

WORLDS OF WONDER AT WEST POINT

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Nature programs on television are a popular source of entertainment and education for many US residents. Breath-taking vistas and fascinating creatures captivate audiences every night on the small screen, relieving some of the tensions that develop in an increasingly complex society.

What might not be known to many people living or working at West Point is that a spectacular natural world exists right outside the back doors of the Academy. It is a world every bit as exciting and beautiful as those depicted on The Discovery Channel and other nature programs found on television today.

The Natural Resources Branch in the Directorate of Housing & Public Works is the USMA organization responsible for the monitoring and maintenance of the myriad plants and animals found on the 16,000 acre West Point Military Reservation. To date, over 1,200 plant species have been documented at West Point and Constitution Island by the Natural Resources Branch. The variety of animals identified includes 21 species of reptiles (snakes, turtles, and a lizard), 20 species of amphibians (frogs, toads, and salamanders), and 50+ mammals. Over 240 species of birds either nest on West Point or pass through during annual migrations in the fall and spring. The lakes, ponds, and streams are inhabited by 38 species of fish, of which 25 provide angling opportunities. Other studies have identified 101 species of dragonflies, 76 species of butterflies, and 460 species of moths.

This natural diversity provides many opportunities for the members of the West Point community to experience its splendor. These opportunities are located in both the Cantonment area and out on the Reservation. One important note, however - access to the Reservation training areas must be coordinated through Range Control, 938-3930.

For those individuals that enjoy the traditional outdoor activities of hunting, fishing, and trapping, West Point certainly has some excellent opportunities for individuals of all ages. There are several important laws and regulations that must be followed when pursuing these activities. The relevant USMA regulation is USMA Reg. 215-5. Questions regarding this regulation should be directed to the Outdoor Recreation Coordinator at 938-2503 or the Community Recreation Division at 938-2401. Either office will be able to explain the permit requirements and fees as well. Questions regarding what opportunities are available can be directed to the Fish & Wildlife Biologist, Natural Resources Branch, at 938-3857.

For community members who prefer more passive ways of enjoying nature, West Point has several opportunities. The Natural Resources Branch puts out **A Checklist For the Birds of the West Point Military Reservation**. To receive a copy, call 938-3857. Good viewing sites for birds include North Dock, Wilkins Pond, Mine Torne Road, and the entrance road to Camp Buckner. Some of the annual highlights are - bald eagles over North Dock and Constitution Island during the winter months; ospreys, waterfowl, and swallows in the spring and fall at Wilkins Pond; and, along Mine Torne Road in the fall and winter for waterfowl and the spring for warblers and woodcock. Along the Hudson River between North Dock and South Dock is an excellent spot to see many species during spring and fall migration that use the river corridor as a natural migration route.

Two nature trails are present around Wilkins Pond and Round Pond for those community members who just enjoy a quiet walk in the woods. These trails were constructed and maintained by West Point Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

The Round Pond Recreation Office also has boats and canoes available for daily rental if paddling the lakes and ponds meets your desire to view the natural world. Seasonal boat passes are available. Some waters are closed at times during summer training. Be sure to check with Range Control.

There are also some other areas adjacent to West Point which are also available for nature viewing. The Black Rock Forest has several hiking trails and outdoor programs available. Contact the Forest office at (914) 534-4517. The National Audubon Society has a Visitors Center and several trails through Constitution Marsh across the Hudson River from West Point. Call (914) 265-3501 for information and hours of operation. Harriman, Bear Mountain, and Storm King State Parks adjoin West Point to the north and south. These parks have numerous hiking trails. Call the park headquarters at (914) 351-4245 for information.

The natural world of the Hudson Highlands is a fascinating place to explore. While you are at West Point, be sure to take the time to see some of it.

Questions may be directed to the Natural Resources Branch at 938-3857/2314.