Located in the Town of Patterson, in the northeast corner of Putnam County and within New York’s Hudson Highlands, the Cranberry Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a popular recreational destination for local residents and long-distance travelers alike. Just 50 miles north of Manhattan and less than a mile from the state boundary with Connecticut, the WMA provides critical habitat for a rare rabbit found in few other locations within New York. It also contains a 1.5-mile stretch of Haviland Hollow Brook, which supports one of the southernmost wild brook trout fisheries in the state.

The land for this WMA was first acquired in the 1960s, with two initial purchases totaling 465 acres. Thousands of acres surrounding the WMA were part of the Putnam County Cooperative Hunting Area. The “Co-op” program, created by the 1957 NYS Fish and Wildlife Management Act, allowed the then Conservation Department to administer public access on enrolled private lands. While the program has been significantly reduced from its heyday in the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s, it helped to create a strong tradition of downstate hunters traveling to the Hudson Valley for recreational possibilities.

When the Putnam County Co-op was dissolved in 1981, substantial public recreation opportunities were lost. However, some of these opportunities were reestablished with the acquisition of several large additions to Cranberry Mountain in 2011 and 2013. The WMA now encompasses about 1,100 acres.

Cranberry Mountain is dominated by upland hardwood forests, with various types of oak (red, white, black, and chestnut) and maple (red and sugar) being the most abundant tree species. Additionally, there are 15 acres of maintained fields that are surrounded by approximately 30 acres of early successional habitat created by DEC over the last decade. The WMA also contains several small ponds, the largest encompassing 2.5 acres. There are 30 acres of forested wetland and floodplain forest associated with the riparian corridor of Haviland Hollow Brook. This small stream, fed by cold, high-gradient headwater tributaries in both New York and Connecticut, provides the cool water necessary to sustain a native brook trout population.

Wildlife at the WMA include typical species such as white-tailed deer, turkey, wood thrush, and red-shouldered hawk, as well as less common species such as worm-eating warbler and cerulean warbler. Additionally, DEC stocks the fields of the WMA with ring-necked pheasants to provide additional hunting opportunities. The WMA’s larger waterbodies support largemouth bass, sunfish,
bullheads, and chain pickerel, while several vernal pools provide breeding habitat for wood frogs, spring peepers, and spotted and marbled salamanders.

The area is home to a population of New England cottontail, the only native rabbit species in southern New York east of the Hudson River. Loss of the rabbit’s preferred young forest habitat and competition with the introduced Eastern cottontail have caused dramatic declines in New England cottontail populations across their range. Along with five other northeastern states, New York is part of an initiative to help increase the number of New England cottontails through research and habitat management. Since 2013, DEC has created 30 acres of young forest at Cranberry Mountain through active management. Furthermore, a Habitat Management Plan was created for the WMA in 2016, and one of the goals includes the creation of an additional 150 acres of young forest.

Cranberry Mountain WMA is an ideal destination for outdoor recreation. The area is popular with big and small game hunters, and the property’s larger ponds and Haviland Hollow Brook provide good fishing opportunities. Additionally, there is a five-mile trail network that can be enjoyed throughout the year by hikers and other visitors (on snowshoes when appropriate).

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