  - 0.19 Miles • Parking at 2711 Half Mile Rd, 2501 Huntingshown Farms Ln, 5600 Rideau Rd or 2200 Ramsey Ln
- **Lower McAlpine, McMillan and Four Mile Creek Complex**
  - 0.8 Miles • Parking at 1600 Byrons Rd, 7671 Powdr Rd or 808 Fairview Rd (on street parking)
- **Meallard and Clark's Creek Complex**
  - 1.1 Miles • Parking at 1721 Meallard Rd, 4626 Swansea Way, 210 East Mallard Creek Church Rd (park Farm-Friendly or 1964 Mallard Creek Church Rd
- **McAlpine Creek (Upper)**
  - 1.6 Miles • Parking at 400 Byrons Rd (James Byrons Park), 6771 Powdr Rd or McAlpine Creek Park or 7671 Old Mill Rd
- **McBee Creek**
  - 1.32 Miles • Parking at 5650 Cranleigh Rd or 8623 Firsthart Rd
- **Middle Creek**
  - 0.52 Miles • Parking at 17202 Marvin Rd
- **South Prong Rocky River (Davidson, NC)**
  - 1.57 Miles • Parking at 203 South St, 1676 Davidson-Cox Rd or 15007 Robert Walker Dr
- **Toby Creek Greenway**
  - 0.6 Miles • Parking at 210 East Mallard Creek Church Rd (Nick Farm Fields)
- **Torrence Creek (Huntersville, NC)**
  - 0.6 Miles • Parking at 1500 Westpark Avenue (on-street parking along Bradford Hill Ln at the greenway entrance)
- **Walker Branch**
  - 0.48 Miles • Parking at 14505 South Tryon St or 1680 Regent Park Way
- **West Branch Rocky River (Davidson, NC)**
  - 1.1 Miles • Parking at 8320 Snow Rd

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation
The National Place To Be...
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