

A tranquil natural sanctuary in
the backyard of scenic
Hendersonville, NC

JACKSON PARK NATURE TRAIL

and



OKLAWAHA GREENWAY

Your Natural Guide to the

The Oklawaha Greenway meets Americans with
Disabilities Act (ADA) surface standards and is
compliant with ADA grade standards except as
posted on the southernmost 500' of the trail.

Henderson County Parks & Recreation
801 Glover Street
Hendersonville, NC 28792
Phone: (828) 697-4884

For information on guided group tours, please
contact:

www.eco-wnc.org

For a digital version of this guide, please visit

Environmental & Conservation
Organization (ECO)



Henderson County Parks & Recreation

City of Hendersonville



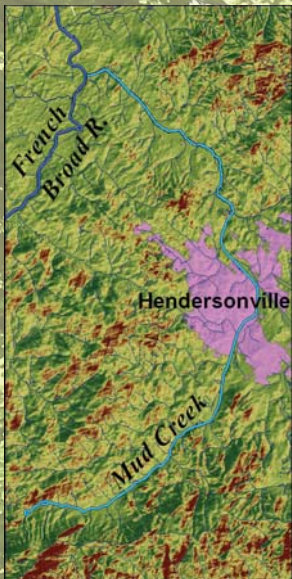
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Oklawaha is a Cherokee word meaning "slowly moving muddy waters". It was used by Native Americans to describe Mud Creek, whose waters flow through Hendersonville on their long journey toward the Gulf of Mexico. Follow the waters of Mud Creek on a leisurely walk or bicycle ride on the Oklawaha Greenway from Hendersonville's Jackson Park to Patton Park or observe wildlife on the Jackson Park Nature Trail. This guide will call your attention to the corridor's natural history and the many plants and animals that call the greenway their home.

Mud Creek

The Mud Creek riparian corridor (area around a natural water course) plays an important role in controlling the City's flood waters as well as providing habitat for a variety of flora (plant species) and fauna (animal species). Most of the precipitation that falls in Hendersonville drains to Mud Creek. The Mud Creek watershed encompasses approximately 113 square miles before joining the French Broad River. The French Broad River is part of the Mississippi River Basin, which eventually discharges to the Gulf of Mexico.



Natural Heritage

The Oklawaha Greenway and Jackson Park Nature Trail travel through swamp forest habitat that has been recognized as significant by the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program. The Natural Heritage Program has identified more than 2,000 Significant Natural Heritage Areas across the state. A Significant Natural Heritage Area is an area of land or water identified by the Natural Heritage Program as being important for conservation of the State's biodiversity. Significant Natural Heritage Areas contain either high-quality or rare natural communities, rare species, or special animal habitats. For more information, visit the Natural Heritage Program's website at www.ncnhp.org

Follow the Oklawaha Greenway and Jackson Park Nature Trail through two Significant Natural Heritage Areas. The Jackson Park Wetlands contain a remnant Swamp Forest community. The Mud Creek Bridge and Eubank Swamp Remnant is a wetland complex with diverse plant life. The plants include species usually found in the Coastal Plain, such as the laurel-leaf greenbrier.

The Oklawaha Greenway and Jackson Park provide habitat for a variety of bottomland fauna, including mammals (raccoons, muskrats, otters, and brown

bats), reptiles and amphibians (turtles, snakes, salamanders, and frogs), and birds (eastern towhee, phoebe, ruby-crowned kinglet, red-bellied woodpecker, brown thrasher, cardinal, mallards, and wood ducks). The trails are also located along a migratory bird corridor and provide a rest area for migrating species.

Park and Trail History

The Oklawaha Greenway was originally constructed in the late 1980's as a cooperative effort of the City of Hendersonville and Henderson County. The original boardwalk was destroyed by hurricane flooding but was rebuilt at a higher elevation in the early 2000's. The City of Hendersonville received funding from the North Carolina Department of Transportation to improve the grade and surface of the Greenway so that it is compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act standards (except where posted).

The 212 acre Jackson Park was established in 1974. The building that currently serves as offices for the Henderson County Parks & Recreation Department (see photo) was designed by architect Erle Stillwell and was originally a farmhouse. The Jackson Park Nature Trail was created by the Environmental Conservation Organization (ECO) in the early 1990's to encourage recreation and interest in natural heritage.



Jackson Park Nature Trail

A The nature trail begins behind the Henderson County Parks & Recreation building. On top of the hill is a climax forest of oak and hickory trees. A climax forest represents the final stage of natural forest succession for its environment. There is also a significant population of understory trees such as Carolina silver bells and dogwoods. Silver bell saplings are easy to identify due to their striped bark. Woodland flowers such as wild cucumber, wild trillium, and giant chickweed can be observed in early spring. Migrating warblers (see photo) visit the trees on the hill in search of insects that feed on the new leaf buds.



B A variety of plants in this area can be observed in bloom during spring. The colorful blooms of the native orange flame azalea can be seen in May. Azaleas are very popular in local gardens, but most tend to be hybrids and other cultivars. Mountain laurel blooms later in the season in June (see photo).

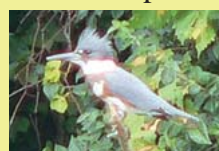


Azaleas and mountain laurel are members of the rhododendron family. Also blooming along the trail in May is the fringe tree, a member of the olive family.

C Leaving the hilltop and its oak forest, the trail travels through bottom land along a flood prone creek. This is an excellent location to observe plants that can tolerate periodic inundation with water. Smaller plants such as yellow root and trillium can be found growing along the stream banks along with black gum trees. The higher elevations of the slope to the left are populated by galax, mountain laurel, and sweet white violets. Dog hobble can be found further down the trail. This plant acquired its name because hunting dogs would get caught in its thick branches while pursuing prey. Dog hobble can be identified in the spring by the raceme (or cluster) of small white flowers growing at the end of each branch.

D The trail emerges into an open meadow from a corridor of river birch. This area is mowed by park staff in order to maintain a meadow habitat throughout the year. Across the road is a series of ponds that provide important habitat for migrating water fowl and year-round water birds. Multi-flora rose (an invasive species) and other hedges provide nesting sites for song sparrows, cardinals, wrens, and mockingbirds. Mature maple trees grow in clumps in areas of the meadow that are frequently flooded.

E The Jackson Park wetlands provide an important habitat for a variety of wildlife. Migratory green herons raise their chicks in the Jackson Park wetlands each spring. Great blue herons can be observed fishing along the edges of the ponds on a regular basis. Wood ducks, kingfishers (see photo), and mallards also frequent these ponds. Keep a sharp eye out for frogs on the banks and turtles on the fallen logs as they tend to retreat into the ponds to avoid people. The habitat transitions up the bank into a pine forest which contains flora and fauna that are not found in the wetlands.



F The nature trail enters another meadow that is frequently flooded. Herons and geese can often be observed in this area and

ducks make their nests on the island in the center of the pond. The colorful purple spiked blooms of pickerel weed (see photo) can be observed during summer. In the early 1990's, the Environmental & Conservation Organization (ECO) constructed a boardwalk through this area. However, the boardwalk was ultimately removed because it was frequently dislocated by the changing water levels. Permanent structures are difficult to maintain in wetland areas and it is best to leave these habitats to the flora and fauna that thrive in this environment.



Oklawaha Greenway

1 The Oklawaha Greenway travels through a swamp forest habitat. Swamp forests are found in riparian areas. Only flora species that can tolerate being flooded for long periods of time can survive in a swamp forest. Some examples of trees found in this swamp forest are sycamore, red maple (see photo), silver maple, box elder, and black cherry.

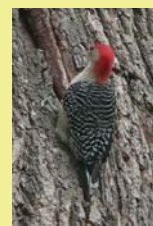


Swamp forests were historically prevalent in western North Carolina but have been greatly diminished by agriculture and development. The preservation of the remaining swamp forest areas are crucial to protect flora and fauna populations that thrive in these flood-prone riparian zones.

2 The introduction of invasive species into an ecosystem threatens the health of the natural community. An invasive species is a species that is not native to the area. Since they are not native, invasive species do not have natural predators to help keep their populations from growing rapidly. Kudzu is the most well known invasive species in the southeastern United States. Before you are three examples of invasive species, specifically: Japanese knotweed, privet, and Reed canary grass.

The rapid growth of invasive species is detrimental to native flora and fauna that compete for the same resources as the invasive species. The increase in invasive populations often results in a decrease in native flora or fauna, which reduces the biodiversity (the variation of life forms within a specified geographic region) of the ecosystem.

3 Although they can be troublesome in developed areas, dead trees (or "snags" as they are called when they are standing) play an important role in the ecosystem. Dead trees are subject to insect infestation which attract birds such as the red-bellied woodpecker (see photo). In its search for food, the woodpecker creates a cavity in the snag tree that can be used for nesting by small birds such as the chickadee.



4 You will notice numerous black boxes attached to trees along the Oklawaha Greenway. These are bat boxes (see photo), which provide resting areas for migratory bats. Bats are nocturnal mammals that use ultrasonic sounds similar to SONAR to locate prey such as mosquitoes, wasps, and other insects. Some bats eat over 1,200 insects in an hour and over half their body weight in insects each night. The migration route of brown bats crosses the Oklawaha Greenway where they are most frequently observed in March.



Many traditional bat dwellings such as trees or caves have been destroyed or disturbed by humans. Bat boxes provide a safe shelter for bats and help to keep them out of building attics.

5 This wetland area is dominated by native trees and shrubs. Buttonbush, laurel-leaf greenbrier, native spiraea, tag alder, swamp rose, black willow, and red maple can all be found here. The vegetation provides excellent habitat for migrating birds such as the indigo bunting, redwing blackbird, and the meadowlark.

Bird photos courtesy of www.birdfreak.com