



# MIDDLE CREEK IN MOTION

Middle Creek is comprised of public lands where many different types of recreation is allowed, including hunting, biking, hiking, non-motorized boating, and much more.



## MIDDLE CREEK SPRING MIGRATION



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Here and gone! That’s the summary of the spring migration for snow geese and tundra swans for 2026. With lingering sub-freezing temperatures into late February keeping much of the lake frozen, the snow geese arrived three weeks later than in 2025. We had an initial influx of birds on February 24 with 60,000 for the first count of the year. If

you follow us on Facebook, you were likely dazzled by the video we posted from Willow Point of these 60,000 birds taking off for the day with a rich sunrise emerging behind the whirlwind of birds. Much of the lake remained frozen for several more weeks which inhibited our overnight roosting numbers. We did see numbers increase throughout the daytime hours up to

around 35,000 birds, which allowed visitors throughout the day to see the show. We estimated over 5,000 visitors made the walk down Willow Point trail the last weekend in February. With continued warming temperatures the first week of March, we had a second influx of birds on March 6 with our peak for the year at 65,000.

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Up for discussion at the next Board of Commissioners meeting is seasons and bag limits with the proposal to remove the conservation season for snow geese and just go to a regular hunting season that would end in March. Conservation seasons are designed to manage overabundant wildlife populations outside of the regular hunting season. If you look at the overall population trends of greater snow geese in the eastern flyway between 2016 and 2025, the

total population is down from 915,000 in 2016 to 428,000 in 2025. The greater snow goose population is monitored on the spring staging areas near the St. Lawrence Valley in Quebec by an annual aerial photographic survey (ref. USFWS Waterfowl Report 2025).

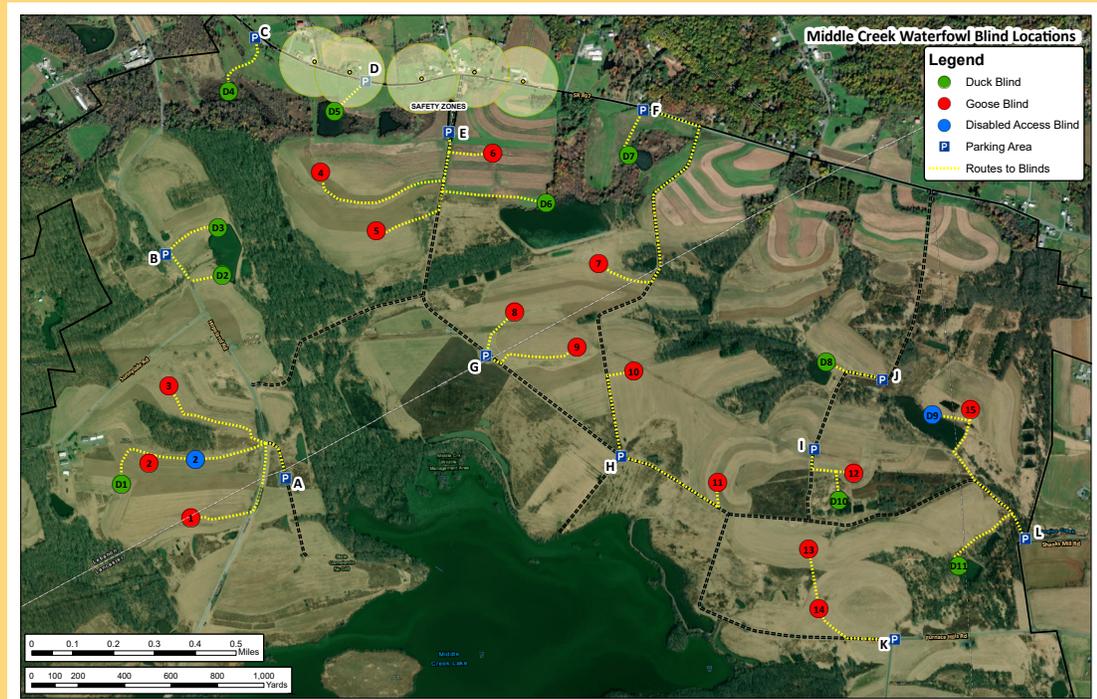
With Middle Creek being a stopover point for many snow geese on their route back north, we're just a snapshot of a much larger population moving north. Will we ever see 200,000 birds stopping to visit Middle Creek in the

future? Only time will tell, but the data seems to suggest the overall population is stabilizing and our new normal may be in the range of 60,000-100,000 birds like we've seen the last two years. If you've ever stood under this many birds during their morning flight, you know it's still a spectacular show and one you should consider seeing for yourself each year. We look forward to having you join us next year for spring migration at Middle Creek!

## 2025-2026 HUNT SUMMARY

The waterfowl season here at Middle Creek came to an end on Saturday, January 17th. While we have had seasons with higher harvests, The 2025-26 season provided much better hunting conditions and more than double the number of harvests from the previous year. Although it has been a dry winter with low precipitation again, earlier rains filled many of our impoundments.

There was a total of fourteen hunt days this season, including the Delta Waterfowl University Hunt and the mentored waterfowl hunt. Though consistently cold temperatures and frozen impoundments slowed the hunting, especially for ducks, we were fortunate to have several days with good conditions for waterfowl hunting.



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For the season, hunters harvested 93 ducks and 65 geese. The ducks consisted of 10 species. Mallards (42), American green winged teal(15), American black ducks (11), gadwall (8), bufflehead (6), northern shoveler (6), American wigeon (1), hooded merganser (1), northern pintail (1), ring-necked duck (1). Canada geese accounted for 63 of the geese, along with 2 snow geese.

One particularly interesting harvest this year was a mallard harvested on January 15th that had originally been banded in Arkansas.

It is always interesting to see what areas of the property the hot spots for harvests will be, and this year duck blind D5 outshined them all with 27 ducks and 4 geese. Duck blind 6 followed in second with 15 ducks and 4 geese. As for goose blinds, G2 lead the way with 6 followed closely by blinds G1, G5, and G10 with 5 geese each. Interestingly, goose blind 5 did not harvest a goose this year but, benefiting from its proximity to D5, managed to harvest 11 ducks.

We were able to bring a new duck blind (D10) into use this year and are looking forward to another new blind (D1) to be ready to hunt next year.

In the deer hunting world, our controlled archery/flintlock hunt took place January 7th and hunters harvested 6 nice does. That brings our total deer harvest for our controlled hunts up to 17 for the season. Some freezers are definitely full with meat and our habitat is better managed as a result!

## MIDDLE CREEK PHOTOGRAPHY

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Photo by Tom Russo

### EASTERN COTTONTAIL

The Easter Bunny is another cultural gift of Pennsylvania Dutch folklore and that of other early central European immigrants. Our eastern cottontail disappointingly does not lay nor deliver eggs! Pennsylvania has 3 native lagomorphs (the scientific group that includes rabbits, hares, and pikas): the eastern cottontail, Appalachian cottontail, and snowshoe hare. Providing native plant cover and brush piles will help you to see more cottontails in your backyard!



Photo by Kristin Yaquinta

### GRAY SQUIRREL

Gray squirrels provide an easy way to experience Pennsylvania wildlife but may be a source of frustration for the backyard birdfeeder. They're adaptable to different habitats and active year-round. They utilize two types of nests. Most common are nests in tree branches made of leaves and finer organic materials. Used in warmer months, these nests are generally waterproof. In colder times, squirrels nest in tree cavities.



Photo by Michele Laucks

### BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER

Some birders seek out warblers after the spring waterfowl migration winds down at Middle Creek. But like waterfowl, all species of warblers are not the same and arrive at slightly different times. The black-and-white warbler is one of the earliest to arrive and will often be seen feeding in trees, like this tulip tree, similar to nuthatches. Warblers stand out for their diversity of bright colors, but the zebra-like stripes still manage to catch one's eyes.



## BIG GRASSLANDS, BIG IDEAS

A large portion of North America's grasslands have been lost. Development, agriculture, loss of natural disturbances like fire, and many other changes have led to this decline. It shouldn't be surprising, then, that grassland birds have also declined by 40% since the 1960s.

Out of all the human-created landscapes, agriculture areas are one of the few habitats where grassland birds can still exist. Grassland birds found in such areas include barn owls, American Kestrels, bobolinks, eastern meadowlarks, and grasshopper sparrows.

Some of these species are in decline, even on farms. Agricultural practices continue

to change favoring efficiency. But the loss of herbaceous buffers along drainage areas, roads, and between fields and the change in the timing of harvesting hay have generally caused negative impacts for birds.

Middle Creek has been a haven for such grassland species and can provide further positive impacts with some tweaks in habitat management. Short-eared owls, northern harriers, upland sandpipers, and Henslow's sparrows require large grasslands — large, continuous areas not broken up by larger trees or areas dominated by non-native shrubs like autumn olives and honeysuckle.

Natural grasslands used to span hundreds of thousands of acres in Pennsylvania and were connected to the

grasslands of the southeastern United States.

Continuous grasslands, with some native woody vegetation patches throughout, could be a big boost that many species desperately need in areas of Middle Creek that aren't currently used for waterfowl habitat and hunting opportunities.

Over the coming years, visitors may see tree lines between field complexes removed to create these expansive open areas. Agriculture fields not used by Canada geese will also be converted to native grassland habitat, managed with prescribed fire.

Stay tuned for future public programs and newsletter articles to learn more about grasslands and prescribed fire!



## 2026 EVENT OFFERINGS AT MIDDLE CREEK

We published our 2026 Event Guide in January, with another busy year of public events ahead.

In addition to the monthly Outdoor Explorer and Speaker Series, as well as our five annual events, visitors can look forward to some other free monthly programs.

As in past years, archery programs will be available at the Willow Point Archery Range. Most archery programs are for general audiences, any age or ability.

May 20 will be a women's archery shoot, and August 26 will be a crossbow shoot. These programs are for beginners to get started with the basics of archery. All archery programs run from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Leading up to October's Speaker Series, there will be free monthly screenings of the documentary Mountain Souls. This documentary follows the lives of Robert and Dottie Webber who lived in the wilderness of the PA Wilds for over 50 years in a log cabin with no electricity, running water, or plumbing. Director Jeff Swingholm will be speaking on Wednesday October 14 at 6:30 p.m. in our auditorium about the documentary. Both Robert and Jeff are natives of Schaefferstown, Pennsylvania.

Public opportunities to observe songbird banding and research will be available again this year. Dates and sign-up information can be found here: [bit.ly/473OyM7](https://bit.ly/473OyM7)

### SAVE THE DATES FOR OUR FOLLOWING ANNUAL EVENTS:

- » World Migratory Bird Day: Saturday, May 9 (10 a.m.-2 p.m.)
- » Pennsylvania Conservation Collectables Expo: Saturday, June 27 (9 a.m.-2 p.m.)
- » Wildlife Art Show: Friday, July 31 (12-5 p.m.), August 1 (9 a.m.-5 p.m.), and August 2, (10 a.m.-4 p.m.)
- » National Hunting and Fishing Day: Sunday, September 27 (11 a.m.-4 p.m.)
- » Wild Goose Chase 5K Race: Saturday, August 29 (9 a.m.)

Further event details can be found in our 2026 Event Guide.

# MIDDLE CREEK WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

## EVENTS OVERVIEW

### April

#### **MOUNTAIN SOULS MOVIE SCREENING**

**Wednesday, April 21 at 12:00 p.m. in the auditorium**

#### **CERULEAN WARBLER HABITAT IN THE KITTATINNY RIDGE**

**Wednesday, April 8 at 6:30 p.m. in the auditorium**

Cerulean Warblers, once widespread in the eastern U.S., have declined by about 70% since 1966 due to habitat loss and degradation. The Kittatinny Ridge Conservation Landscape (KRCL) provides critical breeding habitat, and targeted forest management — such as shelterwood harvests, canopy gap creation, and crop tree release — has been implemented to restore the structural diversity these birds need. As a designated climate refugia, the ridge also helps buffer biodiversity from the impacts of climate change, supporting long-term resilience for forest-dwelling species.

#### **PRESCRIBED FIRE FESTIVAL**

**Saturday, April 18 at 10:00 a.m. (rain date: April 25)**

Discover the benefits of prescribed fire and watch one live! Habitat managers will be on hand to answer questions and display the equipment that enables the safe use of fire as a natural management tool for forests and fields. Guided walks to other burn units and a food truck will be available. This event has a rain date, so keep an eye out for last minute event information. Call the Middle Creek Visitors Center for more information.

### May

#### **WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY**

**Saturday, May 9 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.**

Discover the wonders of bird migration and interact with the local organizations making an impact in your community to help protect birds! Live bird banding demonstrations will be scheduled if conditions allow and a food truck will be on-site.

#### **STEWARDSHIP FOR BIODIVERSITY**

**Wednesday, May 13 at 6:30 p.m. in the auditorium**

Todd Bauman, Director of Stewardship for Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, will take us behind the scenes of what it takes to manage Hawk Mountain Sanctuary for its intended purpose — protection of ALL wildlife. The job of stewarding wildlands has many challenges, and those challenges are increased when annually hosting 60,000 visitors and a public road dividing the property.

#### **WOMEN'S ARCHERY EVENT**

**Wednesday, May 20 from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Willow Point Archery Range**

#### **MOUNTAIN SOULS MOVIE SCREENING**

**Wednesday, May 23 at 12:00 p.m. in the auditorium**

#### **WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE FIELD**

**Saturday, May 23 at 1:00 p.m.**

This program, featuring photographer Joe Endy, covers choosing the right cameras, lenses, and settings for outdoor wildlife photography. Get tips on locating and photographing different wildlife depending on the subject, area, and weather conditions. Bring your own camera or learn from others using theirs.

### June

#### **ARCHERY PROGRAM**

**Wednesday, June 3 from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Willow Point Archery Range**

#### **MOUNTAIN SOULS MOVIE SCREENING**

**Saturday, June 6 at 12:00 p.m. in the Auditorium**

#### **WILDLIFE CORRIDORS AND CONSERVATION CONNECTIVITY IN PENNSYLVANIA**

**Wednesday, June 10 at 6:30 p.m.**

Join us for a conversation about wildlife corridors in Pennsylvania with State Representative Mary Jo Daley. Home to the largest highway system and ranking second for wildlife-vehicle collisions, Pennsylvania needed to reduce these incidents. Her legislation initiated a study of existing corridors as a step to create safer roads for people and large and small animals.

#### **ARCHERY PROGRAM**

**Wednesday, June 17 from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Willow Point Archery Range**

MIDDLE CREEK WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA



**Pennsylvania  
Game Commission**  
YOUR STATE WILDLIFE AGENCY

### HEADQUARTERS

2001 Elmerton Avenue, Harrisburg, PA 17110  
Phone: 717-787-4250

## REGION OFFICES

### NORTHWEST REGION

1509 Pittsburgh Road, Franklin, PA 16323

**SERVING:** Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, Warren counties

### SOUTHWEST REGION

4820 Route 711, Bolivar, PA 15923

**SERVING:** Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Somerset, Washington, Westmoreland counties

### NORTHCENTRAL REGION

1566 South Route 44 Highway, P.O. BOX 5038, Jersey Shore, PA 17740

**SERVING:** Cameron, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, Lycoming, McKean, Potter, Tioga, Union counties

### SOUTHCENTRAL REGION

8627 William Penn Highway, Huntingdon, PA 16652

**SERVING:** Adams, Bedford, Blair, Cumberland, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Mifflin, Perry, Snyder, York counties

### NORTHEAST REGION

3917 Memorial Highways, Dallas, PA 18612

**SERVING:** Bradford, Carbon, Columbia, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Montour, Northumberland, Pike, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Wayne, Wyoming counties

### SOUTHEAST REGION

253 Snyder Road, Reading, PA 19605

**SERVING:** Berks, Bucks, Chester, Dauphin, Delaware, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Montgomery, Northampton, Philadelphia, Schuylkill counties

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## VISITORS CENTER

### HOURS OF OPERATION:

*Notice: Middle Creek Visitor Center is currently closed and will reopen on January 20, 2026.*

**Monday** - Closed

**Tuesday - Sunday:** 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

### MAILING ADDRESS

Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area, P.O. Box 110, Kleinfeltersville, PA 17039

### VISITORS CENTER ADDRESS

100 Museum Rd, Stevens, PA 17578

**PHONE NUMBER:** 717-733-1512

**EMAIL ADDRESS:** [middlecreek@pa.gov](mailto:middlecreek@pa.gov)

## OUR HOURS HAVE CHANGED

Starting when the Visitors Center reopens on Tuesday, January 20th, our Sunday hours are expanding! We're excited to announce that Sundays will now match our weekday schedule: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. This means three additional hours for visitors to explore the center each Sunday.