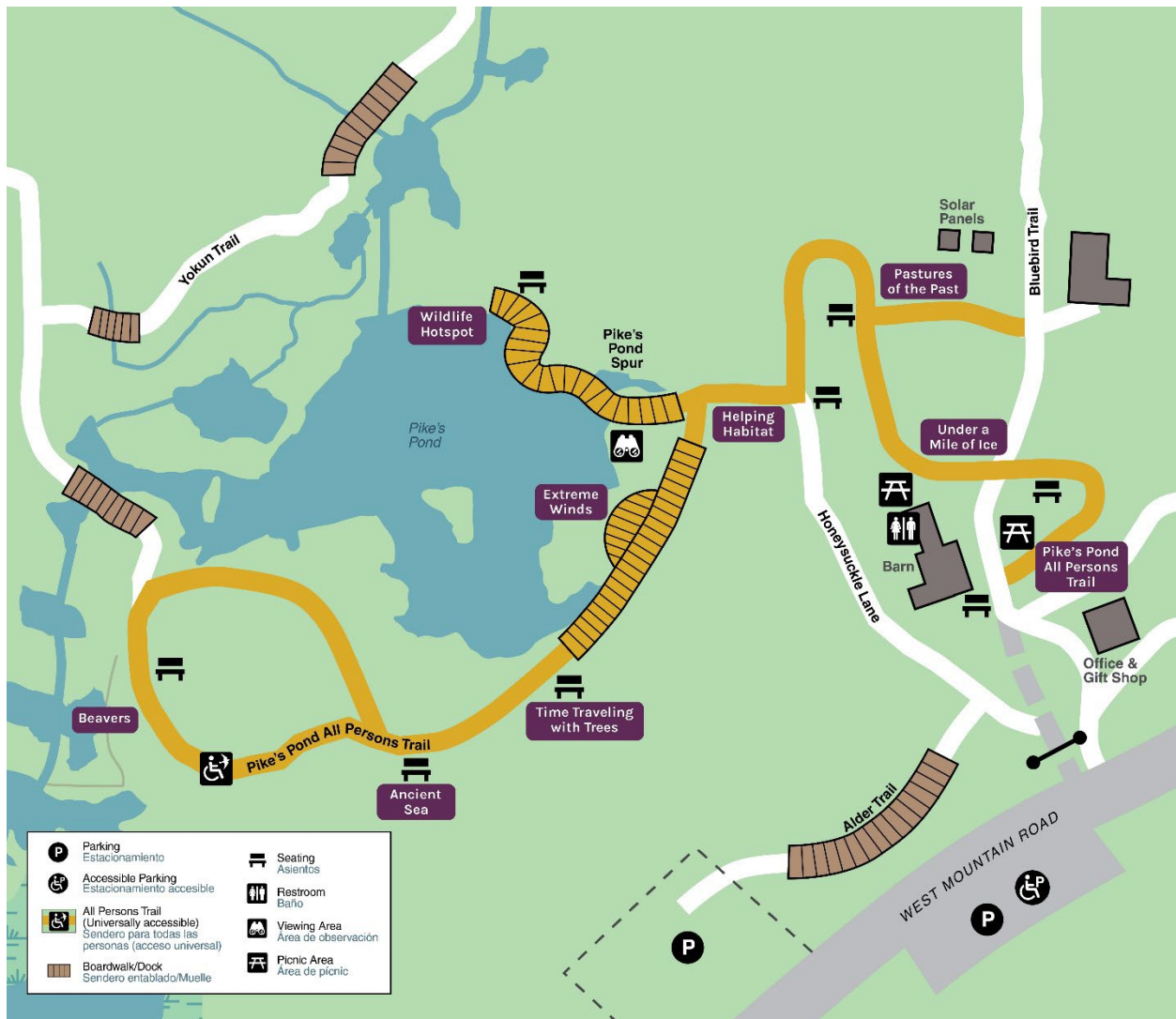


Pleasant Valley All Persons Trail Tour



Welcome to Pike's Pond All Persons Trail

Welcome to the Pike's Pond All Persons Trail at Mass Audubon's Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary. This universally accessible trail is here for your enjoyment. Enjoy the trail today and return to visit in different seasons. Please take only pictures and leave only tracks.

As you visit each of the eight interpretive stops you will pass through a variety of habitats and explore the ways that Pleasant Valley is always changing. You'll begin near a meadow, cross through the remnants of a major windstorm, travel along a boardwalk that wraps around the historic Pike's Pond and then pass through a forest before returning the way you came.

Each stop on the tour is highlighted on an angled 18" x 36" sign on the side of the trail. These signs contain text and photographs that are explained on all the tour materials including the audio tour. They also include raised large print and Braille stop markers. Some of these signs contain a tactile item for you to examine, located on the bottom right-hand side of the sign. A label for each tactile item is located to the right of the object in raised print and Braille. These tactile display items will always be located at the same spot on the sign, whenever present.

You may also follow the tour using a pre-printed, customizable print, or Braille booklet. Copies of the printed booklets are available in the Visitor Center. You can also scan the QR code on the bottom left corner of each sign for access to the tour stops in written and audio formats on your own device. A Victor Stream Reader, pre-loaded with the audio tour, is available for loan at the office.

The Pleasant Valley All Persons Trail's length is 0.4 miles (0.6 km) one-way, or 0.8 miles (1.3 km) out-and-back. It is surfaced with crushed stone and 425 feet (130 meters) of boardwalk. There is one brief segment with a post-and-rope guide approaching the Pike's Pond boardwalk. The slope ranges from 0-7% grade. Nine benches or multi-use seating areas are spaced at regular intervals and indicated on the tour. Two picnic areas are available on unsurfaced areas near the trail. It could take an estimated 45-60 minutes to complete this trail, depending on your pace.

Throughout the trail, you'll be invited to use your senses. Listen for birds singing from treetops and dense brush, woodpeckers foraging insects, frogs calling at Pike's Pond, and wind blowing through the treetops. Feel the bark texture on different trees, exposed bedrock, spongy decomposing logs, and the leaf and needle texture on trees and bushes. Smell the fresh scent of grass and ferns in the meadow, the subtle scent of pine trees, the sweet scent of roses and azaleas, and the earthy scent of forest soil. You may even look for signs of past glaciers and land clearing, a human-made pond modified by beavers, remnants of an extreme wind event, and a changing landscape. For more on Mass Audubon's accessibility work, visit [**massaudubon.org/accessibility**](https://massaudubon.org/accessibility).

To continue on this tour, follow the trail to the right of this sign. The trail will slope slightly downward and curve to the left. 50 feet from this sign is a small picnic area on your left, which is located 20 feet off the trail. This picnic area is unsurfaced and surrounded by trees and fallen logs; a larger picnic area surfaced with crushed stone is located ahead near the next stop. Continuing past this small picnic area, the path will curve to the left. Continue along the trail for 130 feet. You will pass across the Bluebird Trail, which intersects the All Persons Trail. The next interpretive stop is located to your right.

Under a Mile of Ice

Feel the open air as you pause in the middle of a meadow on the edge of a forest. In the far distance both in front of you and toward your right side, there is a ridgeline of mountains with smoothed peaks rising beyond the treetops. A three-dimensional map of this same ridgeline is located near the right side of the sign. Imagine if you were surrounded by tall, sharp, rugged peaks instead of these rounded hills. How do you think the land ended up with a gentle, rolling shape?

The Berkshires are part of the Appalachian Mountain Range, which formed over a series of events beginning one billion years ago. When the Berkshires first formed, this ridgeline was made up of jagged peaks. Water, ice, and wind continued to change the land's shape over millions of years.

The Berkshires experienced multiple ice ages. During the most recent glaciation, an ice sheet between a half mile and one mile thick covered this area. The slow-moving glacier scoured the hills and scraped away all traces of life. The final glaciers retreated from this area roughly 12,000 years ago, leaving behind the rounded hills we see today. Soil and plant life gradually returned, and the first people came to this region around 10,000 years ago, long before colonists arrived in the 1700s.

To continue on this tour, follow the trail. Six picnic tables are located immediately on your left in an open crushed stone surface area 10 feet off the trail. The three picnic tables farthest from the trail are equipped with umbrellas during the summer months.

As you continue on the trail, listen for the bubbling song of a House Wren or woodpeckers tapping on trees. The Baltimore Orioles that can nest in the area have a short song consisting of loud, clear notes.

As you continue 200 feet down the trail, the first shade you'll feel might be from the large English Oak growing just before a multi-use seating area on your left. 15 feet after the multi-use seating area, the next stop is straight ahead - it will be to your right as the trail starts to curve to the left.

Pastures of the Past

Listen or look for birds, insects, and other wildlife in the field and around the edges where animals often hide. To your right, two solar panels rise above rolling fields covered in summer with wildflowers such as goldenrod and Black-eyed Susan. Some 200 years ago, the landscape in front of you was very different. Farming, raising livestock, and logging took place from the mid 1700s through the early 1900s. These activities left much of the land cleared of trees and crisscrossed by stone walls.

Mass Audubon manages some of the old pastures as meadow habitat, mowing them annually to keep trees from taking root. Periodic mowing provides habitat for birds like Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds, and a diversity of insects and wildlife that favor meadows. This emulates natural and human-facilitated processes that have been occurring for thousands of years.

To reach the next stop, follow the trail as it curves sharply to the left and moves further downhill 70 feet from the last stop. You may feel the sun shining on you again as you leave the shade of the trees. While you're at the forest edge, listen for the song of the Chestnut-sided Warbler, "pleased-pleased-pleased to meet-cha." You may even begin to hear the harsh calls of Red-winged Blackbirds: a sure sign that you're getting close to water. 150 feet down the trail from the sharp left turn, you'll find a multi-use seating area on your left. Just past this seating area, after a curve to the right and 20 feet up the trail, the next stop is located on your left.

Helping Habitat

Think about the most recent major storm that you or someone you know experienced. How did this storm affect people and the landscape after it was over? The area around you once contained tall mature pine trees up until 2021, but now is a mix of meadow and shrubby woodland dotted with tipped-over and broken tree trunks. Extreme winds from a microburst storm in 2021 left behind broken branches and tipped-over trees across this area and several other trails. Evidence of this storm will remain on the landscape for many years.

Invasive plants, which often lack natural predators or competition, are some of the first species to take root after a soil disturbance like a storm. Mass Audubon's land management strategy will allow more native woody shrubs and young trees to thrive in this area over time, while preventing invasive plants from disturbing the delicate balance.

This microburst wasn't the first severe storm to hit Pleasant Valley, and it won't be the last. As the regional climate warms, the processes that create our day-to-day weather are intensifying. This means that storms are becoming more erratic and extreme. To learn more about how you can help fight climate change, visit massaudubon.org/climate.

To reach the next stop, continue down the trail. The crushed stone surface will become a boardwalk 40 feet from the previous stop. The boardwalk will remain level or gently sloping, but the wetland beneath the boardwalk will range from a few inches below you to over three feet in some areas. 80 feet after the boardwalk begins, there will be a junction where one path curves to the left and another continues straight. To remain on the tour, continue straight for 130 feet. The next stop is located at the farthest point of the observation deck, which is a dead end. As you move along the edge of Pike's Pond, listen for frogs and Red-winged Blackbirds. You may even hear the clattering call of a Belted Kingfisher over the pond. You are approximately halfway through the tour.

Pike's Pond: A Wildlife Hotspot

This observation deck overlooks the historic Pike's Pond. What can you hear, see, and smell around the pond today? Try to imagine how this pond might change with the seasons. In general, water is a great place to search for wildlife. Try counting the different animals you observe, sounds you hear, or even the different scents you're noticing near the water. Do you hear lots of chatter, or is it quiet? Every season offers something new to experience.

Ever since humans constructed the pond in the early 1930s, beavers have influenced how water flows around the earthen dam. In the warmer months, Green Frogs gulp plucked banjo-like calls or shriek and jump at your approach. Under the water surface, bullhead catfish, pumpkinseeds, shiners, and other fish swim about, and bullfrog tadpoles and red-spotted

newts are on the lookout for a meal. Dragonflies and damselflies on gauzy wings patrol the shore. What else can you find here? Come back again to see how the pond changes through the seasons.

To continue on the tour, turn back and follow the boardwalk 130 feet to return to the junction. Follow the boardwalk to your right. As you make your way to the next stop, listen for birds flitting through the shrubs around the boardwalk. The next stop is located 35 feet after you turn right, and the sign will be about 3 feet to your right.

Extreme Winds

To your right as you face the sign, about ten feet away from the boardwalk, is a line of massive roots left behind when several trees were knocked over. Roots that once anchored these white pines into the soil now point up at the sky. A few of these roots are as thick as tree limbs, and are still looming six to ten feet above your head. Near the center of these tall “tip-ups,” there are large rocks still entwined in the roots. Can you imagine how strong the wind must have been to push over these mature trees while they were still alive?

On July 27, 2021, a thunderstorm produced a microburst with 80-90 mph winds that moved through the sanctuary and other parts of Lenox. The storm affected over 10 acres of forest and destroyed sections of the boardwalk near here. How do you think this area will change as the area recovers?

Some species thrive in the dense shrubby vegetation that springs up in the years following a disturbance like the microburst. In the warmer seasons, watch and listen for birds like Yellow Warblers and Gray Catbirds singing from the tops of the tip-ups or flitting around these roots.

To reach the next stop, continue down the boardwalk. 160 feet ahead, the boardwalk will transition to crushed stone again. Notice how the air abruptly becomes cooler as you cross the boundary between a wetland and forest habitat. 120 feet after the boardwalk ends, you will find two multi-use seating areas next to each other on your left. Continue about 200 more feet down the trail, and the next stop will be on your left.

Time Traveling with Trees

What do you notice in the different layers of the forest around you: near your height, halfway up, and high overhead? Do the trees all appear similar, or do you see different shapes and sizes? Do you feel the light shining on you from overhead, or is the canopy dense and shaded?

The forest around you is always changing. Old trees die, leaving patches of light for young trees to grow. Storms, diseases, pests, deer browsing, and beaver activity can also affect which trees you’ll find and where you find them. Do you smell the earthy scent of the forest around you? This forest is full of life, but also the intricate processes that happen after living things die.

A single dead or fallen tree can host a wide variety of living things. Carpenter ants burrow complex cavities through wood to form their nests. Even some native bees nest in decaying

wood, while woodpeckers use their chisel-shaped beak to excavate the wood in search of hidden insect prey.

Moss and ferns may grow on the surface, while microbes, fungi, and insects consume the woody pulp inside. Eventually a young tree might tap into a nutrient-packed “nurse” log to fuel its own growth. To find a nurse log that has long since rotted away, look for a tree in the forest that appears to be on stilts, its aerial roots curled around the former location of a nurse log.

While trees offer a fascinating window into the past, they can also offer some information about changes affecting the future. If the older trees are different species than the younger trees, that could mean that the forest’s composition is changing over time. This could impact which animals can live here. Perhaps the smaller saplings today will dominate this forest someday. Both ancient and modern land stewards use clues like this to assess the health of a forest and look for potential threats.

Follow the trail 85 feet to the next stop, which will be on your left.

Remnant of an Ancient Sea

Examine the piece of rock mounted on this sign, or bend down to feel the rough texture of the rocky outcrop near this sign. Can you see or feel lichen and moss growing on the surface, helping to slowly break down the rock?

The bedrock of the Berkshires includes some of the oldest rock formations in the world, beginning roughly 500 million years ago as sediments on an ancient seafloor. Over time, intense pressure and heat below the Earth’s surface compressed and changed clay, silt, and sand into new forms like schist and quartzite.

The rock outcrop on the trail’s edge is partially made of schist, a common bedrock in the Berkshires that’s often hidden from sight by a thick layer of soil, sediment, and plants. One of schist’s main components is mica, which can make it sparkle in sunlight.

A multi-use seating area is located 15 feet down the trail on your left. Listen for the loud “teacher, teacher” song of the Ovenbird, or the unusual song of the Veery. 45 feet past the multi-use seating area, you will reach a fork in the trail. This is a small loop at the end of the All Persons Trail. Follow the loop to the left and the final stop in the tour will be 160 feet ahead, on your left.

Beavers at Pleasant Valley

Examine the model of a chewed stick on this sign. If you found a tree with the same shape and texture, would you think a person or an animal made it that way? Why?

The sanctuary’s diversity of plant and animal life is supported by a rodent with a special story: the North American beaver. From the 1600s through the early 1700s, over-trapping for the fur trade drove beavers to local extinction in Massachusetts. Pleasant Valley was one of the first places where beavers were reintroduced to the state in the 1930’s. Since then, generations of beavers have transformed Yokun Brook into a mosaic of ponds and wet meadows teeming with life.

Beavers build dams to create ponds for safety from predators and a place to feed on aquatic plants and nearby trees and shrubs. While exploring, look for beaver's wall-like dams and dome-shaped lodges made of sticks and mud. You may also find logs covered in toothmarks or fallen trees with a pointed shape.

This concludes the self-guided tour. We hope you enjoyed this introduction to the ever-changing landscape of Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary. 5 feet from this sign, there is a multi-use seating area to your right. 35 feet past the multi-use seating area on the left is the entrance to the unsurfaced trail system. To return to the beginning of the All Persons Trail, continue down the All Persons Trail as it loops around to the right. Keep left and you will return to the main path of the trail, which you can follow back to the beginning at your own pace.

Thank you for visiting this All Persons Trail.

We gratefully recognize the commitment and generosity of the donors and the accessibility consultants that have made this project possible.

Please return any borrowed trail materials or equipment at the Visitor Center. Please come back and enjoy the trail again.