



What's Happening at Blue Marsh Lake?

USACE

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Winter is a Great Season to Get Outdoors

Welcome to winter! There is no need to be suffering from cabin fever. Get outdoors at Blue Marsh Lake. It is not the busy season, there are no bugs to contend with when it is cold, and you don't get all sweaty. The winter season offers excellent birding opportunities, especially if there is no ice. In fact, if you need some expert guidance, Joan Silagy is leading a bird walk on Wednesday February 20 at 1:00 p.m. at the Visitor Center.

Blue Marsh Lake is quiet and peaceful during the winter. There are no crowds to deal with, which is especially nice. The only time you might find the gates closed is after a snowfall. But once we are able to get out and plow the roads everything will reopen. As for the trails, you can use them year-round. The only problem is that you might encounter a downed tree or large branches across the trail. Last year was especially challenging when it came to keeping the trail clear. There were many storms that were accompanied by strong winds, including Hurricane Sandy. Crews were kept very busy clearing the trails of downed trees. We are always looking for volunteers to help with trail clearing. Volunteers Karen and Ken Speiker have adopted a section of trail and do a great job maintaining their section of trail. It is a lot of work trying to keep over 30 miles of trails cleared of brush and other debris. And please carry your trash out with you. As you can see, snow or no snow, Blue Marsh is a great place to visit and offers a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities. I will be looking for you on the trails.



Recreation Spotlight—Cross-Country Skiing

I discovered cross-country skiing when I was in college, and loved it. Unlike a lot of folks, I enjoy the snow. Winter has become a season of magic for me. Skiing and snowshoeing offers great opportunities to look for animal tracks and wildlife. And anybody can do it. If you can walk, you can ski. Once you get the necessary equipment, which includes skis, poles, and boots; you do not have to spend a lot of money. There are no lift tickets needed, but unfortunately, you do need snow. Start out by skiing on flat, open areas. This enables you to get use to kicking and gliding on your skis. And when skiing, dress in layers, as you will warm up quickly. It is great exercise, and also offers you the opportunity to be among the animals on a snowy afternoon.



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Control Tower Tour, February 16, Saturday, 10:00 a.m., Visitor Center
Wee Ones Walk - Walk on the Wild Side, February 20, Wednesday, 10:00 a.m., Conference Center
Bird Walk, February 20, Wednesday, 1:00 p.m., Visitor Center
Home School Field Day, February 22, Friday, 9:30 a.m., Conference Center
Family Fun Day This Bud's For You, February 23, Saturday, 10 a.m., Dry Brooks Day Use Area
American Woodcock Program, March 8, Friday, 6 p.m., Conference Center
Hike with a Ranger, March 9, Saturday, 8:00 a.m., Visitor Center

Ice Safety

It is that time of year where the lure of a frozen lake can lead to a very dangerous situation. There is no such thing as “safe ice”. Even if ice thickness is great enough to support your weight, the hazard of slipping and falling is still there. If you are going to venture out onto the ice please take the necessary precautions to be as safe as possible. Some of the items you should have to go out onto the ice are shoes with good tread, a long staff or pole, ice awls, and a personal flotation device. Use the pole to tap or test the ice in front and to the side of you as you walk and always keep your ice awls easily accessible in case you fall through the ice. What are ice awls you might ask? Ice awls are hand held devices with some sort of a point that can be used to stab the ice to provide a solid hold to aid in pulling yourself out of a whole in the ice.

If the ice starts to crack under your feet, lay down on the ice and spread your weight out, slide yourself off of the ice using the same path you took to get to your location. If you feel yourself falling through the ice, position your ice staff across your body and under your arms to form the letter “T”. The ends of the staff might catch on solid ice and keep your upper body out of the water. If you find yourself in the water, try to remain calm and perform a self rescue by striking the ice in a stabbing motion with the ice awls and pulling yourself from the whole. Always have a buddy while recreating on or around ice and if you are alone, make sure someone knows where you are and what time you are supposed to return. Taking these necessary steps can minimize your chance of getting hurt while recreating on the ice.



Ice Awls

Meet Education Volunteer Joan Silagy

Education Volunteer Joan Silagy has been volunteering at Blue Marsh Lake for at least 30 years. She is an expert naturalist and bird watcher, and has shared her skills with numerous people over the years. Joan has been involved in the planning of all of our nature trails, as well as the gardens at the Visitor Center and Eyes of the Eagle Sensory Trail. Blue Marsh was recognized as an “Important Bird Area” by the Audubon Society thanks to Joan nominating the lake. She and her late husband Bob were instrumental in getting two osprey nesting platforms installed on the project grounds. She has also taken the lead in producing the “Birds of Blue Marsh” brochure, which she is currently updating for the next printing. Joan’s hobbies include reading, gardening and bird watching, but Blue Marsh Lake is her passion. She and her late husband also led bird watching trips in New Mexico and Arizona. I was lucky enough to go on one in New Mexico, and it was awesome! We saw so many neat birds, and visited some beautiful places. These days she leads monthly bird walks, which are very popular. Her next two bird walks are on Wednesday, February 20 and March 20 at 1:00 p.m. at the Visitor Center. Thank you Joan for everything. You are appreciated.



Joan Silagy, wearing red, leading a Hawk Watch at State Hill Vista

Adopt A Trail Program

Blue Marsh Lake would like to announce the re-launch of a program that we hope to have great success, the Adopt A Trail program. The Adopt A Trail program will give individuals, families, or groups a chance to take ownership of a portion of our multi-use hiking trail. If you adopt a section of trail, you will be responsible for the general maintenance and litter pick-up. If there is erosion damage, large downed trees, or other major maintenance you would be responsible for relaying that information to the park office. Work on your trail section should be done a minimum of two times a year. There are over 30 miles of trails, and maintaining them is a monumental task. The staff at Blue Marsh could use your help. Please contact Nathan Freiwald at 610-376-6337 to Adopt A Trail.



Winter Word Search

COLD
FLAKES
FREEZING
FROST
ICE
PLOW
SHOVEL
SKATING
SKIING
SLEDDING
SNOW

S	G	W	N	U	F	G	S	D	T	S	S
F	H	X	O	L	T	N	I	C	E	K	A
Y	H	O	A	N	H	I	S	Z	Z	I	X
A	A	K	V	B	S	D	W	I	A	I	G
G	E	Z	X	E	N	D	O	M	K	N	M
S	I	N	Y	E	L	E	L	T	I	G	X
C	B	F	Q	W	C	L	P	Z	F	L	C
O	Q	E	K	L	Z	S	E	J	F	F	K
E	C	Y	H	D	N	E	K	L	T	K	A
W	Y	S	L	M	R	K	V	Z	H	I	A
T	S	O	R	F	S	K	A	T	I	N	G
N	C	N	J	D	X	O	Z	D	M	I	K

Downed Trees Everywhere!

Hurricane Sandy affected all of Berks County in one way or another. Blue Marsh Lake was no exception. The rain and high winds caused an unprecedented amount of blockages by downed trees on the hiking trail. Some of the tree tops snapped off and some just fell over exposing giant root balls. The blockages varied from vine covered six inch trees all the way up to a 40 inch diameter oak. Over 60 trees needed to be cut to make the trail 100% accessible. It was a task that had to be accomplished over a few weeks with the ranger staff working as a team to get it done.

The staff at Blue Marsh knows how important our hiking trail is to our users, so we wanted to have it accessible as soon as possible. One lesson that we learned from this task is that we could use some help from dedicated trail users to assist us in times like these. If you are interested in joining a trail maintenance and chainsaw volunteer crew, please contact Nathan Freiwald at 610-376-6337. Proficiency with a chainsaw and proper use of safety gear must be demonstrated to qualify for tree removal from the hiking trail.



Get Outdoors

High-tech gadgets have changed the world as we know it. Kids and adults have come to rely on computers, Smart Phones, I-Pods, etc. How did we ever get along without all of this technology? It is a challenge to get kids outdoors. They prefer playing computer-based games, or watching television. The staff at Blue Marsh is striving to get people to move outdoors. We are offering a variety of ranger/volunteer led programs, including Geo Cacheing, canoeing and kayaking, bike riding or hiking. And there are plenty of activities to partake in on your own. There is the 29-plus mile long Multi-use trail that is open to foot use, mountain bike and horseback riding. And for those that are looking for something a little tamer, there are three self-guided nature trails; one of which can be accessed at State Hill Boat Launch, and two which are located in the Dry Brooks Day Use Area. The Connector Trail hooks trail users up with the Berks County Park System trail along the Tulpehocken Creek, and there is the Tulpehocken Creek Valley Geo Trail, which is a geo cache trail that has ten caches at Blue Marsh Lake, and ten caches in the Berks County Parks. So the next time you hear the excuse “there is nothing to do,” bring them out to Blue Marsh Lake. We offer both land and water-based recreation. Be good to your body and get outdoors. We benefit both physically and mentally from outdoor physical activity. And there are plenty of opportunities in Berks County to get outdoors, so just do it!

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<http://www.nap.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks.BlueMarshLake.aspx>

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**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,
Philadelphia District**

Winter 2013 Programs

Hike with a Ranger, Saturday, February 9, 8:00 a.m., Visitor Center: Join the ranger staff for a hike along the hiking trail, nature trails and the lake shoreline. Length of the hike will be 3 - 5 miles, and will include some hills. You will also have the opportunity to learn more about Blue Marsh Lake, as you are making your way along the trails.

Control Tower Tour, Saturday, February 16, 10:00 a.m., Visitor Center: Participants get a “behind-the-scenes” look at how the dam functions. Not only will you be on the dam, but you will be going inside the control tower. Be prepared to go down and up numerous steps. For those of you who cannot handle the steps you can go as far as the control room (about 10 steps).

Wee Ones Walk on the Wild Side, Wednesday, February 20, 10:00 a.m. at the Conference Center. We will start by talking about the kind of homes animals live in, whether in a forest or a field. Young adventurers will then get to pick out a animal puppet and take it with them on an outdoor journey as we investigate where each animal might live. Maybe we can even build a home for animal!

Bird Walk, Wednesday, February 20, 1:00 p.m., Visitor Center. Join birding expert and naturalist Joan Silagy as she guides you along trails and roadways in search of a variety of birds. Walking should be easy with few hills. Don't forget your binoculars!

Home School Field Day Discovery Hike, Friday, February 22, 9:30 a.m. at the Conference Center. We do not want to overlook the children who are home schooled! Participants will become nature detectives, as we head out on a short hike in search of signs that tell us an animal has recently visited the area. Their signs come in many shapes, sizes and colors. Students will also have the chance to make some tracks of their own. We will be both indoors and outdoors, so dress for the weather.

Family Fun Days This Buds For You, Saturday, February 23, 10 A.M., Dry Brooks Day Use Area. Come out and enjoy a winter morning while learning to identify trees by their buds, bark and branching. Enjoy the outdoors while learning interesting and fun facts about the trees we will be identifying.