McDowell Nature Preserve in southwest Mecklenburg County protects over 1,130 acres of forested, rolling terrain along the banks of Lake Wylie. Over 90% of the nature preserve is undeveloped which offers many wildlife and hiking opportunities. The Preserve also offers an accessible trail, two playgrounds, picnic shelters, nature center and campground. Throughout the preserve, individual picnic tables and grill areas are available on a first-come-first-serve basis. There are three large picnic areas - McDowell Pavilion, Red Fox Shelter and Waterfront Deck - these can be reserved by calling the campground at 980.314.2267 or by visiting www.parkandrec.com.

Fishing and Boating

Fishing is allowed on Lake Wylie, but all anglers must purchase a valid North Carolina fishing license. North Carolina fishing licenses can be purchased at www.ncwildlife.gov or through some area retailers.

Boating access to Lake Wylie is available from Copperhead Island at the end of Soldier Road. Copperhead Island’s fishing piers and hiking paths are open to the public, unless the island has been reserved. Reserve facilities on the island include: six group camping sites and a picnic shelter containing restrooms, electricity, charcoal grills, horseshoe pits, and a volleyball court. For more information or to make a reservation, please call 980.314.2267 or visit www.parkandrec.com.

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 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 tobaccos, 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 prohibited 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, snow, or ice storm even if closure notices are no longer posted.
• Children under the age of 16 are required to wear a helmet while riding bicycles, skateboards, or rollerblades.

Educational Programs

McDowell Nature Center serves as the gateway to the preserve. The center houses live animals and an exhibit area with a variety of informative displays which highlight the preserve’s flora and fauna. The nature center offers a variety of environmental education and outdoor recreation programs to the general public, schools, scouts, and other organized groups. Children age 4-12 can have their birthday party at the Nature Center. The Park and Recreation website, www.parkandrec.com has a complete description of public programs and special events. The center also contains public restrooms, a classroom, and gift shop. For more information or to schedule a program, stop by McDowell Nature Center or call 980.314.1128.

Fishing on Copperhead Island's fishing piers and hiking paths are open to the public, unless the island has been reserved. Reserve facilities on the island include: six group camping sites and a picnic shelter containing restrooms, electricity, charcoal grills, horseshoe pits, and a volleyball court. For more information or to make a reservation, please call 980.314.2267 or visit www.parkandrec.com.

Fishing and Boating

Fishing is allowed on Lake Wylie, but all anglers must purchase a valid North Carolina fishing license. North Carolina fishing licenses can be purchased at www.ncwildlife.gov or through some area retailers. McDowell Nature Preserve offers a variety of trails for hikers of all ages and abilities. McDowell Campground offers 56 camping sites. Sites include: 13 RV sites, 26 Drive-To tent sites, 10 tent sites with Decks. All sites can sleep up to six persons each. For more information or to make a reservation, please call 980.314.2267 or visit www.parkandrec.com.

Shady Hollow Trail - 0.5 miles

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