



# Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve

KITTY HAWK, NC

## Rules & Tips For Visitors

- The reserve is open to visitors year round.
- Visit at your own risk. The site is remote and conditions can include natural hazards such as insects, poisonous plants, and venomous snakes.
- Off-leash pets are prohibited.
- Fires, fireworks, target shooting, nudity, and camping are prohibited.
- Hunting is allowed by permit during designated hunting season. Both hunters and visitors should use appropriate caution.
- Producing noise that is disruptive to wildlife or other visitors is prohibited.
- Removal or disturbance of plants, animals, fungi, or cultural resources is prohibited.
- Littering is prohibited.
- Leaving any personal property unattended within the boundaries longer than 24 hours is prohibited.
- Recreational/off-road motorized vehicles are prohibited.
- Written authorization is required for organized events, commercial activities, and other special activities.

For the most up to date rules and guidance visit: [deq.nc.gov/reserve-rules](http://deq.nc.gov/reserve-rules)



## North Carolina Coastal Reserve & National Estuarine Research Reserve

[deq.nc.gov/ncreserve](http://deq.nc.gov/ncreserve)

The Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve is managed by the N.C. Division of Coastal Management to protect the site's ecosystems for research, education, and compatible traditional uses. Management and ownership is a joint effort between the state and the town of Kitty Hawk. This site is also a Dedicated State Nature Preserve.

The North Carolina Coastal Reserve & National Estuarine Research Reserve is a part of the N.C. Division of Coastal Management, a division of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality.



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## Purpose of the Reserve

At approximately 1,900 acres, the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve is one of the largest remaining maritime forests on the Outer Banks. A 1988 report commissioned by the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission determined that maritime forest ecosystems should be given high priority in coastal preservation efforts. In the early 1990s, the state received a conservation easement to a 462-acre tract acquired by the town of Kitty Hawk. The site was dedicated a state nature preserve in 1992. Since then the state has continued acquisition efforts with help from The Nature Conservancy, Town of Kitty Hawk, and grants from the N.C. Land and Water Fund and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This natural area is one of 10 sites that make up the North Carolina Coastal Reserve & National Estuarine Research Reserve. Preservation of the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve allows this coastal ecosystem to be available as an outdoor laboratory where scientists, students and the public can learn about processes, functions and influences that shape and sustain the coastal area. Traditional uses, including recreation, are allowed as long as they do not disturb the environment or organisms or interfere with research and educational activities.

### General:

Hiking on existing trails is allowed throughout the reserve. Please stay on designated trails and leave nothing behind except your footprints. Horseback riding and biking are allowed on designated trails only. The town multiuse path along The Woods Road is handicap accessible.

### Parking:

Lots are available at David Paul Pruitt Park, Kitty Hawk Park, and Sandy Run Park. At interior trailheads, park safely off the street and respect private landowners.

### Guidance:

Beware of biting insects (flies, mosquitoes, ticks, chiggers), and poisonous plants (poison ivy). Sun protection is advised.

### Facilities:

Bathrooms are available for public use at Kitty Hawk Park and Sandy Run Park.

### Paddling:

Paddle trails are reached from the Bob Perry Launch.

## Visitor Information

## How to Find Us



The Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve is in Kitty Hawk and is bordered by U.S. 158 to the east and north and Albemarle Sound to the west. The Woods Road runs north-south through the middle of the reserve, and along its length is a two-mile multiuse path. A public boat ramp on Bob Perry Road can be used to reach High Bridge Creek which flows through the reserve.



# Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve

## Unique Features

Ancient dune ridges up to 30 feet tall and low salt content in the surrounding water provide for a globally unique and diverse habitat.

There are three main community types: maritime deciduous forest, maritime swamp forest, and marsh with associated creeks. The reserve has the largest maritime forest in the state where bald cypress dominates the swamp forest community.

## Physical Setting

The reserve is located on the widest section of the northern Outer Banks. The site's eastern edge is only 1/4 mile from the ocean's wind shear and salt spray. A series of parallel ridges and swales, oriented north-south, are relics of ancient dunes marking the previous shorelines when sea level was higher.

The closest ocean inlet is more than 20 miles from this part of Albemarle Sound. The water level around the reserve is affected more by wind currents than by the regular lunar tides.

## Maritime Deciduous Forest

This forest type grows on the old dune ridges. It provides a blanket of protection from salt and wind for the plants and animals that dwell here. The vast root systems help purify storm water and stabilize soils.

The forest canopy is dominated by American beech, loblolly pine, southern red oak, and pignut hickory. Other common canopy trees include sweetgum and water oak. The subcanopy dominants include flowering dogwood, American holly, red bay, ironwood, sassafras, and hop hornbeam.

The most prevalent shrubs and herbs in this habitat are highbush blueberry, switchcane, and wax myrtle. Numerous vines are present including muscadine grape, greenbriar, rattan vine, Virginia creeper, poison ivy, and trumpet vine.

## Maritime Swamp Forest

This community is found in the low, wet swales between the higher and drier, old dune ridges. Many broad swales are saturated with water throughout the year.

Trees dominating this unique environment include red maple, sweet gum, and bald cypress. Thick stands of bald cypress exist in the eastern and central parts of the reserve.

## Marsh and Creek

Brackish marsh is found along Albemarle Sound. Brackish and freshwater marshes exist along High Bridge Creek, which is not affected by tides.

Black needlerush and giant cordgrass are dominant plants in brackish marshes. Freshwater marshes are characterized by giant cordgrass, cattail, willow, wax myrtle, and duck potato.

Creek bottoms can contain widgeon grass, pondweed, wild celery, and milfoil.

## Rare and Unusual Species

The reserve is home to seven protected plant species listed by the state: coastal goldenrod (Threatened), American featherfoil, woolly beach heather (Threatened), southern twayblade, marsh pink, shoreline sedge, and whisk fern (Watch List).

Hop hornbeam is rare on the Outer Banks and found only in Kitty Hawk Woods and Nags Head Woods.

## Reptiles and Amphibians

Because of the location of Kitty Hawk Woods and the variety of habitats it supports, a great diversity of wildlife is found at this site.

A healthy population of amphibians inhabits the reserve, including southern leopard frog, Fowler's toad and several types of tree frog. The red-backed salamander and marbled salamander are also found here.

Common reptiles include eastern and striped mud turtle, spotted turtle, and snapping turtle. Cottonmouth and water snake are common in wet areas, whereas black racer and rough green snake can be found in the uplands.

## Mammals

Upland areas support white-tailed deer, eastern gray squirrel, cottontail and marsh rabbit, opossum, raccoon, gray fox, and bobcat.

Muskrat, river otter, and the invasive species nutria inhabit the marshes and creeks around the reserve.



## Birds

The uninterrupted forest canopy provides habitat for numerous resident and seasonal birds, including woodpeckers, hawks, owls, warblers, wrens, and various other songbirds.

The deeper swales and isolated portions of High Bridge Creek are home to wood duck and belted kingfisher. The marshes support various waterfowl, wading birds, and rails.

Osprey and bald eagle nest in the vicinity and use the reserve for foraging and roosting. Peregrine falcons and sharp-shinned hawks can also be observed here.