

WELCOME TO KNIGHTS HILL NATURE PARK.

The park consists of 74 acres of natural habitat set aside as a sanctuary for the protection of wildlife. It has a secondary purpose as a quiet and peaceful retreat for people to enjoy the aesthetic and scientific study of nature. The field house is open during the summer and staffed by a naturalist. Ask for a program of events that will include nature walks, bird watching, learning about wild and aquatic life, plant and tree identification, and an occasional night sky watch. For the naturalist in you there are checklists available at the field house to record your finds as you travel the trails. While there, check notes on other guests' discoveries and be sure to stop back to add your own.

We invite you to follow the interpretive trail, starting at the field house and proceeding from station number 1 to 10, as listed below. Refer to the enclosed map for the locations of these points of interest.

1. Fern Garden – All the ferns you see are native to this area. Some have been transplanted to this spot to provide an opportunity to compare different species, which might assist in identifying the various ferns you encounter as you walk the trails. In all, there are twenty-one different species in the park. Several are quite rare.

2. Evergreen Forest – The area you have been walking through is mainly a pine and fir forest, dominated by the large White Pines. This combination of several native conifers growing close to one another allows you to see the features that help tell them

apart. There are good examples of Red Spruce, Eastern Hemlock and Balsam Fir. You will notice that the understory consists of rather small, low-growing plants. This is the result of the tall evergreen canopy which limits the amount of sunlight reaching the forest floor. Where more sunlight gets through, young trees are able to get their start.

3. Hardwood Forest - As you continue along from this point, you will notice a thicker ground cover of club mosses and ferns. Notice the gradual thinning of the pines, resulting in a change to more hardwoods, including Sugar and Red Maples, Northern Ash and some birches. An intermittent stream feeds the marsh on your left. The saturated marsh soils provide suitable habitat for these hardwoods, which can tolerate “wet feet.”

4. Wetland Plants – On the right side of the bridge are more plants especially adapted to wet conditions, such as False Dragonhead, Turtlehead, Spotted Jewelweed, and Male, Cinnamon and Sensitive Ferns. Look on the large, split boulder on the left to pick out a hardy, evergreen fern with once-divided leaves. This is Polypody, a fern that prefers to grow on rocks.

5. Marsh – On the left of this bridge is the site of a small beaver dam, now deserted for several years. Because this marsh is shallow, only young beavers spend time here and only for a brief period. Beavers need much deeper water for their lodges. The pioneer trees that are beginning to grow in the marsh include Black Cherry, Speckled Alder,

Yellow Birch and Quaking Aspen. In order for this to remain a marsh habitat without the assistance of the beavers, a rudimentary dam is being maintained here. Upstream from the dam are more species of marsh plants, including many types of sedges and grasses.

6. Vernal Pool – A vernal pool is a very special kind of wetland, one that is ephemeral and is not fed by a stream. It is formed by snow melt and the level of water depends on the amount of rainfall during the summer. In some years, this pool dries out entirely. It supports some of our lesser known amphibians, including the large black and yellow Spotted Salamander, the noisy Wood Frog and the small secretive Northern Two-lined Salamander, as well as several species of aquatic invertebrates. These animals enjoy a greater reproductive success because their major predator, fish, is absent from vernal pools. See if you can find evidence of eggs or tadpoles in spring and early summer.

7. Selective Logging – Deciduous hardwoods dominate at this location because almost all of the coniferous softwoods have been logged. Even so, these hardwoods are not very mature, indicating that the clearing of this part of the forest was done recently. As more sunlight reaches the forest floor now, the coniferous softwoods are making a comeback. A species of Rattlesnake Plantain, a native orchid, can be found near the bridge. It does not bloom every year, so it is difficult to find the 6-8 inch stalks with small, waxy white flowers. This is one of six species of orchids known to grow in the park.