

Vassar Farm & Ecological Preserve

The Vassar Farm and Ecological Preserve provides the community with opportunities to observe nature. Please respect the preserve by following these guidelines:

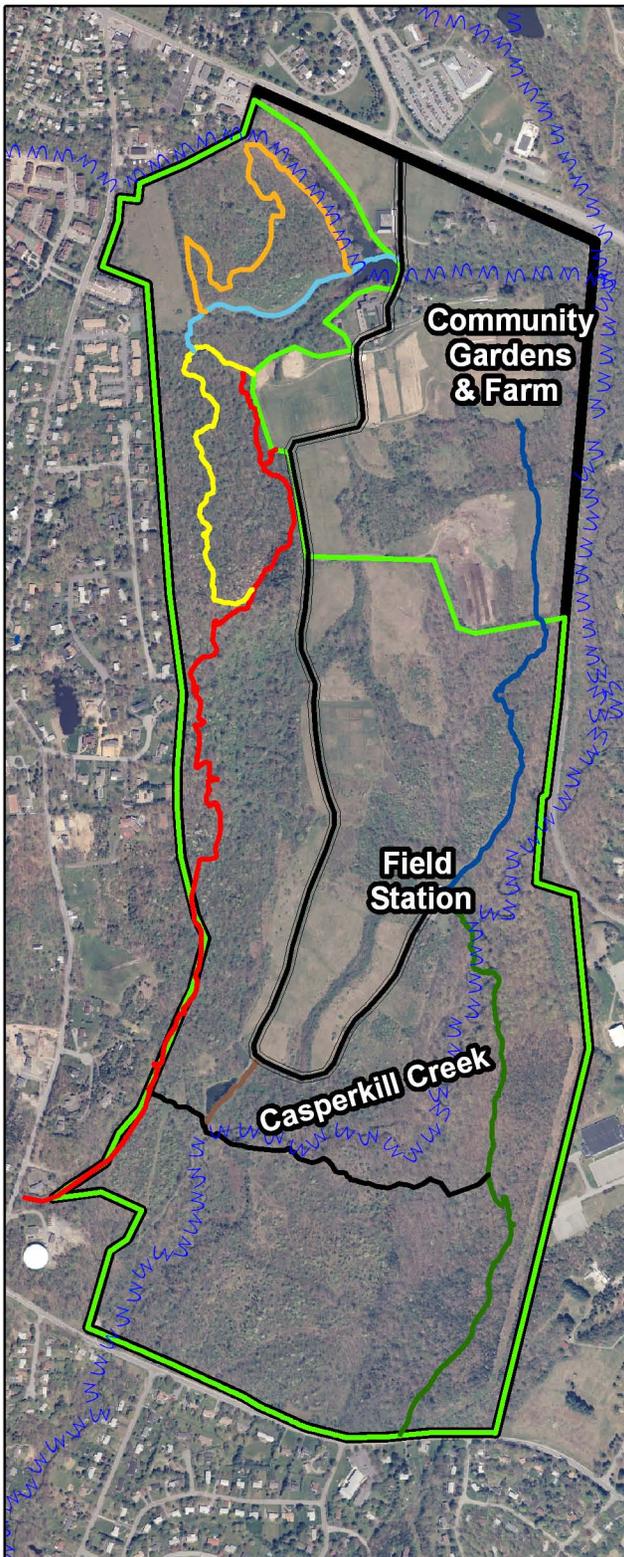
- Leave it as you find it- do not pick flowers, remove artifacts, release plants or animals, build structures, or in any way modify the terrain.
- Stay on marked trails.
- Keep dogs leashed and clean up after them.
- Carry your trash out with you.
- Never feed wildlife.

Be safe:

- Reduce your chances of contracting Lyme disease by checking yourself for ticks after visiting the preserve.
- Know what poison ivy looks like and avoid it.

Legend

-  Collins Trail; 1.03 mi
-  North Trail; 0.68 mi
-  Swain Trail; 0.35 mi
-  Drumlin Trail; 0.55 mi
-  Helen Johnson Woodworth Memorial Trail; 1.44 mi
-  Wright Trail; 0.51 mi
-  Quercus Trail; 0.88 mi
-  Davies Trail; 0.11 mi
-  Farm Road; 1.62
-  Streams
-  Vassar Property
-  Ecological Preserve



The mission of the Vassar Ecological Preserve is to protect and preserve the ecological diversity of the land to ensure that its educational value will be maintained in perpetuity. The Vassar Ecological Preserve promotes increased understanding and appreciation of the natural systems on the preserve through field based education and research.

If you have questions or comments, please contact Keri VanCamp at 845-437-7414 or by e-mail at kevincamp@vassar.edu

For more information please visit our new website:
<http://farm.vassar.edu>

Vassar Farm & Ecological Preserve



History of the Vassar Farm

Ever since Vassar College was founded in 1865 there have been farming operations somewhere on campus. Thirty years after the college was founded, it acquired the first 200 acres of land that would later become part of the Vassar Farm. The land was purchased to create an innovative “settling field” (similar to a septic field) to deal with the college’s sewage. The remnants of the settling fields can still be seen in the northwest corner of the preserve. In 1911, the college received the adjacent 300 acres as a gift; the two parcels and some smaller pieces of land were combined and the farming operation was relocated here. The farm included a model dairy and poultry farm, greenhouses, stables, and storage barns. The milk and vegetables grown were served at the college’s tables. In WWI and WWII, farm help was in short supply and the Vassar women began to work as farm hands. As early as 1917, the “Farmerettes” took to the fields and demonstrated their ability to perform the same physically demanding labor as men. By the mid 1940s, biology and geology students were also using the farm as study sites. By 1957, the farming operation was no longer

economically viable and the operation was shut down. Education and research became the primary uses of the abandoned farmland. In 1976, a large portion of the farm was established as a center for ecological research and conservation.

Vassar Farm & Eco-Preserve Today

Education

The Vassar Farm & Ecological Preserve is an invaluable educational resource. It is used for field-based education, research, and athletics. Current research projects are examining invasive vegetation, deer overpopulation, stream health, owl migration, and amphibian development. The Priscilla Bullitt Collins Field Station is a modern laboratory that makes field research at the preserve convenient and accessible.

The Ecological Preserve is also home to the Exploring Science program. This program is a hands-on science education collaboration between Vassar College and various Poughkeepsie-area elementary schools. Each year, teachers and Vassar students instruct approximately 1,300 children about natural history and ecology through lessons, experiments, and outdoor activities.

Ecology

A wide variety of habitats are present on the Vassar Farm and Ecological Preserve. These habitats host many different types of plants and animals.

The **grasslands** in the center of the preserve are maintained as open areas by mowing. You can observe field sparrows, bluebirds, red-tailed hawks, rabbits, and even migrating bobolinks amongst the grasses and goldenrod.

Over time, abandoned fields become dominated by woody vegetation and turn into **shrublands**. Shrubs such as viburnum, honeysuckle, and crab apple provide cover and food for blue-winged warblers and towhees in the shrublands that are scattered throughout the preserve.

The **wetlands and ponds** at the north and south reaches of the preserve are havens for painted turtles, great blue herons, and wood ducks.

The **drumlin**, a ridge on the west edge of the preserve, was formed from glacial till left by retreating glaciers. It was once cleared for agriculture but is now a young forest.

In the southeast corner of the preserve, the Casperkill Creek flows through a **floodplain forest**. This area is home to barred owls and some of the oldest trees on the preserve. Oaks, sycamores, maples and beeches dominate the canopy there.

Other Uses

The Vassar Ecological Preserve is one of the last open spaces in Poughkeepsie’s urban landscape. It is a perfect place to observe wildlife, run, and hike. There are marked trails throughout the preserve that are open for public use. Please respect our mission and leave no trace of your visit.

The Community Gardens are garden plots that are available for community members to rent on a first-come, first-served basis. Other organizations also utilize this open space. Greenway Environmental is a composting facility that is committed to zero waste systems. The Poughkeepsie Farm Project is a non-profit CSA committed to a just and sustainable food system in the Mid-Hudson Valley. Look these organizations up on the Internet for more information or to schedule a visit.