

WARM SPRINGS MOUNTAIN PRESERVE

Volunteer Program Handbook



Protecting nature. Preserving life.

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THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

In 1951, The Nature Conservancy started as a grassroots organization in New York in order to protect a 60-acre hemlock forest. TNC has since grown into an international non-profit, active in all 50 states and 79 countries and territories.

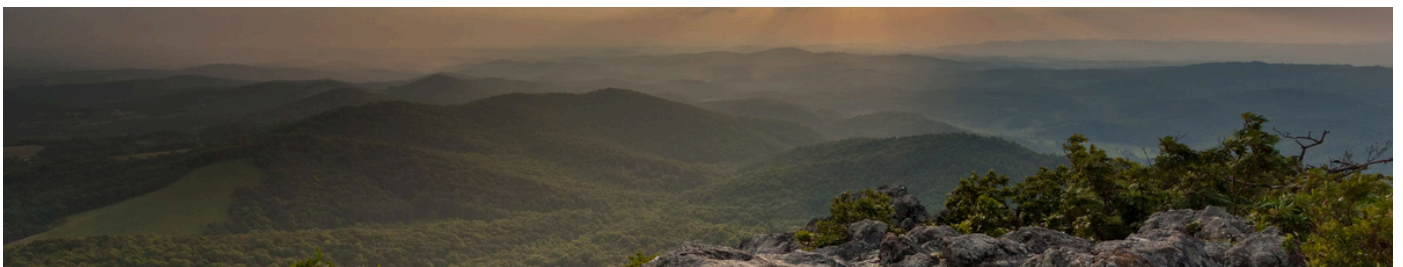
In Virginia, TNC has prioritized the conservation of several key landscapes: Clinch Valley in the southwest, Virginia Pinelands in the southeast, the Chesapeake Bay and Eastern Shore in the east, and the TNC employs scientists across the world in order to make strategic and informed decisions to drive conservation. From finding and protecting migration corridors to using fire to maintain landscapes, TNC is helping lead the way for science-based conservation.



Christmas Eve 1954, TNC is officially launched and making efforts towards land protection.



Mianus River Gorge pledging a deal to protect 60 acres of hemlock forest.



View from Warm Springs Mountain in the Allegheny Highlands.

WARM SPRINGS MOUNTAIN PRESERVE

Warm Springs Mountain Preserve helps stitch together thousands of acres of forest and conservation lands in western Virginia's Allegheny Highlands. The preserve anchors our efforts to protect and restore a key wildlife corridor and habitat for an amazing diversity of natural communities, plants and animals.

Situated within a 77,000-acre unfragmented, largely roadless forest block, the preserve helps maintain healthy, breeding populations of interior-forest-dwelling songbirds, provides key habitat for wide-ranging mammals, and protects headwater tributaries of both the Jackson and Cowpasture rivers.

The preserve features Virginia's only substantial montane pine barren, a globally rare, arid, fire-dependent landscape. The mountain harbors at least two other rare natural communities, three rare plants and eight rare invertebrates.

The Ingalls Overlook, Sandy Gap and Bear Loop hiking trails are open daily. These three trails offer distinct experiences, from expansive mountain views to a close-up look at a globally rare pine barren, along with opportunities to extend your hike on adjoining public lands.



Photos by Preserve Steward Dorothy Carney

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

TNC Virginia has 15 public access preserves. Not all of these preserves host the Preserve Stewardship program and have volunteer trail monitors. There are a total of 9 volunteer stewardship preserves across the state:

- Bottom Creek Gorge
- Cumberland Marsh
- Falls Ridge
- Fernbrook
- Fortune's Cove
- Fraser
- Piney Grove
- Voorhees
- Warm Springs Mountain

Volunteer stewardship preserves are shown in blue, and those that are open to the public but do not host this program are shown in yellow.

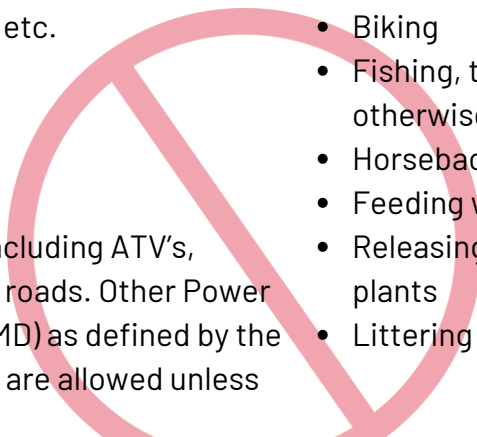


PRESERVE GUIDELINES

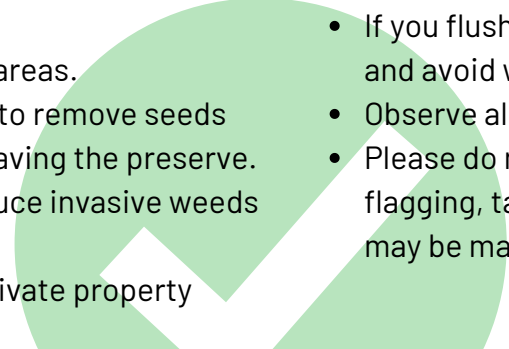
Warm Springs Mountain is open to the public.

The following are the guidelines for TNC preserves. As a general rule, do not confront rule-breakers while on a stewardship hike, especially if the situation does not feel safe. Depending on the situation and comfort level of the Preserve Steward, you can kindly remind visitors of rules (e.g. gently reminding visitors to not pick flowers). If you observe illegal activity, you may call local law enforcement and report to TNC staff. Please report any evidence or observations of rule breaking in your inspection report.

The Following Activities Are Not Permitted:

- 
- Picking flowers, mushrooms, etc.
 - Removing rocks
 - Dog walking
 - Smoking
 - Camping/fires/cookouts
 - Driving motorized vehicles, including ATV's, except on designated access roads. Other Power Driven Mobility Devices (OPDMD) as defined by the Americans with Disability Act are allowed unless otherwise prohibited.
 - Biking
 - Fishing, trapping or hunting, except as otherwise posted
 - Horseback riding
 - Feeding wildlife
 - Releasing animals or introducing plants
 - Littering

To Minimize Your Impact, We Ask That You Please Observe the Following:

- 
- Stay on trails
 - Avoid walking in wet, boggy areas.
 - Inspect pant legs and shoes to remove seeds before entering and when leaving the preserve. Failure to do so could introduce invasive weeds to new locations.
 - Please do not trespass on private property adjacent to preserves.
 - If you flush a ground nesting bird, stop and avoid walking near the nest area.
 - Observe all posted signs.
 - Please do not remove stakes, signs, flagging, tape or similar objects. These may be markers for a research project.

PRESERVE VOLUNTEER OVERVIEW

With many preserves to manage around the commonwealth, it is not always possible for the staff of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to visit each preserve as often as we would like. This is why it is vital to have a community of volunteers at our preserves to help maintain and monitor their condition. TNC is dedicated to providing authentic and inspiring examples of natural Virginian habitats, and maintaining our preserves and natural areas is one of the best ways to accomplish this goal.



The Warm Springs Mountain Preserve Volunteer Community is organized into three tiers based on the amount of time you would like to dedicate to the preserve. Preserve Leaders take on additional responsibilities for the preserve (e.g. manage schedule, lead 1-2 workdays a year). Preserve Stewards commit to 4-6 hikes a year to maintain trails and monitor the condition of the preserve. The Preserve Volunteer Community, receives quarterly updates regarding the preserve and are promptly informed about workdays, guided hikes, and other events.

PRESERVE LEADERS

Preserve Leaders are instrumental to the success of the Preserve Volunteer Program. Leaders are people who have demonstrated their commitment to the preserve and are willing to take on additional responsibilities. There are several preserve leadership positions including the Schedule Manager, Workday Leaders, and Preserve Naturalists. Anyone interested in becoming a Preserve Leader should contact Brynna Strand at brynna.strand@tnc.org in order to receive additional information about the positions.



The Preserve Leader Schedule Manager is responsible for maintaining the Preserve Steward schedules. Most preserves have schedule managers, but a few do not. The monitoring schedule is created and maintained on a regular basis, typically using Google Docs. The schedule manager will assist new Preserve Stewards on first hikes, if they wish, as they are a wealth of knowledge and history regarding the preserve. The Preserve Leader Schedule Managers have typically been a steward at a preserve for more than one year, possess excellent communication and organizational skills, and have basic computer skills like the ability to use and edit Google Docs.

This position is currently vacant at Warm Springs Mountain Preserve.



Photo from Guided Hike and Paint Day at Bear Loop

PRESERVE LEADERS

As a Preserve Leader, you may also choose to lead large workdays (up to 10 volunteers) at the preserve as needed. Larger workdays could include trail infrastructure projects, invasive species removal, nature hikes, etc. Workday leaders coordinate with TNC staff to organize workdays, determine objectives and safety requirements, and supervise volunteers. If interested in becoming a workday leader, TNC staff can work with you to get the required first aid and youth certifications.



Those that would be a great fit for a Preserve Leader have been a steward for at least 1 year, and possess excellent communication and organizational skills. Preserve Leaders must have a First Aid Certificate and be TNC Youth Safety Qualified. Optional skills that many Preserve Leaders possess are Virginia Master Naturalist training and the ability to use the iNaturalist app. These skills are useful in teaching and informing other stewards about the geology, ecology, flora and fauna of the preserve.



(Top Right): Chicken of the Woods, Sabine Scholes ©

(Top Left): Trout Lily, Don Coram ©

(Bottom Left): Volunteer Workday, Josh Mitri ©

(Bottom Right): Monarch Butterfly, Keith Navia ©

PRESERVE STEWARDS

Preserve Stewards visit the preserve and perform a stewardship and monitoring hike approximately 4-6 times a year. When performing a stewardship and monitoring hike, stewards should look for and report any of the following items: maintenance needs, downed trees, fallen branches, kiosk needs, broken signage, overgrowth of plants, condition of parking area, erosion on trails, trespassing, or any general preserve needs. Don't forget to listen for bird songs and take in the flora, fungi, and fauna!



Stewards are an integral part of the TNC stewardship program, acting as the eyes and ears at our preserves. Preserve Stewards will work with the Schedule Manager to sign up for weeks during which they are available to hike. Our goal is to have the preserve visited at least once a week.

We encourage stewards to bring hand tools such as loppers or clippers to cut back overgrown vegetation. Weed whackers, string trimmers, and leaf blowers may also be useful in helping us to improve the trails. If hand tools are used, safety is our number one concern, and using proper body mechanics and proper PPE is highly suggested.



Once a stewardship and monitoring hike has been completed, stewards should complete the monitoring report form. All forms should be sent to: vapreservestewards@tnc.org and your preserve leader/schedule manager (not applicable to all preserves). In your report, list any maintenance needs, as well as general items to be noted at the preserve.

Being a Preserve Steward gives you the opportunity to help protect important habitat for plants and animals that is quickly disappearing. Stewards will gain valuable experience in the field and have the opportunity to increase skills through potential trainings. It is also an opportunity to network with conservation-minded individuals from the community.



PRESERVE STEWARDS

To become a steward with TNC Virginia, there are a few checklist items that must be completed.

Logistical Items



Step 1



- Walk the preserve
- Read through the Preserve Steward Handbook
- Paperwork

Step 2



- Review virtual training and onboarding information
- Ask questions

Actions as a Preserve Steward



- Review prior monitoring reports
- Sign up for a monitoring hike 4-6 times per year
- Perform stewardship hikes
- Complete monitoring report and send it to **vapreservestewards@tnc.org**, CC Preserve Leader if applicable
- Communicate ideas, suggestions, questions

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The Preserve Volunteer Community is an easy way to become more involved with a preserve without performing monitoring hikes. Community Members are added to an email list to receive quarterly preserve updates and information regarding future workdays or events. Community Members are also able to learn more about the preserve and become an active volunteer.



Becoming a Community Member is a great way to learn about TNC, the places we protect, and the Preserve Steward program. If you have been a steward in the past, but do not currently have the time to commit to monitoring hikes, becoming a Community Member is a great way to stay involved with the preserve.



Photos by Community Member Doug Rogers

STEWARDSHIP AND MONITORING HIKE

Preserve Stewards are an integral part of the Stewardship Program and are the eyes and ears on the ground at our preserves. Each time a stewardship and monitoring hike is performed, it will be followed with the completion of a monitoring report.

What to Look Out For:

- Condition of preserve signage
- Downed trees
- Broken structures
- Trail issues/erosion
- Kiosk needs
- Parking area conditions
- Conditions of puncheons, bridges, steps
- Overgrowth of vegetation



Preserve Stewards are permitted to make repairs, remove trees from trails, and perform general maintenance needs only if it is within their comfort and skill levels. It is not required to perform any maintenance needs, it is only required to report the issues on the monitoring report form. During the summer months, bringing loppers or trimmers can be useful to combat the overgrowth of vegetation on the trails. It is not required, or expected, that preserve stewards cut back the overgrowth, however it is very useful.

Safety is our number one concern. If tools are brought on a monitoring hike, please remember proper body mechanics when using. **Personal protective equipment such as gloves, safety glasses, ear protection, helmet, closed toed shoes, and long pants and sleeves are highly suggested when using any tools.** Motorized tools are permitted at the preserve, but it is highly suggested to use them in pairs for safety.

If there are signs of trespassing or inappropriate use of the preserve, stewards do not need to confront or resolve the issue. Please let TNC know by emailing vapreservestewards@tnc.org and **Caleb Haynes** at caleb.haynes@tnc.org.

STEWARDSHIP AND MONITORING HIKES

There are many helpful applications to aid you in your monitoring visits, including Survey123, iNaturalist, and eBird.



AVENZA MAPS

Avenza Maps is useful in navigating the preserve during your monitoring visit and finding your location along the trails. PDFs of the trail map can be uploaded into the app.

[Avenza Training](#)



iNaturalist

iNaturalist is a great way to record plants and wildlife identified during your monitoring visits. Don't worry if you aren't sure what something is, other users will help to ID your observations.

[iNaturalist Training](#)



eBird

Similar to iNaturalist, eBird is helpful in recording bird observations and informs TNC of different bird species utilizing our preserves.

[eBird Training](#)

We encourage you to download and use all of the above apps. They will help provide TNC with valuable data, and may help you hone your plant and animal identification skills! Please explore the linked trainings, or reach out to vapreservestewards@tnc.org if you have any questions.

STEWARDSHIP AND MONITORING HIKES



Preserve Stewards will complete a Survey123 form on their monitoring visits. Survey123 is a free app you can download on your mobile device. Scan the below QR code to access the survey. Please answer the questions provided on the monitoring form, and enter locations for hazards observed such as down trees. For those that may not have a smartphone, the form can be completed after your visit on a web browser, or there is also a fillable PDF form available. **If you complete a PDF monitoring report, please send it and any photos you took to vapreservestewards@tnc.org and caleb.haynes@tnc.org.**

Virginia Volunteer Preserve Steward Report

Thanks for monitoring and maintaining the preserve and trails. Contact vapreservestewards@tnc.org for questions.

General Visit Information ▼

Preserve Steward Name*

Date of Stewardship Hike*

Preserve Name*

Trail or specific area visited
example: Red Trail, boardwalk only, entire trail system

Volunteer hours*

Access the Survey123 form at this link: <https://arcg.is/1b8nz50>, or by scanning the below QR Code to use it on your mobile device:



SAFETY PRECAUTIONS



In the event of a medical emergency, please call 911 immediately.

If the event does not warrant 911, use best judgement and first aid skills to determine next actions to be taken. If able to make it to the parking lot, the nearest hospital is:

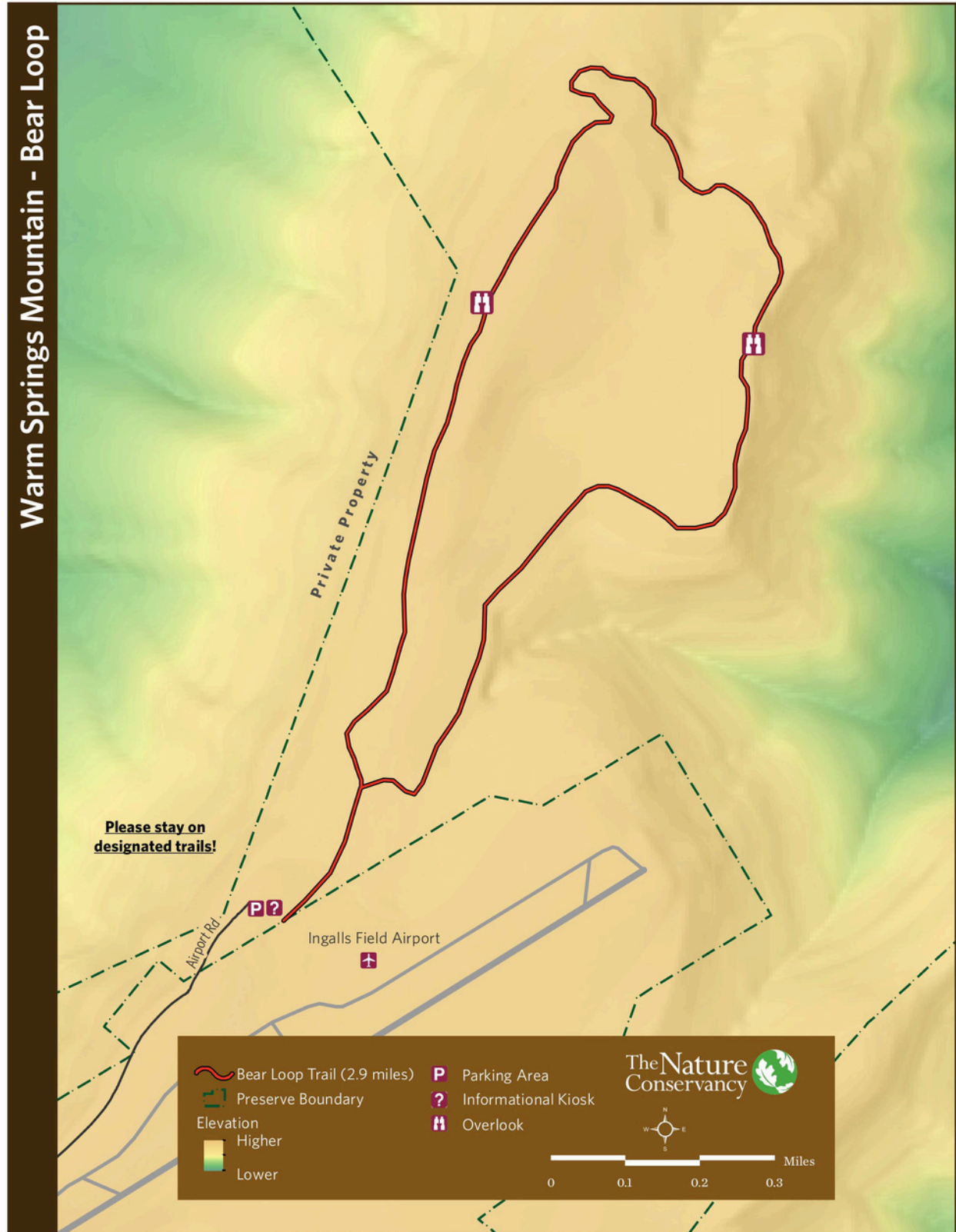
- Bath Community Hospital
- 106 Park Drive Hot Springs, VA 24445
- Phone: (540) 839-7000

The Nature Conservancy is dedicated to the protection of youth (individuals under the age of 18). TNC may ask that Preserve Stewards become Youth Certified by completing the online Commitment to Youth Safety Course and background screening. Preserve Stewards who will interact with youth as a Workday Leader more than twice in a year must complete the training.

Preserve Stewards are not permitted to drive other volunteers or visitors while representing The Nature Conservancy unless they have been Auto Safety certified by TNC. This is completed online. One of the most dangerous parts of performing a stewardship and monitoring hike or helping with a workday is driving to and from the preserve. Please use caution and avoid distractions while driving.

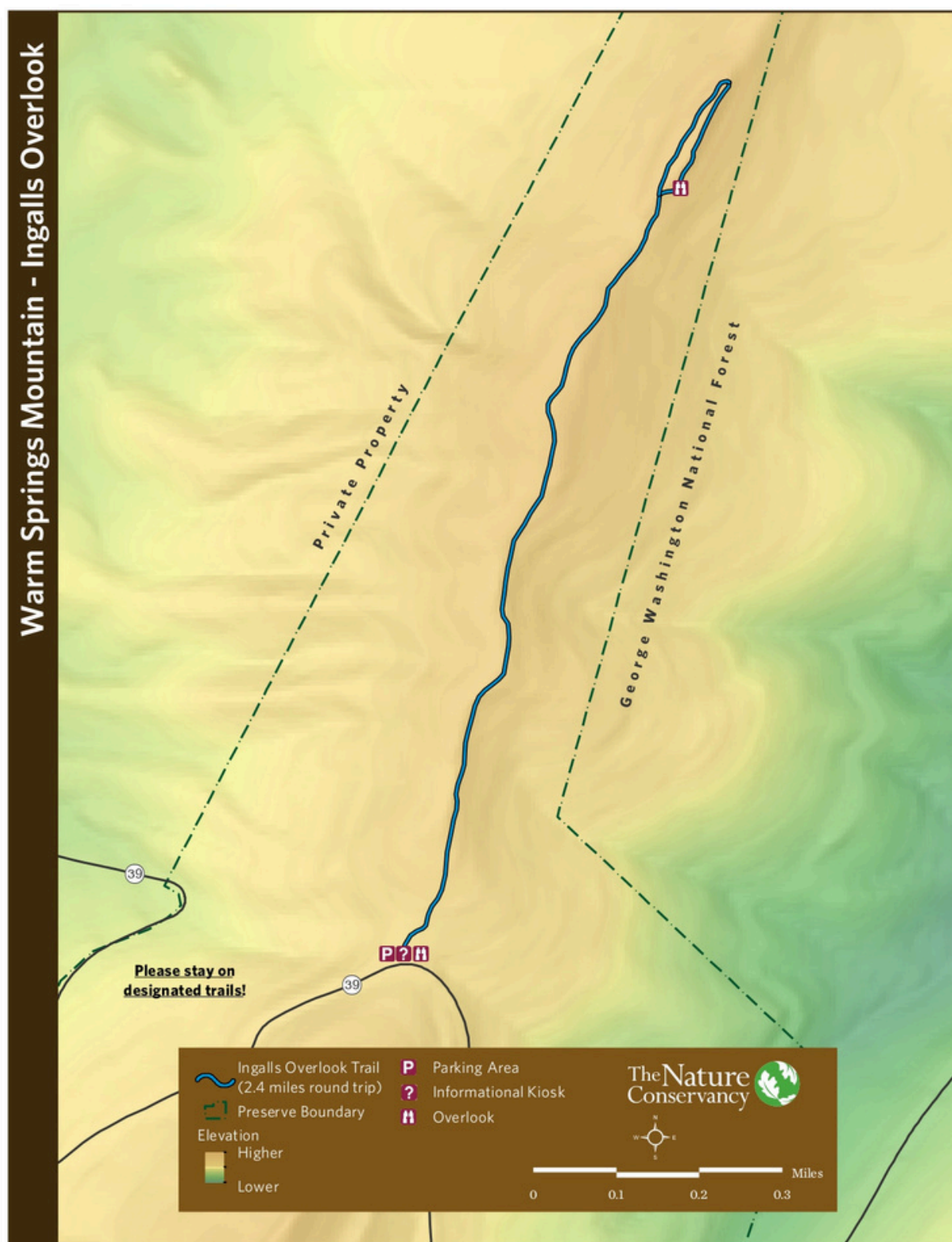


BEAR LOOP TRAIL MAP



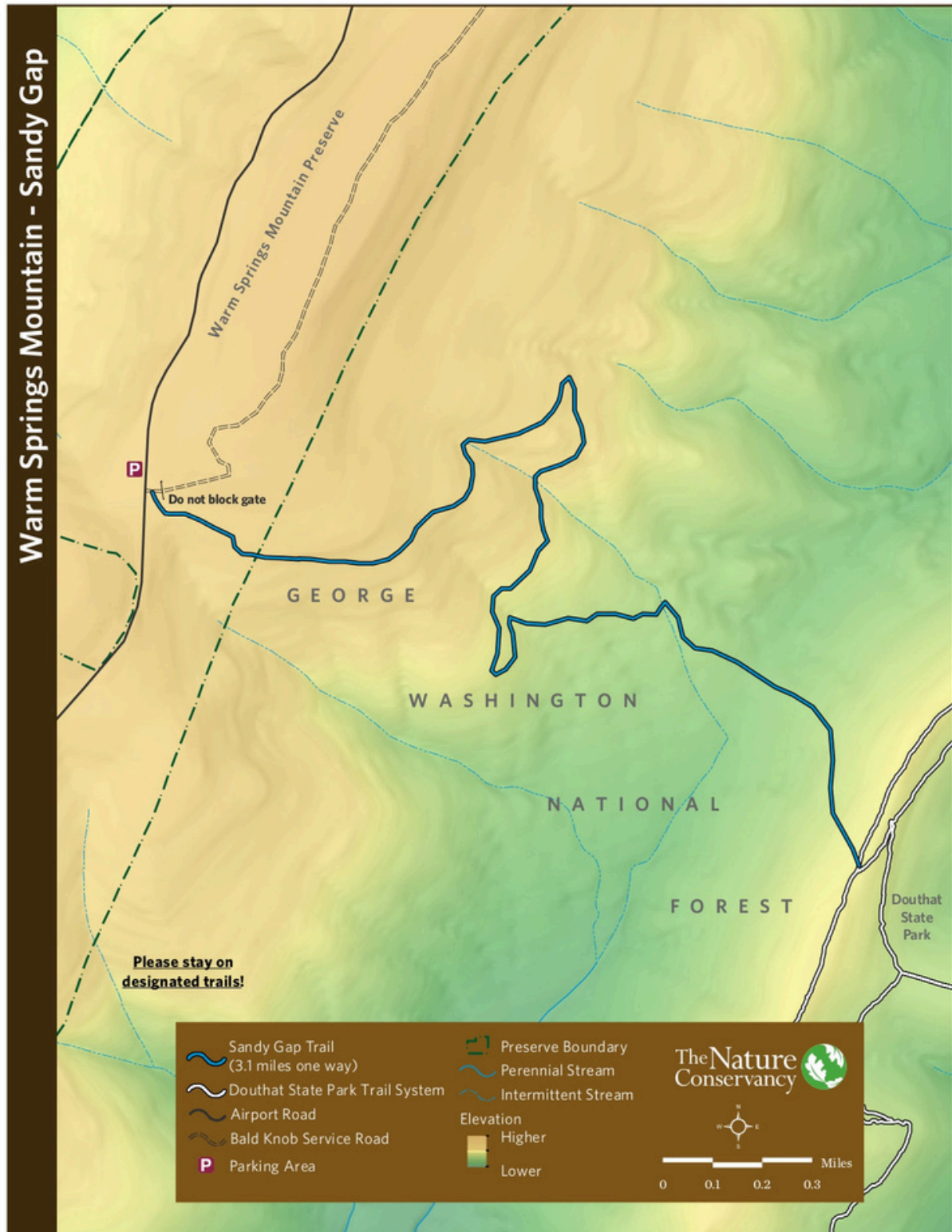
[Bear Loop Trail Map \(link\)](#)

INGALLS OVERLOOK TRAIL MAP



[Ingalls Overlook Trail Map \(link\)](#)

SANDY GAP TRAIL MAP



[Sandy Gap Trail Map \(link\)](#)

ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION

Bear Loop

Length of trail network: 2.9 miles

Shortest Distance to Viewpoint: 1.3 miles

Surface Type: Unimproved

Typical and Minimum Trail Width: 72 inches, 17 inches

Typical and Maximum Slope: 10%, 52%

Typical and Maximum Cross Slope: 5%, 26%

Ingalls Overlook

Length of trail network: 2.4 miles

Typical Cross Slope: 7.5%

Sandy Gap

Length of trail network: 3.2 miles (one way)



OTHER WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

Connect with us on social media



Share your other skills and talents

We are always looking for fun and engaging new volunteer opportunities. If you have a special skill like photography, art, species identification, invasive removal, or anything in between, let us know!

Explore more volunteer opportunities

Check out our website to learn more about our other opportunities, like watershed cleanups, eelgrass collection, City Nature Challenge, and more.

www.nature.org/vavolunteer

Thank you for reviewing the Preserve Steward handbook!
We are so grateful for your help and dedication to conservation.
If you have any questions, please contact **vapreservestewards@tnc.org**.