Latta Plantation Nature Preserve is Mecklenburg County’s largest nature preserve and protects over 1,385 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 900,000 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 Schwitzek’s sunflower. 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 songbirds, and protection of bottomland hardwood forests, a threatened natural community in North Carolina.

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). These reservable (30 person) picnic shelters and an accessible trail with eight picnic platforms that provide picnic opportunities with restrooms nearby. For more information call 704-875-1395 or visit www.parkandrec.com.

**Fishing and Boating**

Fishing is allowed on Mountain Island Lake, but all anglers must purchase a valid North Carolina fishing license. North Carolina fishing licenses can be purchased at www.ncwildlife.gov or through area tackle stores. Canoe and kayak enthusiasts will find two landing areas that provide access to Gar Creek and Mountain Island Lake. At the North Canoe Access, you’ll find an accessible canoe/kayak launch with a floating dock for universal access. For more information call 704-875-1395 or visit www.parkandrec.com.

**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.

**Horseback & Hiking Trails**

**Split Rock Trail** - 1.15 miles

Accessed from either Hill or Piedmont Prairie trails, this moderate trail skirts the southern edge of the Piedmont Prairie restoration site, where the endangered Schwitzek’s sunflower can be seen in bloom from mid-September to early October. This trail is better traveled and is more rocky terrain that is not accessible to horseback riders. 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 very rocky terrain that may not be suitable for all horseback riders, but does offer a beautiful view of Mountain Island Lake. This trail has been designated a “Horse Friendly Trail” (contact nature center for details). A 0.4 mile spur trail leads to the Gar Creek canoe access.

**Hill Trail** - 2.21 miles

This moderate trail starts at the southern terminus of 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. Along the prairie’s edge from spring through fall look for native prairie plants, hummingbirds, and butterflies. The trail’s northern terminus at the Latta Springs parking lot provides the only public access to the nature preserve outside of the main entrance on Sample Road.

**Shade Trail** - 1.60 miles

Accessed across the main road from the horse trailer parking lot, this easy 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** - 0.3 miles

An easy trail that parallels the edge of a 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 boulder outcrops. To preserve vegetation and minimize erosion around the overlook, horses must be at a hitching post located 100 feet before the deck.

**Catawba Trail** - 1.25 miles

An easy trail that parallels Gar Creek and Mountain Island Lake, this easy trail passes through both upland hardwood and bottomland hardwood forests. The trail provides excellent views of both types of habitat. A connector trail can be used to reach the horse trailer parking lot, providing access to Shade Trail which can be used to travel west back towards the Buzzard Rock trail.

Laura’s Trail - 0.2 miles

Officially named in 1998 in memory of Laura Anderson of the Carolina Berg Wanderers this easy trail passes through a beautiful bottomland hardwood forest with spots of the largest tulip poplar trees in the nature preserve. The trail terminates at a large cluster of doliolite boulders, known as the Wash Rock overlook, providing excellent views of Mountain Island Lake. Wash Rock was named after the rock upon which, legend has it, early settlers settled of the area washed their garments. To preserve vegetation and minimize erosion around the overlook, horses must be restricted from entering the trail final 500 feet.

**Hiking Trails ONLY**

**Beechwood Trail** - 0.9 miles

A moderate 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. Features a small cluster of mountain 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** - 0.8 miles

An easy trail accessed from the picnic area parking lot. Part of the trail passes through a mature bottomland hardwood forest containing sweetgum, pawpaw and tulip poplar trees while the remaining portions traverse a dry, hardwood forest. This trail has been designated a “Horse Friendly Trail” (contact nature center for details). A 0.4 mile spur trail leads to the Gar Creek canoe access.

**Tuscarora Trail** - 0.7 miles

This easy 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 ancient bottomland hardwood forest, providing the opportunity to view century-old trees. Be sure to look for the unusual loblolly pine, the largest tulip poplar trees while the remaining portions traverse a dry, hardwood forest. This trail has been designated a “Horse Friendly Trail” (contact nature center for details). A 0.4 mile spur trail leads to the Gar Creek canoe access.

**Cattail Trail** - 0.8 miles

Accessed from the picnic loop trail, this easy 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 portion traverses under the canopy of several large water oaks.

**Piedmont Prairie Trail** - 0.3 miles

This moderate 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.

**Nature Walk Trail** - 0.2 miles

This short, accessible paved trail provides access to eight picnic sites with primitive grills, a fishing pier, Cattail and Audubon trails for hiking, and an 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 streamside compost area. Self-interpretive trail guides are also available.

**Historic Latta Plantation** is a restored 17th century, 69-acre historic site housed in a 1870s barn, now a gift store.

**Horseback Riding**

Horseback riding is allowed on paved roads and the horse trailer parking lot. Bicycles are permitted ONLY on paved roads within the preserve. Dogs are welcome on paved roads but must remain on a six-foot leash at all times. Visitors bringing their own horses can park in the designated horse trailer parking lot. All trails are clearly marked with color symbols.

**Nature Preserve Rules**

- Collection, removal, or disturbance of any natural or cultural object is prohibited.
- All pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet.
- No alcoholic beverages are allowed (except with a valid beer/shelter reservation and permit).
- Motorized and non-motorized vehicles are restricted to paved roads.
- Effective March 18, 2015, Mecklenburg County parks and buildings will be tobacco-free. The tobacco-free designation includes cigarettes, e-cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, water pipes, etc.
- For your safety and the protection of the preserve, please walk with a friend and stay on designated trails. To prevent damage to fragile vegetation and erosion, do not create switchbacks or skirt wet areas.
- Introduction of plants or animals to the nature preserve is prohibited.
- All weapons except properly concealed firearms pursuant to valid permit.
- No swimming or wading is allowed.
- Avoid natural surface trails for a minimum of 24 hours after a heavy rain, sack, or ice storm even if closure notices are not posted.
- Children under the age of 16 must be supervised by a responsible adult.
- No firearms, knives, skateboards, or rollerblades are allowed.

**Natural Play Area**

Latta Plantation Nature Preserve features a natural play area for kids with a playhouse, climbing equipment, and exploration.

**Self-Interpretive Trail**

Signs mark each interpretation area.

**Nature Walk Trail**

Enjoy a shady walk along this trail and learn about some of our local plants and animals. Within the loop you’ll find a natural play area for kids with a playground, climbing structures, and plenty of opportunities for imagination and exploration.