



*Photo: Matt Jones*

*Erin Lunsford Jones &  
Alli Kenlan, NatureServe*



**Explore  
Natural Communities**



**NatureServe**



[ExploreNaturalCommunities.org](https://www.explorenaturalcommunities.org)

# The end goal of biodiversity data...



**The end goal of  
biodiversity data...**



*Photo: Ben Lowe*

**is good stewardship  
and conservation of  
biodiversity**



*Photo: Matt Jones*





# INTERNATIONAL ECOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION STANDARD: TERRESTRIAL ECOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATIONS

Subset from the National Vegetation Classification  
for Rock Creek Park

15 May 2011

by  
NatureServe  
1101 Wilson Blvd., 15<sup>th</sup> floor  
Arlington, VA 22209  
6114 Fayetteville St, Suite 109  
Durham, NC 27713

This subset of the International Ecological Classification Standard covers vegetation alliances and associations attributed to Rock Creek Park. This classification has been developed in consultation with many individuals and agencies and incorporates information from a variety of publications and other classifications. Comments and suggestions regarding the contents of this subset should be directed to Mary J. Russo, Central Ecology Data Manager, Durham, NC <mary\_russo@natureserve.org> and Judy Teague, Regional Vegetation Ecologist, Durham, NC <judy\_teague@natureserve.org>.



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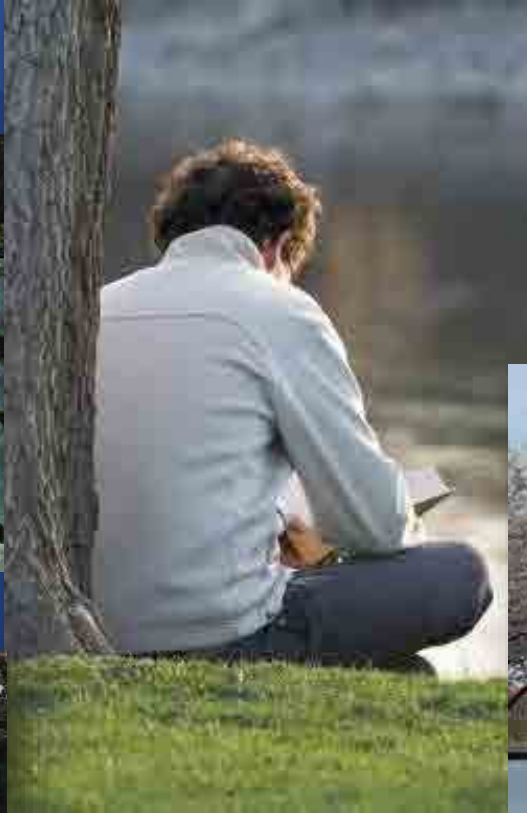
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**Another piece of  
conservation planning...**

**Another piece of  
conservation planning...**

**is bringing along the public**







*Photos: Matt Jones*



*Photo: NPS*

# INTERNATIONAL ECOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION STANDARD: TERRESTRIAL ECOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATIONS

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*Photos: NPS*

What people need is...



## Parks & Places

Interactive maps and nature guides for different parks and places.

## Explore a Community

By Park or By Name



Natural Communities



Ecology Basics





# Explore Natural Communities

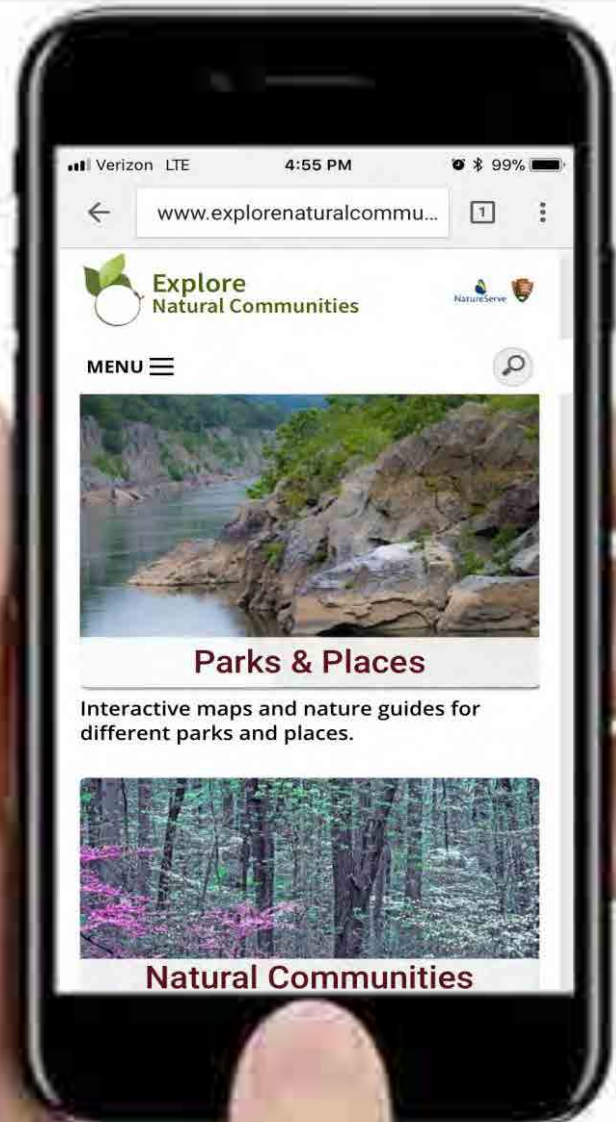


HOME PARKS & PLACES NATURAL COMMUNITIES ECOLOGY BASICS

## Parks & Places

Interactive maps and nature guides for different parks and places.

## Natural Communities







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Natural Communities



Ecology Basics



## Overview

Ecology is the science of relationships in the natural world. It is the study of how plants and animals interact with each other, with other organisms, and with their physical environment. Learn more about some of the foundational ecological concepts of this website.



### Patterns in Nature

Ecologists see patterns in the landscape called natural communities. What's the value of naming and mapping the patterns?



### The Role of Animals

How do animals need plants, and vice versa?



### Secret Lives of Plants

How do the differences among plants make them great at living in community?



### Physical Setting

The soils, bedrock, topography, and water at a site give clues to which natural communities might live there.



### Natural Processes

How do things that happen in nature (think floods, ice storms, falling trees, animals eating or pollinating plants, etc.) shape natural communities?



### Stewardship and Ecological Threats

What keeps a natural community healthy? What threatens its survival?



Ecology Basics

- Patterns in Nature
- The Role of Animals
- Secret Lives of Plants
- Physical Setting**
- Natural Processes
- Stewardship & Ecological Threats

Ecology Basics > Physical Setting

## Topography

**Topography** refers to the form of the landscape—its steepness, shape, and slope aspect (the direction a slope faces). Even within a relatively small area, variations in topography can create variations in temperature, moisture, and exposure to sun and wind. These differences create conditions that support different natural communities.

Explore

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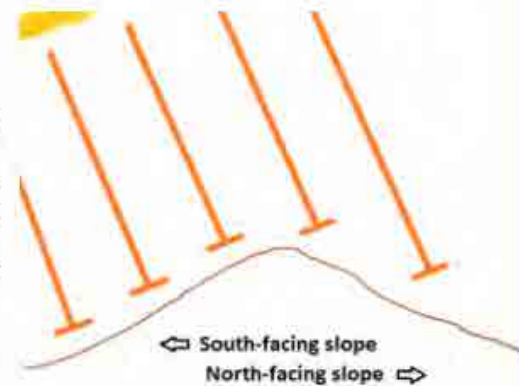
## How Topography Creates Microclimates

Topography creates differences in climate across very small distances. These differences in temperature, moisture, and exposure to wind and sun are called microclimates, and they are important predictors as to where various natural communities can be found.

For example, a windy hilltop with high evaporation and transpiration will tend to have a drier microclimate than a nearby sheltered ravine. Consequently, you'll find plants on the ridge that can tolerate windy and dry conditions. In the ravine, you'll find plants that prefer less windy and more moist conditions.

South-facing slopes will tend to be sunnier and drier than nearby north-facing slopes. That's because the sun is always in the southern sky for those of us in the northern hemisphere. The sun's rays strike a south-facing slope more directly than they strike a north-facing slope. This explains why snow melts away faster on south-facing slopes than on north-facing ones. It also explains why you'll find plants adapted to sunny, drier conditions and warmer temperatures on south-facing slopes, while nearby north-facing slopes may contain plants suited to more shade, moisture, and cooler temperatures.

[back to top](#)



The sun's rays strike south-facing slopes more directly than north-facing slopes in the northern hemisphere.

Digging deeper into “how things work”





## Explore Natural Communities



MENU ☰



### Is Your Property Watershed Friendly?

No matter where you live, what flows off your property matters!

What can you do to slow down and clean up stormwater runoff? Make use of nature's percolation process. Install more infiltration devices—everything from rainbarrels and rain gardens to permeable pavers and water-detention ponds.

For ideas, visit the District of Columbia's **RiverSmart Homes Program**, or this [wikiHow website on reducing stormwater runoff at your home](#).

Remember: What goes down a storm drain goes directly and speedily to the nearest creek, unfiltered.



A lowered roadside swale in Washington, D.C. absorbs and naturally filters water collected from the street. Photo courtesy of Chesapeake Bay Program

**Sparking ideas  
people can use  
in their own  
communities**



## Ecology Basics

Patterns in Nature

The Role of Animals

Secret Lives of Plants

Physical Setting

Natural Processes

Stewardship & Ecological Threats

Ecology Basics > Patterns in Nature

## Seeing the Patterns

Plants often grow together naturally in certain combinations in certain settings. Ecologists notice these patterns, or natural communities in the landscape, and they also notice what influences the patterns.

But not all the vegetated areas of a park are considered natural

[Learn More](#)

Explaining terms / concepts used in this website

## Natural Communities

Combinations of native plants often found together in particular settings are called natural communities. What sorts of factors influence these natural patterns?

- position in the landscape,
- type of soil or rock,
- water supply,
- protection from or exposure to sun, weather events, fire, and other natural processes.

Each natural community functions as essential habitat for various wildlife species. Many animals—such as wide-ranging deer and adaptable raccoons—live and travel among different natural communities. Others are dependent on specific natural communities, like the beaver or kingfisher who live in floodplain forests.

[back to top](#)



## Parks & Places

Interactive maps and nature guides for different parks and places.

## Explore a Community

By Park or By Name



**Natural Communities**



**Ecology Basics**



## Chestnut Oak Forest (Central Appalachian-Northern Piedmont)

Chestnut Oak Forest is a hardy natural community of the central Appalachian Mountains and northern Piedmont. Its most common plants – chestnut oak and mountain laurel – are well-suited to the often rocky terrain of dry hilltops and steep slopes.

### Where to Explore It

Chestnut Oak / Mountain Laurel Forest in Rock Creek Park

Chestnut Oak / Mountain Laurel Forest in Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts

Chestnut Oak / Mountain Laurel Forest in Harpers Ferry National Historical Park-delete

The Chestnut Oak Forest occurs at relatively low elevations (mostly under 3,000 feet/900 meters in elevation) in the Central Appalachians and northern Piedmont.

The range map shows the states in which this natural community has been documented.



### Explore a Community

By Park or By Name

### Learn More

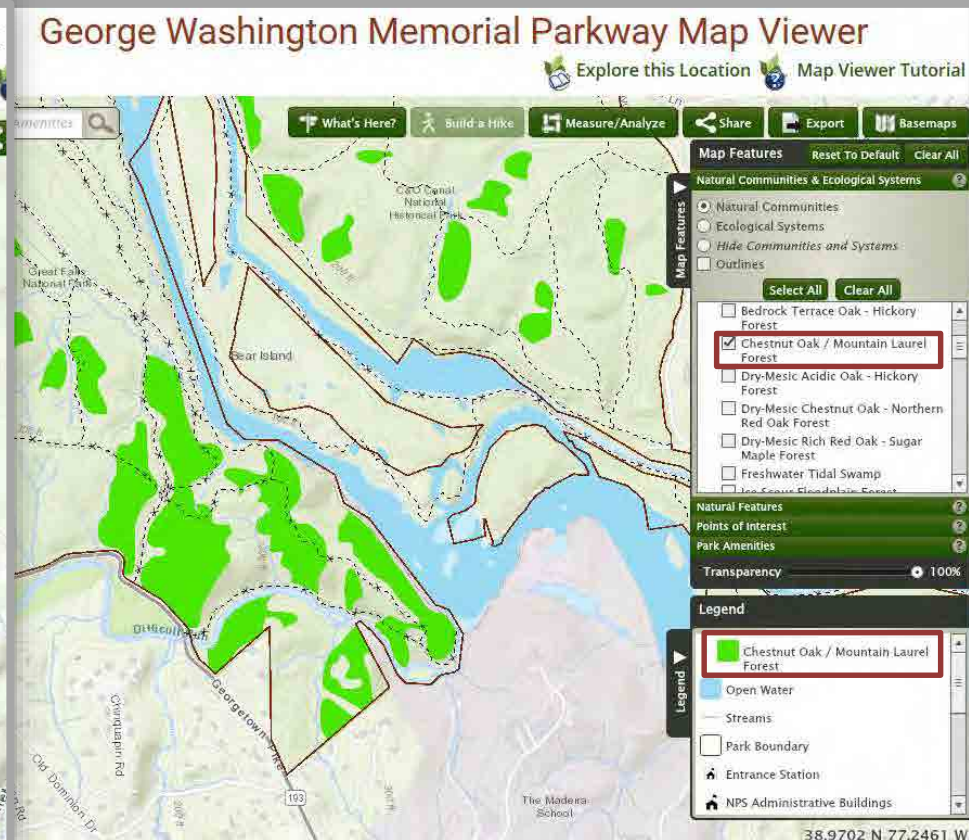
What is a Natural Community?  
Parks & Places

## Look for It in These National Parks

- Appalachian Trail
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Catoctin Mountain Park
- Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park
- George Washington Memorial Parkway
- Harpers Ferry National Historical Park
- National Capital Parks – East
- Rock Creek Park
- Shenandoah National Park
- Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts



# Shared Goals Across Managed Areas





## Parks & Places

Interactive maps and nature guides for different parks and places.

## Explore a Community

By Park or By Name



## Natural Communities



## Ecology Basics



## Parks and Places

Get to know a park through the eyes of a naturalist! This website contains field guides and interactive maps about nature—especially natural communities—in national parks and other places. It currently focuses on National Capital Region parks, which are located in Washington, D.C., or within a two-hour drive. More content is on the way.

### Featured Park

Explore a park's natural communities and their patterns in the landscape—through stories, interactive maps, photos, podcasts and more.



#### Rock Creek Park



Explore Park Park Map

### Explore Parks

Explore the parks below. More complete nature guides for these parks are on the way!



#### George Washington Memorial Parkway



Sneak Peek Park Map



#### Harpers Ferry National Historical Park



Sneak Peek Park Map



#### Manassas National Battlefield Park



Sneak Peek



#### Prince William Forest Park



Sneak Peek



## Rock Creek Park

[At a Glance](#)

[Map Viewer](#)

[Maps & Trails](#)

[Natural Communities & More](#)

[Natural History](#)

[Stewardship & Ecological Threats](#)

[Videos & Podcasts](#)

## About Maps and Trails

Want suggestions for good hikes at Rock Creek Park? Looking for a description of a particular trail? Interested in details about what's available in the Rock Creek Park Map Viewer? You've come to the right place!

Explore these menu items:



### Featured Hikes

Some suggested hikes at Rock Creek Park, lasting from an hour to a full day.



### Learn More

[Map Viewer Tutorial](#)  
[Mapping natural communities](#)

### Other Websites

[Rock Creek Park](#)



### Trail Information

An overview of the 30-plus trails on the Rock Creek Park map.



### Map Information

Descriptions of what's available on the Rock Creek Park map. Plus technical stuff for map geeks!

# Featured Hikes



## Floodplain Forest Hike

This loop hike skirts Rock Creek's broadest floodplain forest, follows a gentle slope up the narrowing Rock Creek Valley wall, crosses a footbridge over Rock Creek, and winds through a forested valley and rolling hills.

**Length:** 2.60 mi; 4.18 km

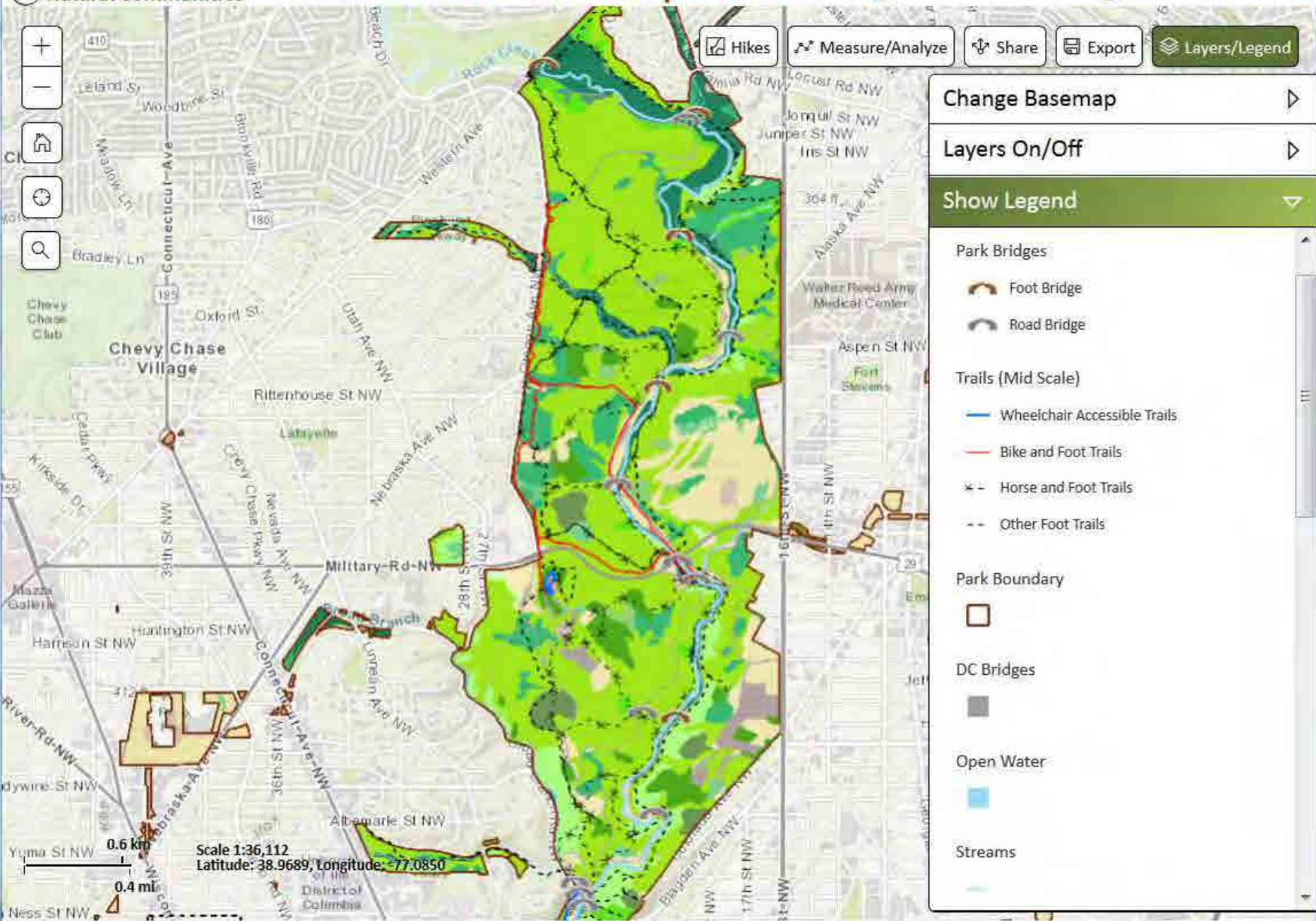
**Difficulty:** Moderate, with slopes. Bring water.

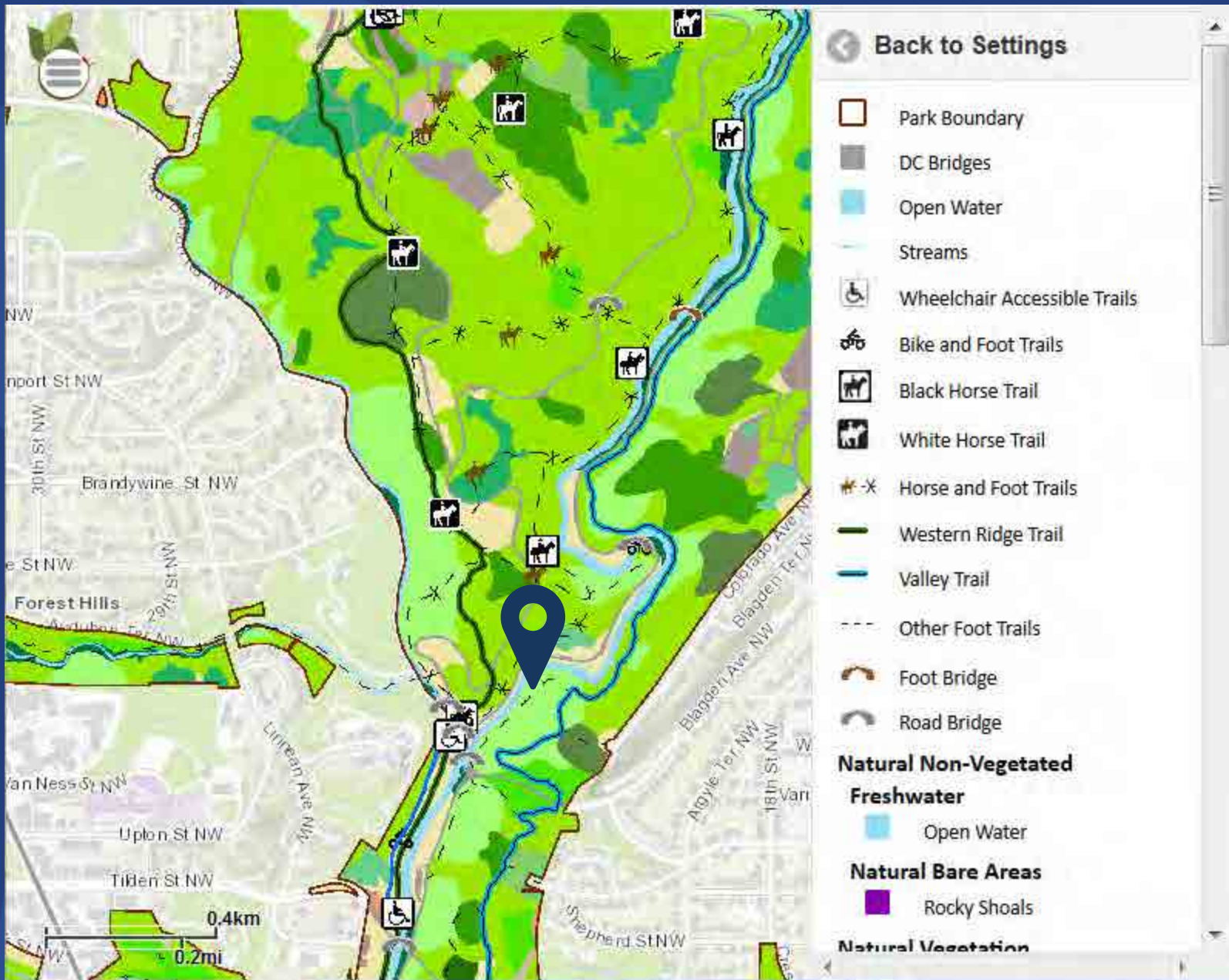
**Start Here:** Parking Lot at Boundary Bridge (Beach Dr. NW at D.C. / MD boundary)

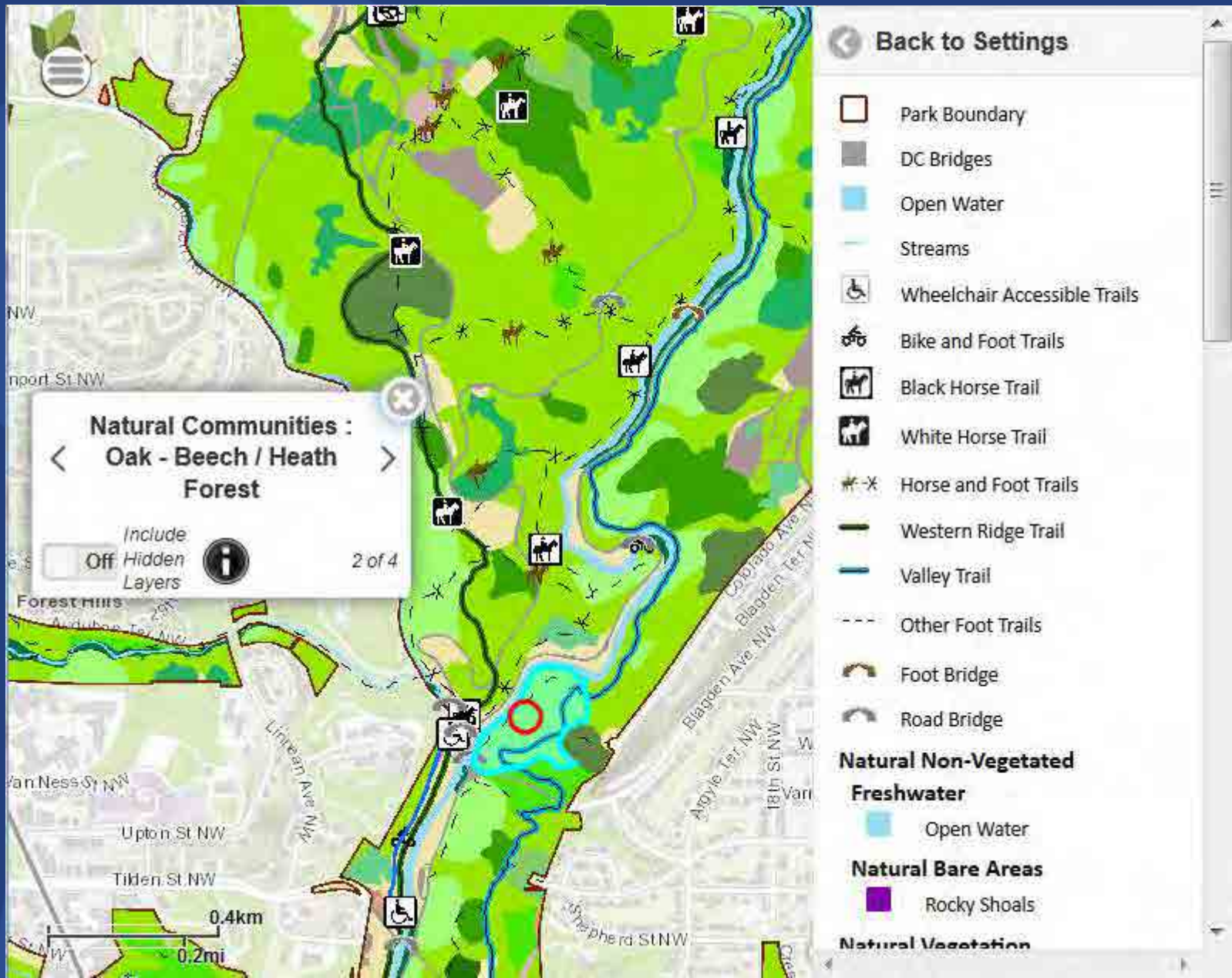
**Tips:** All trail segments shared with horses. No restrooms on this route or at trailhead.

**Street Crossings:** Beach Dr.

**Highlights:** The Tuliptree Small-Stream Floodplain Forest; a Red Maple Seepage Swamp where the Valley Trail starts climbing the Rock Creek Valley wall; transition zones between a mix of natural communities on the meandering trail above Rock Creek; Riley Spring footbridge; large outcrops of Laurel Formation bedrock surrounded by mature Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest and a patch of Basic Mesic Hardwood Forest in the wide lower section of a ravine; acres of rolling Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest.











Back

## Oak - Beech / Heath Forest


At Rock Creek Park, the Oak - Beech / Heath Forest is typically found on steep slopes with rock outcrops. Soils are shallow, loamy, and nutrient-poor. Look for American beech and oaks (white oak, chestnut oak, or black oak) in the tree canopy, along with mountain laurel in the understory.

Area in acres (hectares): 10.2 (4.1)

Classification Code: CEGL006919

[Explore More](#)



 American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) leaves in autumn.  
Photographer: Al Schotz.

Natural Vegetation



## Natural Communities of Rock Creek Park

### Oak – Beech / Heath Forest

[Plants & Animals](#)[Physical Setting](#)[Natural Processes](#)[Ecological Threats](#)[Making a Difference](#)[Conservation Status & Classification](#)

natural community in Rock Creek Park.

[Additional Photos](#)[Where to See It](#)[Open Park Map](#)[Explore This Natural Community Elsewhere](#)[Compare Natural Communities](#)

## How to Recognize It

[Plants & Animals](#)[Physical Setting](#)[Natural Processes](#)[Ecological Threats](#)[Making a Difference](#)[Conservation Status & Classification](#)

## Learn More

Similar natural communities at Rock Creek Park:

- Chestnut Oak / Mountain Laurel Forest
- Mixed Oak / Heath Forest (Low-Elevation)

The Hardwood Forest Ecological System at Rock Creek Park

## Natural Communities of Rock Creek Park

### – Beech / Heath Forest

Physical  
Setting

Natural  
Processes

Ecological  
Threats

Making a  
Difference

Conservation  
Status &  
Classification

How to  
Recognize  
It



### How to Recognize It



30 photos in gallery

This natural community has a distinctive look with evergreen mountain laurel shrubs under a canopy of oaks and American beech. Look for the **Oak - Beech / Heath Forest** at Rock Creek Park on steep, convex slopes and bluffs above streams. You may see patches of moss on the thin, highly acidic soils. Outcrops of metamorphic bedrock jut out of the steep hillsides, along with the occasional white quartz vein. Because of the steepness, rainwater runs off quickly and soils do not accumulate easily.



Open Park Map



Explore This Natural  
Community Elsewhere



Compare Natural  
Communities

### Learn More

Similar natural communities at  
Rock Creek Park:

- Chestnut Oak / Mountain Laurel Forest
- Mixed Oak / Heath Forest



## Seasonal Highlights



4 photos in gallery

- Pink or pinkish blooms of mountain laurel (early summer)
- Red blooms of black huckleberry
- White blooms of striped prince's-pine, partridgeberry—low to the ground
- Dark berries of hillside blueberry, black huckleberry
- Red berries of common serviceberry
- Nesting birds actively collecting food for young birds. **Baby birds** learning to fly and following their parents around, begging for food

# Natural Communities of Rock Creek Park

## Oak – Beech / Heath Forest

How to Recognize It

Seasonal Highlights

Where to See It

Plants & Animals

Physical Setting


Natural Processes

Ecological Threats

Making a Difference

Conservation Status & Classification



 Gypsy moth caterpillars (*Lymantria dispar*). Gypsy moths are an invasive species, introduced from Europe. The caterpillars are especially destructive, feeding on many species of trees and shrubs.

Photographer: Flickr user Dennis Wilkinson

- English ivy\*  (vine)
- Japanese stiltgrass\*  (herb)
- linden arrow-wood\*  (shrub)
- Norway maple\*  (tree)
- oriental bittersweet\*  (vine)

Adding to its

Map

Natural Elsewhere

Natural s

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Invasive plants at

Insect pests at

at Rock Creek

- Population dynamics of white-tailed deer at Rock Creek Park
- Fire at Rock Creek Park

Other Websites



## Explore Natural Communities



### Don't Let Your Ivy Climb

Did you know that English ivy (*Hedera helix*) that is never allowed to climb upwards won't reproduce by making flowers and seeds? Once it grows vertically for some time, however, an internal switch seems to flip. Thereafter, even if the tree it was climbing falls, English ivy is capable of producing fleshy blue berries.

Birds help native AND non-native plants spread by eating their beautiful plump berries and flying away. When nature calls, so to speak, a bird deposits seeds that are ready to grow. By that time, the bird could be in the middle of a pristine forest.

**Moral of the story for gardeners:** Don't let your ivy climb! If you garden with other ornamental non-native plants that have berries, harvest the berries for indoor decorations.



English ivy fruit grows on vines that climb. (That's why you don't see fruit in manicured container plantings of ivy.)  
Photographer: Flickr user happy days photos and art



How to Recognize It

Seasonal Highlights

W Se

## Low Plants (Fi

Plants growing low to

Photo album [fr](#)

- green moss
- **partridgeberry**
- striped prince's
- white wood-ast

The field layer, which usually sparse in the dense root mats of high exposure mineral soil.

## Non-Native Inv

Read about the hand **Ecological Threats** pa

# partridgeberry



**Scientific Name:** *Mitchella repens*

**Common Name:** partridgeberry

**Global Conservation Status:** G5 - Secure

Find out more on

**NatureServe Explorer**

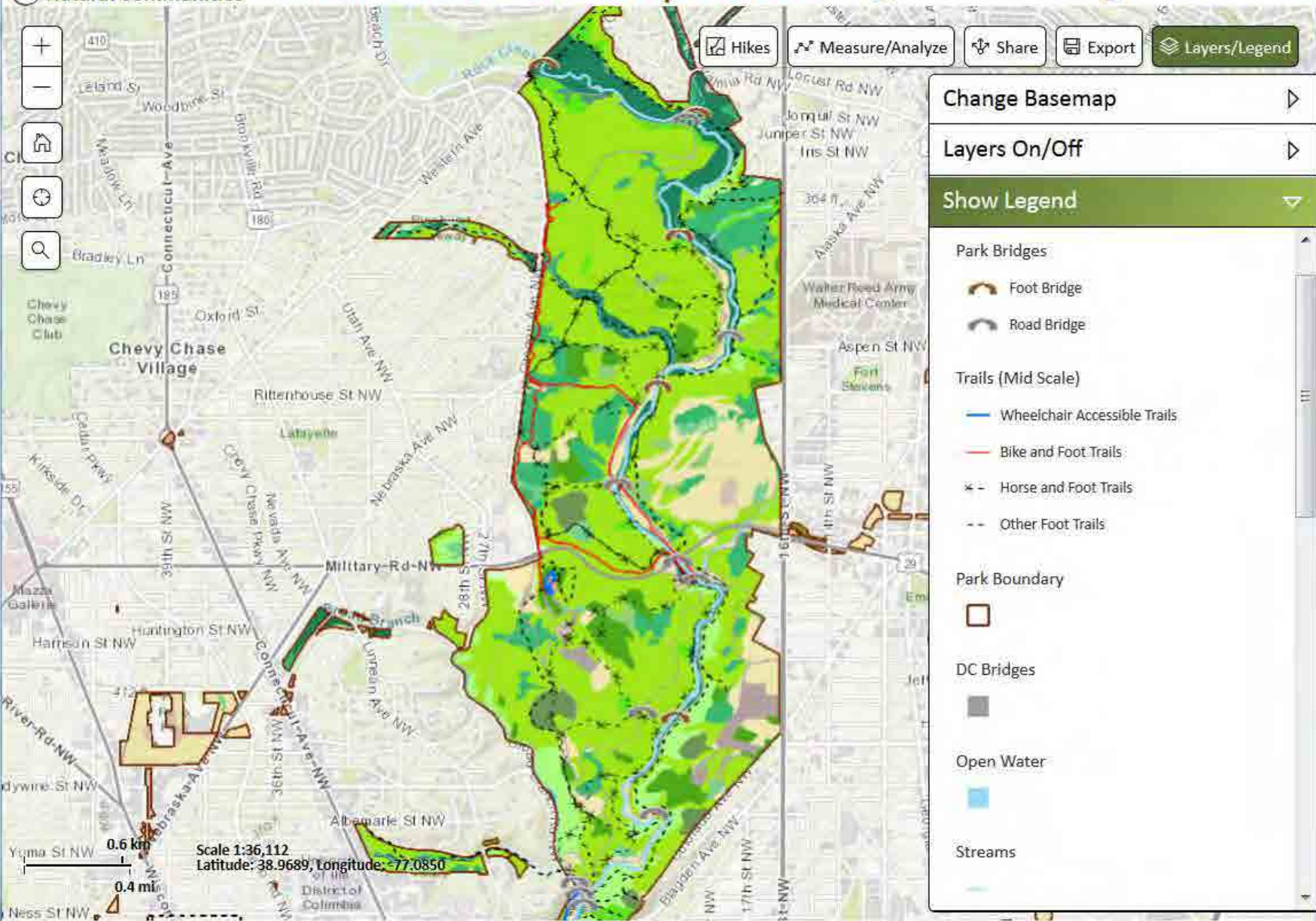
Search for photos of this species within the **NatureServe Flickr photo stream.** [fr](#)



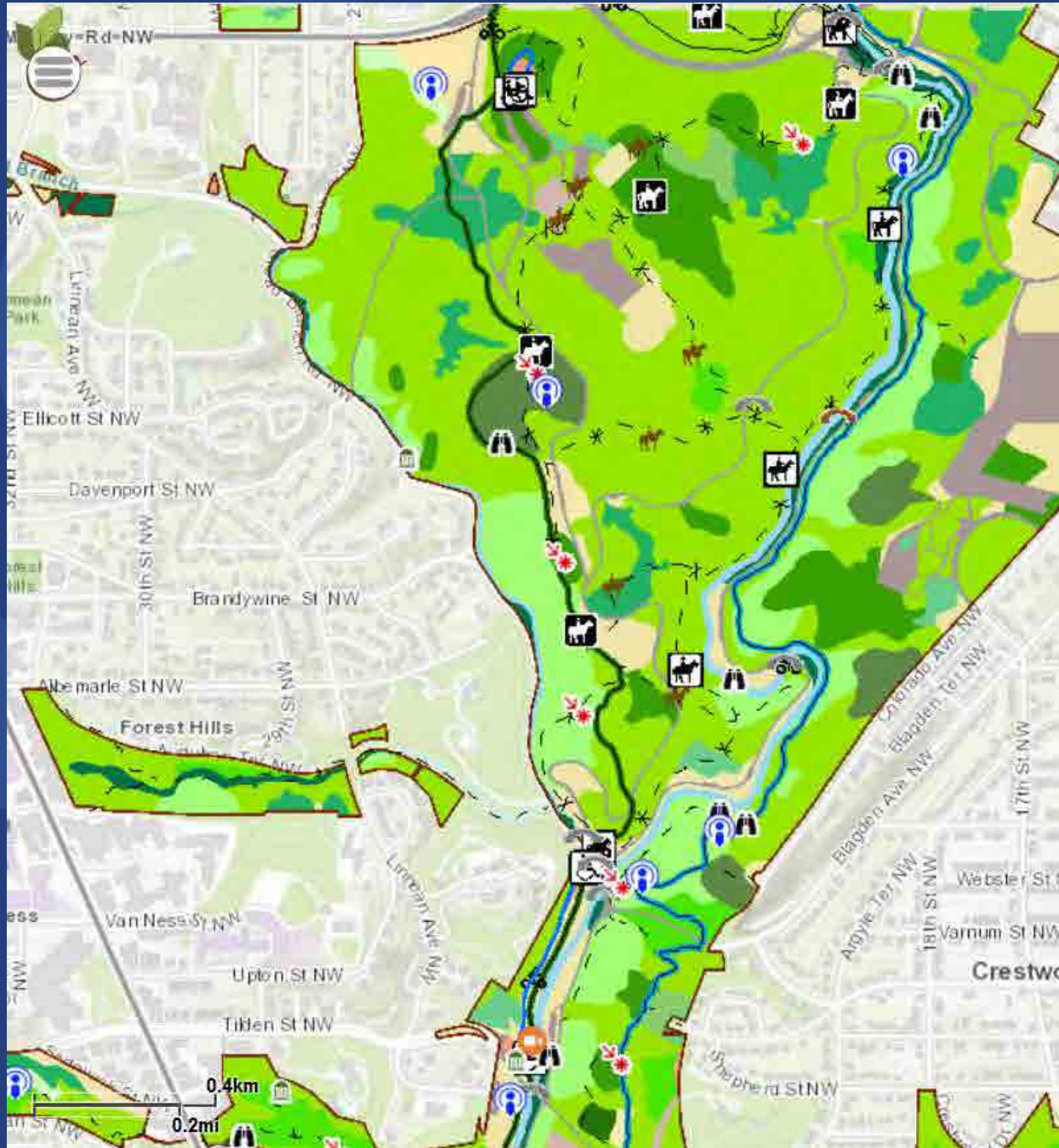
Twin flowers, fused at the base and producing a single red berry, help identify this sprawling groundcover.

Photographers: Matt & Erin Jones

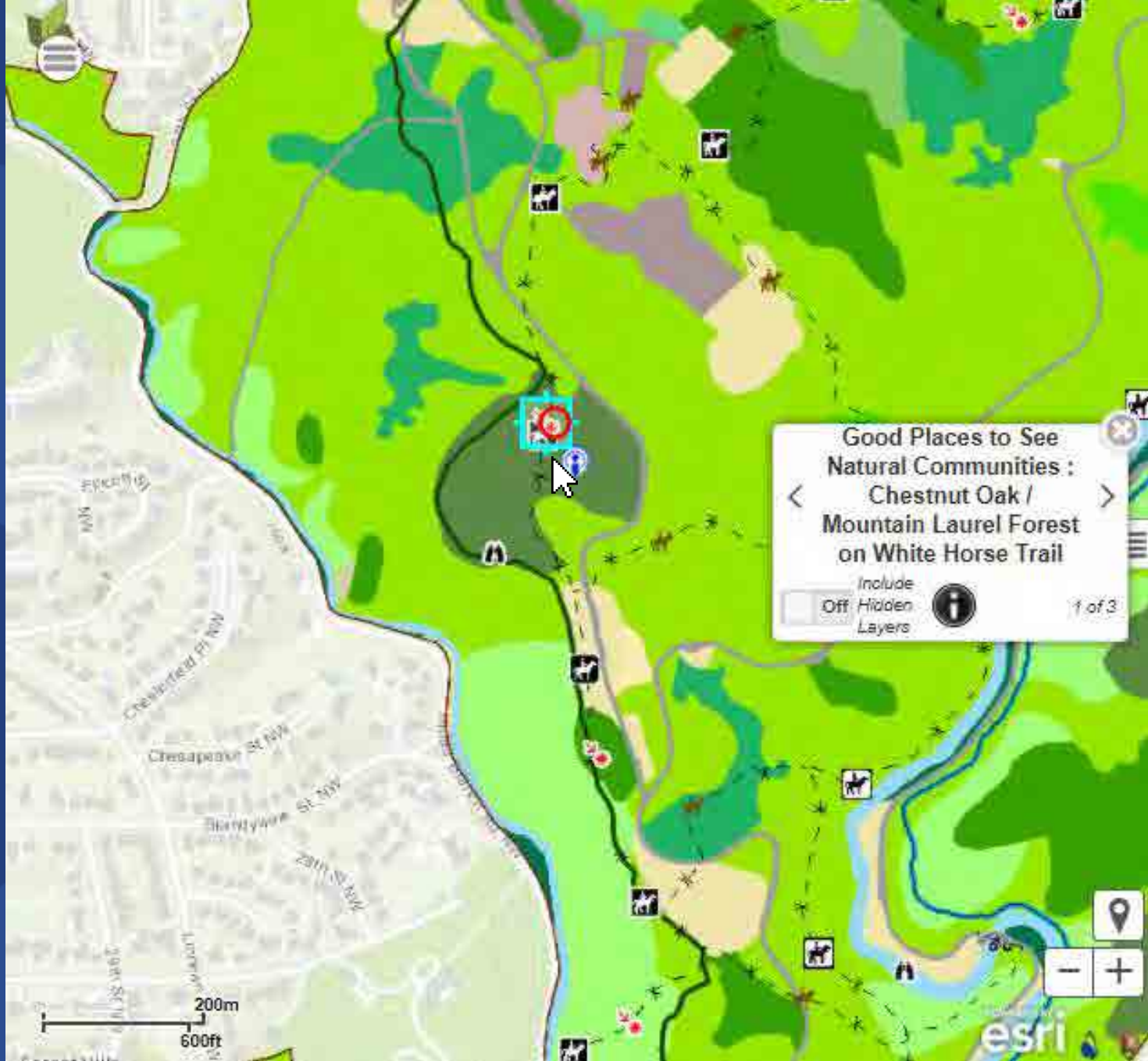
† The conservation status of a species is designated by a number from 1 (critically imperiled) to 5 (secure), preceded by a letter reflecting the geographic scale of the assessment (G = Global, S = Subnational). More information is available through **NatureServe Explorer**.



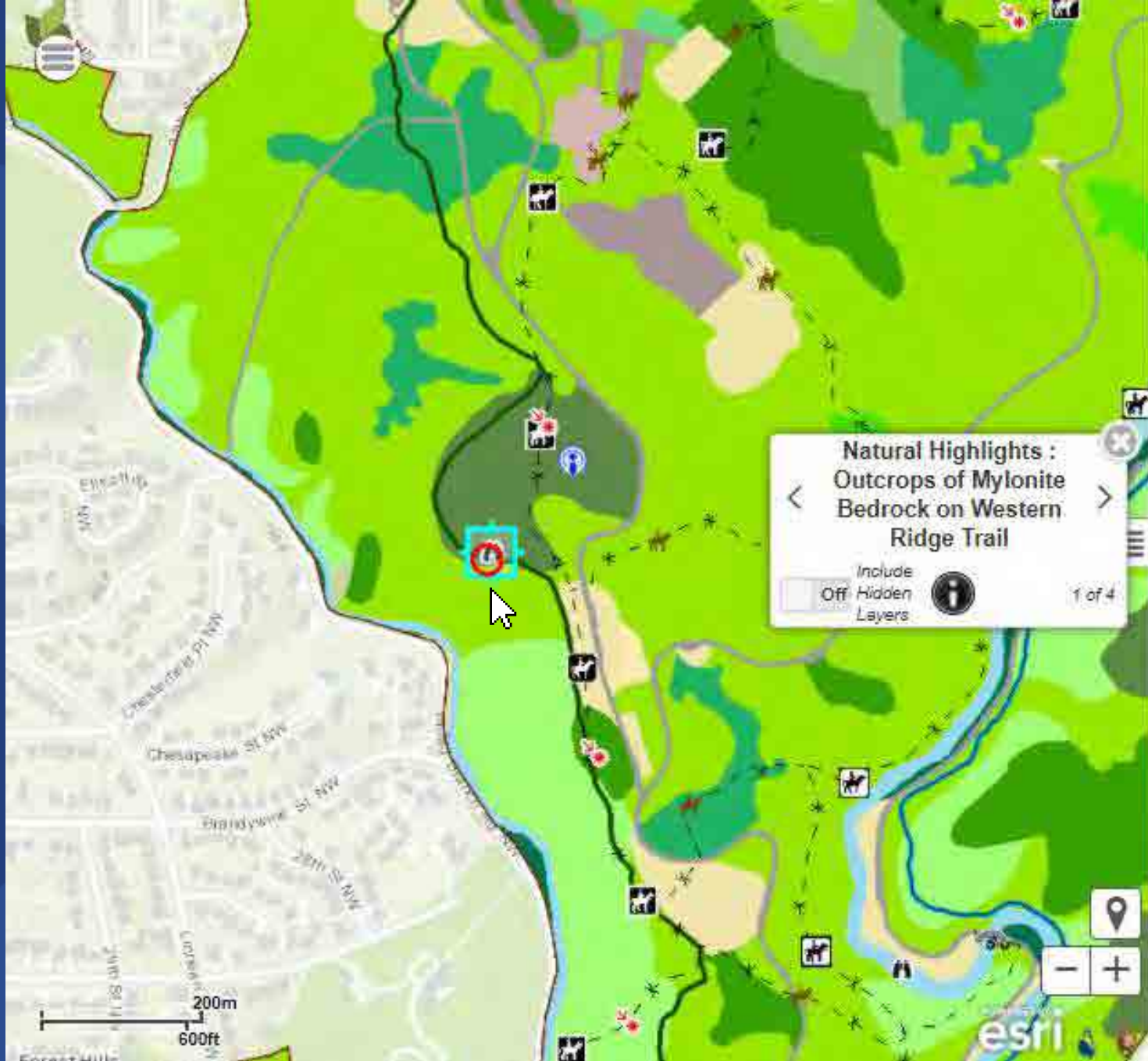




- Videos
- Audio Podcasts
- Park Boundary
- Good Places to See Natural Communities
- DC Bridges
- Wheelchair Accessible Trails
- Bike and Foot Trails
- Black Horse Trail
- White Horse Trail
- Horse and Foot Trails
- Western Ridge Trail
- Valley Trail
- Other Foot Trails
- Foot Bridge
- Road Bridge
- Historic Military Site
- Historic Site
- Memorials & Statues
- Natural Highlights
- Natural Non-Vegetated**
- Freshwater**
- Open Water



[ExploreNaturalCommunities.org](http://ExploreNaturalCommunities.org)





[ExploreNaturalCommunities.org](http://ExploreNaturalCommunities.org)

# Analyze - An - Area

Home Natural Communities Natural Areas Ecology Basics About This Website Help Contact

Home > Reports > Analyze an Area

## Analyzed Area

Blagden Ave  
Mathewson Dr  
Trumbull Ter  
Upshur St  
Argyle Ter  
Shepherd St  
Shoemaker St

County of Fairfax ESRI BDOUGHERT GEOLOGICAL DATA SOLUTIONS HERE esri

# Build a Hike

## Natural Communities

Name	Code	Notes
<b>Mixed Oak / Heath (Low Elevation) Forest</b>	CEGL008521	At Rock Creek Park, the Low-Elevation Mixed Oak / Heath Forest is usually found on flat and rolling hilltops, on infertile, coarse to loamy soils. A mixture of oaks including white, black, chestnut, and scarlet oak dominate the tree canopy. Several species of low growing blueberries and huckleberries may be scattered throughout the stand.
<b>Oak - Beech / Heath Forest</b>	CEGL006919	At Rock Creek Park, the Oak - Beech / Heath Forest is usually found on steep slopes with rock outcrops on loamy, infertile soils. Look for American beech, white oak, chestnut oak, and black oak in the tree canopy, along with mountain laurel in the understory.

## Good Places to See Natural Communities

Name	Location	Notes
<b>Mixed Oak / Heath Forest on Meadow Link Trail</b>	North end of Meadow Link Trail, on level hilltop at Valley Trail junction	You can find multiple distinct shapes of oak leaves in the leaf litter of this level hilltop forest. Deer nibble the low, shrubby blueberry bushes.

## Trails

Segment Number	Name	Painted Trail Blaze	Difficulty	Length in miles (km)	Notes	Accessibility Notes	Wheelchair accessible?	Bikes allowed?	Horses allowed?
1	Valley Trail segment	Blue	M	0.15 (0.24)	This section of Valley Trail north of Park Rd climbs a long, moderate slope. It passes a meadow mowed occasionally by the Park to maintain habitat for critters such as butterflies. Meadowlink Trail (a short loop trail) meets Valley Trail at the north and south end of this segment. The top of the hill (north end) is a good place to see Mixed Oak / Heath Forest, with cobble stones.		No	No	No



## Rock Creek Park

At a Glance

Map Viewer

Maps & Trails

Natural  
Communities  
& More

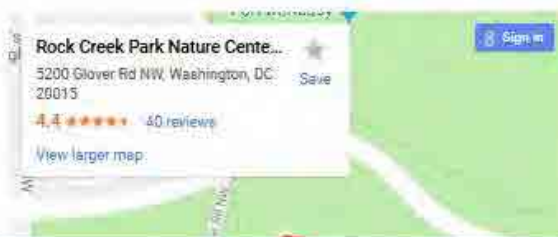
Natural  
History

Stewardship  
& Ecological  
Threats

Videos &  
Podcasts

stretch or rapids;

- patches of flat, fertile floodplains with infrequent seasonal pools and groundwater seeps;
- valley walls that rise dramatically with jagged rock outcrops to high ridges and bluffs;
- moist, fern-laden ravines;
- hillsides cloaked with American beech ;
- cobblestone-sprinkled dry hilltops dense with oak trees and mountain laurel .




### Learn More

Hit the Trails!

- Policies of Rock Creek Park
- Plants of Rock Creek Park
- Non-Native Invasive Plants of Rock Creek Park
- Animals of Rock Creek Park
- The Rock Creek Watershed

### Other Websites

- Rock Creek Park 
- Getting There 



## Parks and Places

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[Explore Park](#) [Park Map](#)

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[Sneak Peek](#) [Park Map](#)



#### Harpers Ferry National Historical Park



[Sneak Peek](#) [Park Map](#)



#### Manassas National Battlefield Park



[Sneak Peek](#)



#### Prince William Forest Park



[Sneak Peek](#)



#### Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts



[Sneak Peek](#) [Park Map](#)

# Designed for Expansion





*Photo: Matt Jones*

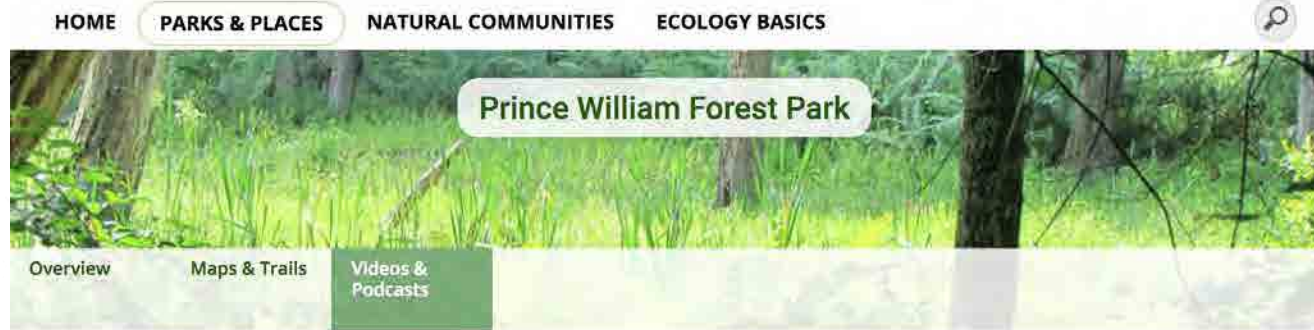
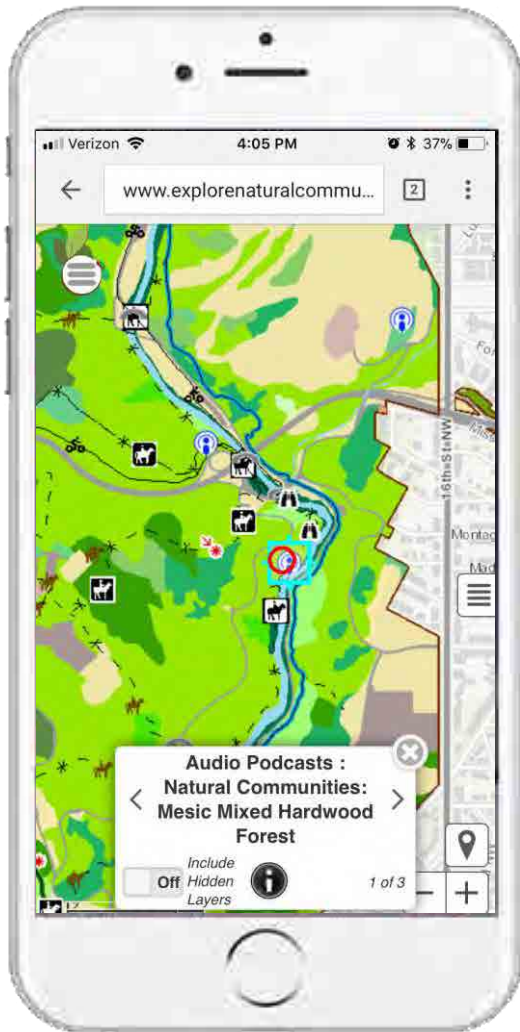
# Building stewardship on several levels

- Visitors – cultivating mindset
- Interpretive Staff (and educators) – coaching
- Natural Resource Managers – facilitating sharing
- Natural and Cultural Resource Managers – helping work together

# Explore Natural Communities Summer Internship



# Short, Informative Podcasts



## Videos and Podcasts

Listen to audio podcasts about Prince William Forest Park!

### Podcasts



#### **Natural Community: Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest in Prince William Forest Park**

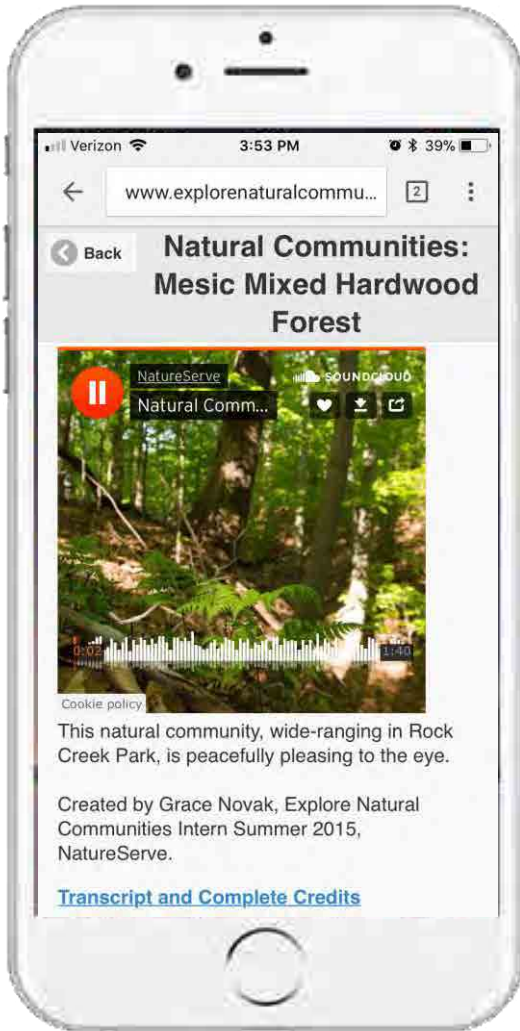
Meet the beautiful **Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest**, a widespread natural community in Prince William Forest Park.



#### **Natural Community: Mixed Oak / Heath Forest in Prince William Forest Park**

The **Mixed Oak / Heath Forest** is naturally good at recovering from forest fires, like the one that raged in Prince William Forest Park for nine days in 2006.

# Short, Informative Podcasts



Overview   Maps & Trails   Videos & Podcasts

Prince William Forest Park > Videos and Podcasts for Prince William Forest Park

## Pollinators

How do plants attract the insects and other animals that spread pollen from flower to flower?

A desktop view of a podcast player. At the top, there are navigation tabs: 'Overview', 'Maps & Trails', and 'Videos & Podcasts'. Below this is a breadcrumb trail: 'Prince William Forest Park > Videos and Podcasts for Prince William Forest Park'. The main title is 'Pollinators' in a large, bold, dark red font. Below the title is a question: 'How do plants attract the insects and other animals that spread pollen from flower to flower?'. The audio player features a play button, 'NatureServe' logo, 'Pollinators' title, and 'SOUNDCLOUD' logo. The background image is a close-up of a bee on a purple flower. A progress bar at the bottom shows '0:00' and '3:30'. Below the player, there is a 'Cookie policy' link.

**Learn More**

Other Websites

Prince William Forest Park 📍



**Parks & Places**  
Interactive maps and nature guides for different parks and places.

**Explore a Community**  
By Park or By Name



**Natural Communities**



**Ecology Basics**

**Features**



**Welcome**

See the world as a naturalist does!



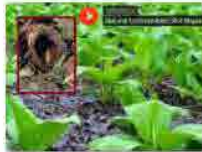
**Rock Creek Park**

Learn about the natural history of Rock Creek Park.



**Interactive Map**

Explore Rock Creek Park's natural communities, hiking trails, and more.



**Videos and Podcasts**

Watch a video or listen to podcasts about Rock Creek Park!



**Meet a Community**

Oak - Beech / Heath Forest in Rock Creek Park



**A Peek at the Plants**

Commonly seen native plants in Rock Creek Park

**Join us!**



*Photo: NPS*

## The Team

NatureServe ENC team (current): Judy Teague, Dave Hauver, Todd Parks, Allen Anselmo, Erin Lunsford Jones, Jianyu Wu, and contracted science writer Mary-Russell Roberson; Summer Interns 2015 – 2017; with help from many others!

National Park Service ENC champion: Diane Pavek