



Buxton Woods Reserve

BUXTON, NC

Rules & Tips For Visitors

- The reserve is open to visitors year round.
- All trails are designated for hiking. Horseback riding is allowed only along Piney Ridge Trail.
- 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 and fishing are allowed according to the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission regulations. The site is part of the N.C. Game Lands Program. 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

North Carolina Coastal Reserve & National Estuarine Research Reserve

deq.nc.gov/ncreserve



The Buxton 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. The Reserve is part of one of the largest remaining tracts of maritime forest on the North Carolina coast. Support from the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission for site maintenance and wildlife management is gratefully acknowledged. This site is a game land and 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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Creation of the Reserve

This natural area is one of 10 sites that make up the North Carolina Coastal Reserve & National Estuarine Research Reserve. Preservation of the Buxton Woods Reserve allows 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 ecosystem or organisms or interfere with research and educational activities.

At approximately 1,000 acres, the Buxton Woods Reserve is comprised of globally extremely rare maritime forest community types and is a Dedicated State Nature Preserve. In the mid 1980s, a group of developers proposed to construct a golf course within Buxton Woods. This generated local support for protection of the woods by community and environmental groups which ultimately led Dare County to create a Special Environmental District for the Buxton area. Additionally, the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission determined in 1988 that maritime forest ecosystems, like Buxton Woods, should be a high priority for coastal preservation efforts. The State purchased a 152-acre tract creating the Buxton Woods Coastal Reserve in that same year. Since then, the State has continued acquisition efforts with funding from State appropriations, the N.C. Land and Water Fund, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Access:

Four-wheel drive vehicles are strongly recommended for accessing the reserve via Old Doctor's Road. Visitors with two-wheel drive vehicles are directed to the trailhead at the end of Water Association Road. Old Doctor's Road (just off Highway 12) by the kiosk. West end of Tunnel Road (four-wheel drive) near Lookout Loop. Water Association Road near the North and West Trails.

Guidance:

Beware of biting insects (flies, mosquitoes, ticks, chiggers), and poisonous plants (poison ivy). Sun protection is advised. There are no public restrooms or facilities available at Buxton Woods Reserve. Public restrooms are available at Cape Hatteras National Seashore Visitors Center.

Trails:

Easy: Lookout Loop, East Trail
Moderate: North Trail, Ridge Trail, and Sedge Trail, West Trail

Visitor Information

How to Find Us



The Buxton Woods Reserve is located on Hatteras Island between the villages of Buxton and Frisco. The site is bounded on the south by Cape Hatteras National Seashore and on the north by N.C. Highway 12. Access to the interior of the reserve is available from two unpaved roads that extend south from N.C. Highway 12. Old Doctor's Road provides access to the eastern half of the reserve (Buxton side), and Water Association Road provides access to the western half (Frisco side). Trailheads are located along both of these roads and link the reserve with Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

Buxton Woods Reserve

Physical Setting

The Buxton Woods Reserve is located just north of Cape Hatteras on the widest section of Hatteras Island. This maritime forest ecosystem encompasses approximately 3,000 acres with roughly two-thirds of it protected by the reserve and the adjacent Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The remaining lands are owned by Dare County and private entities.

The site is characterized by a series of ridges and swales containing three main community types: maritime evergreen forest, maritime shrub swamp, and interdune ponds and wetlands locally known as sedges. Ridges are forested and represent relict sand dunes from previous shorelines of Cape Hatteras. Swales are interdunal troughs located between ridges. The area is a major source of groundwater recharge for Hatteras Island, and the western part of the reserve partially surrounds the County's wellfield.

Buxton Wood's latitude and proximity to oceanic and estuarine waters result in a unique setting that supports a range of subtropical and temperate species.

The area has the highest probability of hurricane incidence along the North Carolina coast in a given year. Salt spray and high winds associated with these events tend to reset vegetative succession and result in standing dead pines, stunted oaks, and large areas covered with thick vines.

Maritime Evergreen Forest

This community is located on the dune ridges. The forest creates a dense protective blanket over the plants and animals that dwell here. The vast root systems of the forest also provide water purification and soil stabilization functions for the overall benefit of the island's ecosystems and organisms.

The canopy of this habitat consists of mixed pine-hardwoods with local domination by loblolly pine, live oak, and laurel oak. Dominants in the forest subcanopy are yaupon holly, flowering dogwood, American holly, ironwood, and red cedar. Woody vines including poison ivy, catbriers, and Virginia creeper occur throughout the area, as well as scattered shrubs such as blueberry and wax myrtle.

Maritime Shrub Swamp

This community is found in seasonally flooded swales and along the borders of permanently flooded sedges. Although no true swamp forest is present, swamp dogwood and willow are dominant trees associated with this habitat. Scattered individuals of loblolly pine and red bay are found where flooding is diminished due to slight increases in elevation.

Shrub swamp is characterized by stunted subcanopy and shrub layers containing saplings of the species listed above plus wax myrtle and dwarf palmetto. Other species able to tolerate the saturated conditions in these communities include lizard's tail, royal fern, cinnamon fern, and pennyworts. Unlike other maritime forests along the Outer Banks, red maple and sweetgum are not major components of the maritime shrub swamp community in Buxton Woods.

Interdune Ponds and Wetlands

These freshwater communities are found in intermittently wet to permanently flooded depressions between ridges. The largest, Jennette Sedge, is located on the southeast part of the reserve. Sedges are typically dominated by saw grass,



cattails, wild rice, and spike rushes. Pennywort, bedstraw, false nettle, and smart weed also occur, as well as submerged aquatic vegetation. Widespread surface water drainage may have contributed to decreases in this community type in the area.

Amphibians and Reptiles

Buxton Woods supports a high density and large variety of amphibians and reptiles. Common amphibians include southern leopard frog, several types of tree frogs, Fowler's toad, eastern narrow-mouth toad, and two-toed amphiuma. Common reptiles include slider turtles, eastern mud turtle, snapping turtle, cottonmouth, black racer, ribbon snake, and rat snake.

Birds

More than 360 species of birds have been documented at the reserve, including ospreys, bald eagles, peregrine falcons, yellow-billed cuckoos, wood ducks, indigo buntings, and worm-eating warblers. The Woods serve as an important resting place for migratory birds, particularly in the fall.

Mammals

The habitats within the reserve support white-tailed deer, eastern gray squirrel, cottontail and marsh rabbit, opossum, raccoon, mink, gray fox, and river otter. Sedges are inhabited by muskrat and the invasive species nutria.

Rare and Unusual Species

The following rare plant species are found in Buxton Woods: winged seedbox (Significantly Rare), gulfcoast spikerush (Threatened), and savanna nutrush (Significantly Rare). Two rare butterflies, the Eastern Giant Swallowtail, the Northern Oak Hairstreak, and the rare moth (Messalina underwing) are all listed as Significantly Rare.