Recreational Opportunities

HUNTING AND FIREARMS: About 500 acres, including adjoining lands owned by the Friends of Salt Springs Park, are open to hunting, trapping, and the taking of birds during established seasons. Common game species are deer, turkey, quail, and grouse. Hunting is prohibited in the Fall Brook Natural Area.

Hunting woolsack, also known as groundsheets, 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 Friends 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 must be unloaded and ready, for the only one in authorized hunting areas during hunting seasons. It is 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 upon their person while they are on a state park.

PIECING: A small picnic grove with tables and grills is between Fall Brook and Silver Creek, the two streams that form the park. A restroom is centrally located in the parking area. At the southwest end of the picnic area is the salt spring, the park's namesake. A large timber frame house, with electric wires, is across Silver Creek from the picnic area at the entrance to the campground. A second position is located just west of the back parking lot. Bicycles may be observed in advance for a fee from the Friends or he used on a first-come, first-served basis.

CAMPING: Basic tent sites are privately, along the banks of Silver Creek. All sites include a fire ring and picnic table. The campground has restrooms with composting toilets. Water is available from an outdoor faucet at the Wheaton House and from a faucet in front of the parking lot for Group camping. All groups are open to the public and free of charge, unless otherwise indicated. On Labor Day weekend, the Friends host the annual “Salt Springs Picnic,” a monthly electronic newsletter, and an annual picnic. All groups are open to the public and free of charge, unless otherwise indicated. Support for the Friends’ work through memberships, annual contributions, public and private agency grants, business donations, and programs. Support for the Friends’ work through memberships, annual contributions, public and private agency grants, business donations, and programs.

Enjoy the Weather: Most of the trails in the park are well suited for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, and pioneers and hay fields provide wide open areas for sledding and tobogganing. In winter, Fall Brook Gorge is transformed into a wonderland of majestic trees and snowdrifts. Extreme caution when hiking in the gorge as stream ice and nearby rocks can be available and dangerous.

Fall Brook Natural Area

Encompassing the gorge and the old-growth hemlock forest on both the east and west sides, the Fall Brook Natural Area has been designated to provide locating for unique species, and to provide observations of natural systems, to protect examples of typical and unique plant and animal communities, and to protect ecosystems and water resources. Visitors can experience what Pennsylvania’s forests were like 500 years ago. Traveling 50 feet or more above the ground is one of the last old-growth hemlock forest tracts remaining in the commonwealth. Old-growth forests exhibit a delicate balance between nutrients, plants, and animals. At one time, Pennsylvania was largely covered by this type of forest, but most of the forest is now the preserve of commercial and industrial activities. The trees in the park now face the threat of infestation from hemlock woolly adelgid, a non-native insect affecting many of Pennsylvania’s hemlock trees.

This unique habitat and the rich diversity of natural habitats found elsewhere in the park, including mixed hardwood forests, grasslands, riparian woodlands and wetlands, attract a wide variety of birds and wildlife. Over 300 species of birds have been recorded at the park. The diversity of birds and wildlife in the park is such that it is a haven for many birds and wildlife.

WHEATON HOUSE: The renovated Wheaton family homestead houses the Friends’ offices, gift shop, and historical and environmental interpretive information. Displays feature nineteenth-century rural life and regional wildlife. The Wheaton House is open on weekends from May through September.

History

In the 1760s, when the first American settlers arrived at what would become Salt Springs State Park, the area was an untouched forest of old-growth trees, dominated by eastern hemlock. The intense pressure to clear the land. For decades the trees were cut, piled up, and burned. The hotter logs were used for the first sawmill on Fall Brook, the remains of which can still be seen behind the Wheaton House. A flume channel was cut from the first sawmill down the sides of the gorge and a 16-foot oxbow weir. The building also had a lathe machine, likely producing much of the used in the area’s first furnaces.

The salt spring on the south side of Fall Brook is one of the salt springs for which the park is named. Early people to extract salt from the spring were Native Americans who traveled through the area during hunting expeditions. They attempted to keep the location of the spring secret from the settlers, but eventually and with a large enough sum of money, they were forced to part with it.

Numerous attempts were made by different entrepreneurs to develop the spring for commercial gain between 1765 and 1790. The brake obtained produced a high-quality salt, but not enough could be created out of the ground to yield a profit. The water was noted to be more saline than salt. Bubbles would rise to the surface and when touched with fire would flash back of powder. Efforts to strike at or near Salt Springs were made, but with no success. In 1902, the North Penn Oil and Gas Company sank a new test well, well behind the Wheaton house, but plugged it for several months and left without explanation. When methane gas continued to spew up through the plug, a simple container was built at the Wheaton house, and eventually a stone lined pipe was then piped into the Wheaton home where it was used for cooking and lighting. These pipes still run through the house.

HISTORIC HOUSES:

On November 6, 1703, a circuit rider wrote in his diary that he had “shuck’d” several gentlemen from Philadelphia on their way to the back country, and the shelter by the salt springs where they had been for amusement, they took in a manuscript about it, as though they had been on a voyage around the world.” This is the earliest recorded documentation of the impact of the area’s natural beauty on human visitors.

At the northeast entrance of the park is the historic homestead of the Wheaton family. Four buildings of the original homestead remain, as well as the foundation of the south and western buildings of the original homestead, built in the early 1840s by Nathan Philip Wheaton, now the Wheaton House. This home is a private residence, generating rental income for park maintenance.

Adjacent to the Wheaton House, the carriage barn, circa 1850, is also made entirely of hemlock. The building is maintained with hand-hewn beams and stoves.

The foundation is of native stone laid without mortar. Inside the dairy barn is an old 10-40 by 70-foot timber framed structure, which may have originally been a threshing barn. Moved and altered over the years, this barn reflects the changes in agriculture and building from the past 150 years. When renovated, the barn will provide space for classroom, meeting areas, and programs.

About 300 feet from the mouth of the gorge on the south side of Fall Brook, and easily reached from the picnic area, is the seabirds salt spring which is the park’s namesake. The water from the spring is very high in chloride, sodium, and dissolved solids. This unique habitat and the rich diversity of natural habitats found elsewhere in the park, including mixed hardwood forests, grasslands, riparian woodlands and wetlands, attract a wide variety of birds and wildlife. The spring bubbles due to methane gas created by the breakdown of organic matter in the ancient sediments rock. The commercial Cotton House, a one-day festival featuring exhibits in the park. The thrice in the cool, moist conditions of the gorge are mosses, liverworts, and ferns.

Support from numerous grants, the Bureau of State Park and the Pennsylvania Conservation Corp allowed the Friends to renovate the historic structures and improve the facilities and recreation areas at the park. In 2000, the Friends purchased 100 acres of land adjacent to the park’s southern boundary. Easily reached by way of Buckley Road or on several connecting trails, this property offers a variety of natural habitats not found in the park and expand the recreational opportunities available to visitors. In 2004, a conservation easement was placed on this land, ensuring its permanent protection as an open space and recreation area. In 2009, the Friends purchased another adjoining tract of 173 acres, bringing the total size of the public space to 842 acres.

The Friends published a brochure entitled Salt Springs: A Monthly electronic newsletter, and an annual picnic. All grants are open to the public and free of charge, unless otherwise indicated. Support for the Friends’ work through memberships, annual contributions, public and private agency grants, business donations, and programs.

The Wheaton house is open on weekends from May through September.

The renovated Wheaton family homestead houses the Friends’ offices, gift shop, and historical and environmental interpretive information. Displays feature nineteenth-century rural life and regional wildlife. The Wheaton House is open on weekends from May through September.

In 1858, a mill and woolen manufactory were built below the Wheaton House, owned by local volunteers. Operating at the park through a cooperative agreement with the DNFR, Bureau of State Parks, the Friends’ mission is to preserve and improve the facilities of Salt Springs State Park and to develop the area for recreational, environmental, and historical education purposes.
Hiking 14.85 miles of trails

Hike 14.85 miles of trails through the parking lot. It eventually bends west to join Summit Trail near the highest point in the park. It can be accessed from the Friends' property, returning to Frog Pond via an old logging road. The summit is a relatively flat area with large, sparsely scattered trees. 

BUNNY TRAIL: 1.5 miles, most difficult hiking, blue blazes

This hike is best accessed from a small parking lot on Buckley Road, east of where Fall Brook crosses the road. The trail winds through hardwood forest before intersecting with the Catskills. This trail is accessed from behind the dairy barn and parallels Silver Creek through hemlocks and carpets of ferns. It follows the creek, climbing gradually through mixed hardwoods, and then up a steep climb to where it connects with Meadow Trail. An old stone wall can be an interesting rest stop.

BORDER TRAIL: 1.5 miles, most difficult hiking, orange blazes

This hike begins at the far western edge of the park, where Border Trail crosses Buckley Road. The trail follows an easy grade through a magnificent grove of towering spruce trees planted during a reforestation project. It ends near the beginning of Lookout Trail at Salt Springs Road.

CLIFF TRAIL: 1.5 miles, more difficult hiking, blue blazes

This hike can be reached from either Bunny Trail or the Friends' property, returning to Frog Pond via an old logging road. The summit is a relatively flat area with large, sparsely scattered trees. 

OVERLOOK TRAIL: 0.2 mile, easiest hiking, blue blazes

This hike extends the loop of Hardwood Trail, climbing steadily up the mountain through mixed hardwoods, before circling back to rejoin it.

WETLAND TRAIL: 0.8 mile, easiest hiking, blue blazes

This hike begins at the Buckley Road bridge and traverses the wetlands north of Fall Brook. Signs of beaver activity and wetland plants and shrubs can be seen along this trail. It ends just after crossing Fall Brook (no bridge).

WOODLAND TRAIL: 0.25 miles, easiest hiking, blue blazes

This hike begins at the west end of the park, where Woodland Trail meets Buckley Road. The trail follows an easy grade through a magnificent grove of towering spruce trees planted during a reforestation project. It ends near the beginning of Lookout Trail at Salt Springs Road.

SUMMIT TRAIL: 1 mile, more difficult hiking, red blazes

This trail extends the loop of Hardwood Trail, climbing steadily up the mountain through mixed hardwoods, before circling back to rejoin it.

WOODLAND TRAIL: 0.5 miles, more difficult hiking, red blazes

This trail extends the loop of Hardwood Trail, climbing steadily up the mountain through mixed hardwoods, before circling back to rejoin it.

UPLAND TRAIL: 0.5 mile, more difficult hiking, red blazes

This trail extends the loop of Hardwood Trail, climbing steadily up the mountain through mixed hardwoods, before circling back to rejoin it.

HARDWOOD TRAIL: 300 years old that has fallen across the path. The trail ends at Hardwood Trail.

WETLAND TRAIL: 0.8 mile, easiest hiking, yellow blazes

This hike begins at the Buckley Road bridge and traverses the wetlands north of Fall Brook. Signs of beaver activity and wetland plants and shrubs can be seen along this trail. It ends just after crossing Fall Brook (no bridge).

WOODLAND TRAIL: 0.25 miles, easiest hiking, blue blazes

This hike begins at the west end of the park, where Woodland Trail meets Buckley Road. The trail follows an easy grade through a magnificent grove of towering spruce trees planted during a reforestation project. It ends near the beginning of Lookout Trail at Salt Springs Road.

SUMMIT TRAIL: 1 mile, more difficult hiking, red blazes

This trail extends the loop of Hardwood Trail, climbing steadily up the mountain through mixed hardwoods, before circling back to rejoin it.

WOODLAND TRAIL: 0.5 miles, more difficult hiking, red blazes

This trail extends the loop of Hardwood Trail, climbing steadily up the mountain through mixed hardwoods, before circling back to rejoin it.