

## BUSHY HILL NATURE PRESERVE & PLATT PROPERTY



*The Wolf Tree*

Bushy Hill Nature Preserve, located off Bushy Hill Road in Ivoryton, is 137 acres of well-marked trails open to the public for exploring. Managed by the Essex Conservation Commission, the preserve is a wilderness where people may enjoy native plants and animals in their natural habitat. The original 107 acre tract of land was purchased in 1974 by the Town of Essex from Adelaide M. Warner with the help of state and federal funding. An additional 30 acres, acquired by the Essex Land Trust in 2007, adjoins the preserve's southern boundary.

### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Preserve is forested former pasture land with many stone walls. A footbridge built by Essex Eagle Scouts crosses a small stream on Trail #1. Trail #2 encircles a once impressive hemlock grove damaged by wooly adelgid. Trail #5, cut by the Essex Land Trust through the southern section, offers a variety of upland and wetlands terrain. Many people consider the highlight of the preserve to be the wolf tree, an ancient white oak that once spread shade for grazing animals in the former pasture land. After the pasture was abandoned, the forest took over.

### PLANTS AND ANIMALS

The forest canopy consists of oak, hickory, birch, beech and ash trees. Red maples dominate wet regions and younger forest areas are full of red cedar, dogwood and black cherry. Across the trail from the wolf tree are several pitch pines indicating there may have been a fire during the last hundred years

because pitch pines thrive in burned out areas. The wet understory features spicebush, sweet pepper bush, cinnamon fern, skunk cabbage, false hellebore and cardinal flowers. Dry understory consists of mountain laurel, various ferns and wildflowers including violets, Solomon's seal, rattlesnake plantain, partridgeberry, lady's slipper, Indian pipes and wintergreen. Fungi appear in late summer. Common mammals in the preserve are whitetailed deer, gray foxes, raccoons, opossums, gray squirrels, southern flying squirrels, chipmunks, white-footed mice and deer mice. Frequent birds are woodpeckers, crows, cardinals, jays, chickadees, grouse, mourning doves, and tufted titmice. Springtime brings warblers, native sparrows, thrushes, vireos, and flycatchers. Hawks and owls are seen and heard occasionally.

### STEWARDSHIP PROJECTS

Besides pruning tree limbs and maintaining the trail system, stewardship projects include a patch-cut of several acres to bring sunlight back to the forest floor to rejuvenate the understory and ground cover in an effort to benefit wildlife.

### VISITING THE PRESERVE

The preserve has a main entrance on Bushy Hill Road and a secondary entrance on Oakledge Drive. Parking is available at both entrances. You are welcome to visit the preserve and walk the trails during daylight hours. Posted guidelines give reminders on how best to protect the natural resources in the preserve. Smoking, fires, horses, bicycles and vehicles of any type, collecting of floral species, hunting or use of fire arms are prohibited. The preserve is not to be used as a playground or camp ground, a bike path or horse trail. Dogs must be leashed or at heel. Your cooperation is appreciated and helps to maintain the natural character of this wilderness.

### SUGGESTIONS AND CAUTIONS

The trails are well identified by color-coded markers. If a trail is new to you, be conscious of landmarks as you proceed. While in the woods, plan ahead and avoid darkness. Watch for slippery conditions in muddy, snowy and freezing weather. If you sense you are lost, pause and consider some things that might guide you back to "civilization." For example: the lay of the land, the position of the sun and sounds you may recognize.

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