Located in the western reaches of the Catskills, Bear Spring Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA) provides a full outdoor experience, with beautiful views, mountain streams, ponds, trails, and open fields that can all be easily accessed directly from the roadside. Visitors can hunt, fish, trap, watch wildlife, or hike on miles of trails. The landscape is typical of the Catskill Mountains and includes steep forested mountainsides, gentle slopes, and two valleys. Elevations range from 1,300 to 2,500 feet above sea level, and many small fields are dispersed throughout the property.

The area was first settled in the early 1800s, with logging and farming being a common way of life for settlers. Hard times saw many farms abandoned, and in the early 1930s the federal government purchased many of these local properties. New York State first leased the Bear Spring Mountain lands from the federal government in 1941 for forestry and recreation purposes, and in 1961, the Conservation Department (predecessor to DEC) purchased the property for those same uses. Today, DEC continues to manage the site’s abundant forest products, allowing the public to enjoy thousands of acres for recreation activities.

Hunters can find white-tailed deer, black bear, wild turkey, and grouse, and each year DEC releases pheasants in some of the larger fields off East Trout Brook Road. Anglers can fish for brook and brown trout in the property’s two streams, and largemouth bass, sunfish, and bullheads at Russ Grey Pond. Hikers will see multiple bird species, interesting plants, and woodland wildflowers along the trails. There is also a rustic facility for horses at the southern end of East Trout Brook Road, providing an area where horse owners can begin a ride. Winter activities include snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing.

Like most of the state’s WMAs, Bear Spring Mountain is active in New York’s Young Forest Initiative. DEC staff cut patches of forest, which results in thick, new growth of...
Site Features

NOTES: Open year-round. Hunting, trapping, fishing, and hiking are all popular activities. Bear Spring Mountain Campground is a state-operated campground within the WMA boundary that contains 41 individual campsites and facilities. There is a swimming beach and easy access to the trail system on the WMA. For camping reservations, check out https://newyorkstateparks.reserveamerica.com or call 1-800-456-CAMP (1-800-456-2267).

Individuals with disabilities can apply for a permit through the Motorized Access Program for People with Disabilities (MAPPWD) to use an ATV on the McCoy Hill Trail (Trail #2). Permittees may also use the Saint John’s Field Trail, which begins at a gate on West Trout Brook Road. Permittees are not allowed to use trucks or cars on these trails. Contact the regional DEC office (listed below) for more information.

Larry Bifaro is a Wildlife Biologist in DEC’s Stamford office.

DIRECTIONS: The property is accessed from the north from State Route 206 between the villages of Walton and Downsville, with entries at both East and West Trout Brook Roads. These two roads create a loop, making navigation easy. To access the property from the south, take Shinhopple Brook Road, which is a short drive from Rt 17/86. The WMA has multiple parking areas along the road system, but users can also safely park on the shoulder of both East and West Trout Brook Roads. Note that West Trout Brook Road is open seasonally and is not maintained in the winter.

CONTACT: For more information, visit www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/85850.html or call the DEC Region 4 Wildlife Office in Stamford at 607-652-7367.