

History, habitat & nature's diversity in Morgan County's Wildlife Management Areas

Morgan County is home to three Wildlife Management Areas, overseen by the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. Each area was given to or bought by to the state to be put in trust for the public to enjoy, and to provide a habitat for local wildlife to thrive and multiply.

Each area is open to the public, primarily for hunting and fishing, but they have no park amenities and often no marked trails. Visitors should consult DNR maps of each area.

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Widmeyer WMA

Acreage and Acquisition: 435 acres. Donated to WVDNR in 1977 by Lois and Lester Widmeyer. The Widmeyers acquired the land circa 1951 from the Niner family, who built the now-defunct Panorama Steak House at the overlook on Route 9.

Habitat Description:

Approximately 99% of this area is covered by upland oak-pine mixed forest; common tree species include Chestnut Oak, Red Oak, Black Oak, Scarlet Oak, Virginia Pine, White Pine, and Pitch Pine. There are two small ephemeral streams that drain to the Potomac River. Peak elevation is approximately 900 feet.

Wildlife Species: White-tailed Deer, Wild Turkey, squirrels (gray and fox), Raccoon, Virginia Opossum, Striped Skunks, Red Fox, Gray Fox, coyotes, and Black Bears may be found on this WMA in varying abundance.

Birding Prospects: Birders can expect to find "backyard bird species," habitat generalists, and some species associated with mature closed-canopy forests. Wood Thrush, Pine Warbler, American Redstart, Blackburnian Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Scarlet Tanager, Ovenbird, Eastern Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Black-capped Chickadee, Great Crested Fly-

catcher, Eastern Phoebe, Song Sparrow, Least Flycatcher, Eastern Wood-Pewee, American Robin, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Pileated Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak are all species that may be encountered on the area.

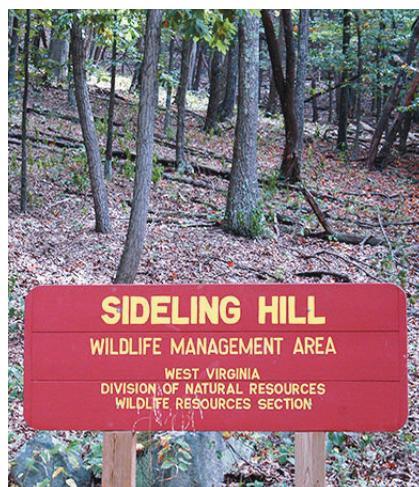
Recreational Facilities: There are no developed and maintained foot trails or roads on this WMA, so hikers and birders will need to be in physical condition adequate for traversing rough country without a trail or road to facilitate entry. Historic roads are still visible on the parcel. Camping, mountain biking, and horseback riding are not permitted on the area.

Access to the WMA is from a parking lot along Bennett Lane off Cacapon Road, or a gravel parking lot along Cacapon Road just east of the Panorama Overlook.

Sideling Hill WMA

Acreage and Acquisition: 2,415 acres. The property was originally purchased from A.W. Moore by The Conservation Fund in an effort to preserve the integrity of a large forested tract. It was protected from future development or subdivision by an easement acquired through the Forest Legacy Program in 2004.

The Division of Natural Resources purchased the property from The Conservation Fund in 2012 and



A modest plaque marks one edge of the public land.

follows a forest stewardship management plan for the area.

The property west of Great Cacapon had been leased and hunted by the Tri-State Hunting Club for several generations.

History: This area was the second state-owned WMA purchased by the DNR in Morgan County. It encompasses a portion of the southern terminus of Sideling Hill (colonial maps from the 1700s reference the ridge as Side Long Hill), which begins in Huntingdon County, Pa. Both the PA Game Commission and the MD Department of Natural Resources own substantial tracts of state game land/wildlife management area along the length of the ridge. Sideling Hill was, up until the late 1700s or perhaps early 1800s, an important north-south travel corridor for both indigenous peoples and white settlers. The proximity of an historic Shawnee village - one of the oldest known - at Oldtown, Md. makes it probable this area was once an important historical hunting area for native tribes that inhabited the region prior to European colonization.

From the late 19th to early 20th centuries, extensive timber harvesting occurred on the area as is typical for forested regions of the northeast. In 1929, the now-West Virginia Division of Forestry constructed a fire

observation tower atop Sideling Hill on the WMA; this tower was operational until its retirement by circa 1990. The remains of the old fire tower can still be found on the top of the ridge in the northern third of the WMA.

Habitat Description: The overwhelming majority of the area is covered by forest of multiple age classes. Forest types represented are predominantly oak-hickory in composition, with some cove hardwood, tulip-poplar, and mixed pine components. Timber ages range from approximately 20 years (saplings and small pole-timber) to 75+ years (large trees in areas that were not harvested since likely clear-cutting in the early 20th Century). Numerous ephemeral streams and the headwaters of a few perennial streams that drain to the Cacapon River (east slope) or Potomac River (west slope) originate on the WMA, but none of these support populations of wild trout or other game fish.

Wildlife Species: White-tailed Deer, Wild Turkey, Black Bear, Porcupine, squirrels (gray and fox), Raccoon, Virginia Opossum, Bobcat, Red Fox, Gray Fox, Coyote, Fisher, Least Weasel, Long-tailed Weasel, and Striped Skunks may be found on the area in varying abundance.

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