

Public Use of Wildlife Management Areas

What is a Wildlife Management Area?

The Department of Environmental Conservation's Division of Fish and Wildlife administers 128 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) which comprise nearly 235,000 acres of lands and waters. These are special places, acquired and managed to: provide quality wildlife habitat; foster wildlife reproduction and survival; promote wildlife-dependent recreation and enjoyment-including hunting, trapping, wildlife observation and photography; and protect soil and water quality. Wildlife Management Areas provide and protect natural habitats that are particularly significant in their capacity to host unusual concentrations of one or more wildlife species; provide important resting and feeding areas for migratory birds or other wildlife; harbor rare, threatened, or endangered species; or provide significant value for wildlife or human enjoyment of wildlife.

How do they differ from State Forests?

Wildlife Management Areas should not be confused with State Forest Lands, which were acquired primarily to offset agricultural abandonment and deforestation, and are managed by the Division of Lands and Forests for multiple purposes, including water quality, ecosystem health, forest management, and recreational opportunities. New York's 442 State Forests greatly outnumber WMAs and comprise nearly 800,000 acres.

Please see: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7768.html>, for information regarding WMAs and <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/44115.html> for rules regarding the use of Lands and Forests properties.

How does DEC determine what activities are allowed on WMAs?

To ensure WMAs provide benefits for wildlife and for New Yorkers, DEC adheres to a set of broad goals based on statutory, regulatory, and policy guidance, as a basis to determine compatibility of public uses.

PRIMARY GOALS

GOAL 1—Provide and enhance habitat for a diversity of wildlife with an emphasis on game species and those species listed as Endangered, Threatened, Special Concern, or listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in New York's State Wildlife Action Plan --please see <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7494.html> and <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7179.html>).

GOAL 2—Provide and enhance opportunities to participate in wildlife-dependent recreation (e.g., hunting, trapping, fishing, wildlife observation, and photography) that are compatible with the ecological integrity of the area.

SECONDARY GOALS

GOAL 3—Foster understanding and instill appreciation of the diversity and interconnectedness of wildlife and their habitats.

GOAL 4—Allow for non-wildlife-dependent recreation (e.g., hiking, biking, horseback riding, skiing, and dog training or trials) provided the activity is compatible with the primary goals associated with wildlife-dependent recreation and wildlife habitat enhancement.

The lists below summarize compatibility of public use activities on WMAs.

Primary, secondary, and restricted uses of WMAs:

- A. **Primary Activities:** Wildlife-dependent activities consistent with the primary goals and purposes of WMAs. These may be restricted during certain times or in specific areas to protect sensitive species or habitats or to reduce conflicts with user groups.
 1. Hunting
 2. Trapping
 3. Wildlife observation
 4. Wildlife and nature photography
 5. Fishing
- B. **Secondary Activities:** Not necessarily wildlife-dependent but generally compatible with the goals and purposes of WMAs.
 1. Non-powered boating with a canoe, kayak, or rowboat.
 2. Hiking
 3. Bicycling on WMA roads, specific trails, or boardwalks
 4. Cross-country (Nordic) skiing or snowshoeing
- C. **Restricted activities:** These activities are typically *not* wildlife-dependent and have the potential to adversely affect wildlife or wildlife-dependent recreation. On WMAs, they are allowed on a limited basis, with conditions, and may require a temporary revocable permit (TRP) or Volunteer Stewardship Agreement (VSA) issued by the regional DEC office. *Please view the specific WMA web page or contact the regional DEC office for additional information (see <http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/50230.html> for the DEC regional office directory).*
 1. Horseback riding: allowed only on roads and specifically-signed trails and typically limited to certain times of the year.
 2. Snowmobiles: Restricted to designated trails, along roads, and marked connector routes between trail systems.
 3. Motorized vehicles, including ATVs: Restricted to designated and posted roads.
 4. Collecting edible plants, fruit, or fungi: Immediate personal consumption allowed. All other collection requires a permit on a case-by-case basis. No collection for commercial use or resale is allowed.
 5. Training dogs on wild game during the training season (August 16 to April 15) does not require a permit. All other dog training, all dog trials, and any training outside these dates require a TRP from the regional DEC office.

Restricted activities authorized only under permit issued through the Regional DEC Office:

1. Dog trials and group training events: Restricted to applicable training periods per New York State Environmental Conservation Law (ECL), August 16-April 15.
2. Camping: where permitted; restricted to designated locations
3. Organized competitive races or group events: Considered on a case-by-case basis and only allowed if there will be no adverse impacts to habitat, wildlife, or priority uses.
4. Geocaching: Requires written permission from regional DEC office; must avoid sensitive habitats and expected user conflict areas.
5. Drone flying: Not allowed unless it is a permitted wildlife, habitat management, or research flight.

Other Activities:

Other non-wildlife dependent activities not listed above are generally not compatible with the intended purposes and management of WMAs. Wildlife Management Area regulations contained in 6NYCRR, subchapter G cover prohibitions and limitations for some activities, but others are addressed on a case-by-case basis to determine if they can or should be allowed. Use compatibility is then determined by examining the proposed activity's impact on wildlife conservation and wildlife-dependent uses.