Pennsylvania’s vast state forest system comprises 2.2 million acres for you to use, enjoy and explore. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources’ Bureau of Forestry manages these forests to ensure their long-term health and to conserve native wild plants. The Loyalsock State Forest comprises 115,000 acres in Bradford, Lycoming and Sullivan counties.

Fern Rock Nature Trail

This nature trail is located on top of the mountain, just southwest of Worlds End State Park, on the western side of State Route 3009 (Worlds End Road.) The trail was created through collective efforts of many individuals. It was initiated by Girl Scouts from nearby Camp Lycogis. Over the years it has been maintained by students from Sullivan County High School, the local Youth Conservation Corp, Boy Scouts of America and Girl Scouts of the USA. Most recently, in 2010, the TREHAB Youth Summer Employment program consisting of 10 teenagers from Sullivan County, cleared and re-blazed the entire trail and replaced and improved the foot bridges.

The ferns and rocks of the area lend their name to the trail. You will soon discover the rich, moist, acidic soils of the forest supports delicate, lacy-leaved ferns among a rocky forest floor. The coarse, quartz-rich sandstone rock that is scattered throughout the trail was formed from sediment of an ancient ocean during the early Mississippian period 340-350 million years ago.

During this 2 hour hike you will traverse 2 miles of flat but rugged terrain. Please wear sturdy footwear and watch your step. During wet periods the trail may be muddy in low lying areas. Please stay on the marked trail, following the yellow rectangular blazes with the blue letters “FR”. There is a shortcut trail, for those hikers who want to cut the trip to about 1 hour. The shortcut trail is blazed with yellow rectangles with a blue “S”. You can follow the narrative guide along the 31 stations to help you learn about forest ecosystems.

Please note that camping along this trail is not permitted. Camping in other locations on the State Forest is allowed with a free camping permit. Contact the Resource Management Center for details.

Loyalsock State Forest

The Loyalsock State Forest, located in Sullivan, Lycoming and Bradford counties is a valuable part of Pennsylvania’s 2.2 million acre State Forest system. It receives its name from the Loyalsock Creek, which winds for over 60 miles through the forest district.

The Loyalsock State Forest contains about 115,000 acres, characterized by high plateaus and ridges cut with numerous deep stream valleys. Northern hardwood tree species, such as birch, beech and maple associated with black cherry, white ash, tulip-poplar and hemlock, fill the forest. The beauty of these hardwoods, combined with the spectacular topography provides for a diversity of forest based recreational opportunities. Under the provisions of the forest’s Resource Plan, forest managers integrate this recreational potential with the increasing demand for sustained yields of high quality water, beneficial wildlife habitat, and valuable wood products. These requirements, not only depend heavily on scientific expertise, but demand the full cooperation of all forest users.

If you remain quiet during your hike, you may see a variety of wildlife in their natural habitat such as this wood turtle. Be sure to bring along a camera!

Care for the Land

State forests belong to all Pennsylvanians. Take time to enjoy them, but know the rules and regulations designed to protect the forests and you. Please be careful with fire, keep our forests litter free and don’t damage trees and other plants.

Certified “Well Managed”

Pennsylvania state forests are certified to FSC® standards. The Forest Stewardship Council® is an independent organization supporting environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world’s forests.

iConservePA

To learn more about the state’s natural resources and what you can do to help protect and enjoy them, log onto iConservePA.org.

For more information

Loyalsock State Forest Resource Management Center
Forest District #20
6735 Route 220
Dushore, PA 18614
(570) 946-4049

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The Loyalsock State Forest comprises 115,000 acres in Bradford, Lycoming and Sullivan counties.
You will also notice the group of young eastern hemlock trees that have invaded a sunny opening caused by a small cluster of fallen trees. You may see young trees reclaiming the forest’s territory now that the water level is lower.

Small streams draining swamps generally flow only during a portion of the year and are called **intermittent streams**. Aquatic life in forest streams consists mainly of crayfish, amphibians and insects.

The trail loop begins here. Follow the trail to the left and watch for the numbered markers.

The native ground cover here is called **stag horn** because it resembles the velvet summertime antlers of a deer. It is in the club-moss family. You will also see another club-moss along the trail that is called **tree club moss**. Club-mosses are sometimes called “ground pines” but they are not even closely related to pines trees. They like cool shade and acidic soil.

There is a fungus among us! Look closely and you will see a very large log in the advance stages of decay. Decay-causing fungi promote the rotting process of dead tree stumps. Eventually the wood breaks down, returning nutrients to the soil so that they can be used again by living plants.

The overhead electric line right-of-way serves as a permanent opening, satisfying the needs of certain wildlife and songbirds that prefer to live on forest edges. Here you will find blueberry bushes.

This yellow birch tree began life on top of a nutrient rich hemlock stump. The **nurse stump** has rotted away now and the birch tree appears to be growing on stilts!

There are many areas of loose surface rock along the trail. The melting ice of glaciers carried away some of the soil and left the rocks behind. Watch your step!

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