

Potomac State Forest – Protecting Maryland’s Native Trout

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Chesapeake Conservancy/National Park Service (NPS)

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*Figure 1: Daphne and I along the North Branch of the Potomac River at Lostland Run*

Potomac State Forest in Garrett County, Maryland seems to have something for almost every outdoors enthusiast: hikers, campers, fishers, archers, mountain bikers, hunters, geocachers, snowmobilers, wildlife enthusiasts, off-road vehicle (ORV) riders, and whitewater kayakers. The class IV rapids of the North Branch of the Potomac River are only for the experienced, well-seasoned paddler, but the rest of us can appreciate the rugged topography that creates these whitewater conditions from a safe vantage point, such as the [Potomac Overlook](#) at Lostland Run.

The Lostland Run Area of Potomac State Forest is centered around Lostland Run, a clear, cold mountain stream that empties into the North Branch of the Potomac River. The 3.5-mile-long Lostland Run Trail meanders along the creek just a short distance from Lostland Run Road, where campsites and pulloffs make it easy for families with young children to appreciate the beauty along the water without having to venture far. In the spring, one can find trillium, jack-in-the-pulpit, and jewelweed, while in the winter, you'll still find plenty of greenery from evergreens like eastern hemlock, rhododendron, and mountain laurel.

Perhaps the most scenic part of Lostland Run Trail is Cascade Falls, where the creek flows over a relatively low angle slope, creating a "slide waterfall." Contemplating the beauty of this area, it is hard to imagine that it was so polluted by acid mine drainage that it was devoid of trout and other associated coldwater



fish species as recently as 1979. This was the result of coal mining, which dates back to the early 1800's in Western Maryland. Once such mines were abandoned, high levels of iron oxides and sulfates seeped into the water, creating dangerously acidic conditions for aquatic species. To fix the problem here, a large lime doser was built about two miles upstream of the falls. It dispenses pulverized limestone which neutralizes the acid, bringing pH levels back to normal. Today, this stream is home to a variety of fish species, including Maryland's native trout, the brook trout.



*Figure 2: Cascade Falls on Lostland Run*

West of Lostland Run, near the [Potomac Resource Center](#), lies a 3-D Archery Range where archers can hone their skills by shooting at 30 life-size three-dimensional targets. Slightly south of this is the quarter-mile-long interpretive [Eagle Scout Trail](#). South of the Lostland Run Area are the Laurel Run and Wallman areas, which together offer 6.3 miles of [ORV trails](#) and 10.2 miles of [snowmobile trails](#). They also provide scenic views and fishing access on the North Branch of the Potomac River.



On the northern side of Potomac State Forest is the North Hill Area. Open to mountain bikers and hikers, the unblazed two-mile-long North Hill Trail is accessed via an unmarked [trailhead](#) on the east side of North Hill Road, just 0.2 mile north of the entrance to the newly-established Wolf Den Run State Park. Little is written about this area, so I set out to explore it and learn what I could on my own.

It was a sunny day in February. Snow was melting and turning what appeared to be old logging roads into small creeks. Unlike the trail to the Potomac Overlook at Lostland Run, there were no water bars to divert excess water away from the road, so erosion was rampant. But all that moisture helped keep the ferns, mosses, lichen, and fungi lush so they could deliver a nice splash of color to areas where deciduous greenery tended to be sparse in winter. My favorite find was orange sporangia growing from moss. Sporangia are capsule structures in many plants and fungi where reproductive spores are produced and stored.



*Figure 3: Moss sporangia*

I did not encounter any wildlife, but I did find some coyote scat. Though not commonly seen in Maryland, the highest concentrations of coyote currently reside in this part of the state and their population



(though not officially tracked) appears to be rising. Coyotes were first documented in Maryland in 1972, one of the last states in the contiguous United States to be colonized. Considered by many to be a nuisance, coyotes are known to contribute to livestock and crop depredation, though not significantly. But their biggest ecological impact may be the decline and relocation of red foxes due to their similar habitat requirements and overlapping niches.



*Figure 4: Coyote scat*

After walking approximately 1.9 miles on the North Hill Trail, I picked up an unnamed side road heading west and then northeast for another 0.6 mile. This brought me within about 800 feet of the wind turbines on Backbone Mountain, where they could easily be heard. The 39-mile-long Backbone Mountain includes Maryland's highest point, Hoya-Crest (3,360 feet) at the western edge of the state. The part of the mountain range that passes through Potomac State Forest lies several miles northeast of that, and only reaches about 3,180 feet.



*Figure 5: Wind turbines on Backbone Mountain*

I never got a great view of the wind turbines in the North Hill Area, as their lower halves remained mostly obscured by trees. They could be seen much more clearly a short distance just outside Potomac State Forest. Heading home, I caught one last look at them in my rear-view mirror and pondered the irony that about 200 years after coal was first mined in Maryland, we are still dealing with its environmental damage, while just a few miles away, we are harnessing a much cleaner and more sustainable form of energy. Hopefully, after another 200 years, we'll be able to look back and know we made the right decision.

For more information, see

- [RiverFacts – Maryland Whitewater, Potomac River – North Branch](#)
- [Maryland Department of Natural Resources \(DNR\) – Potomac-Garrett State Forest](#)
- [Maryland DNR – Maryland's Natural Areas - Lostland Run, Garrett County](#)
- [World of Waterfalls – What Types of Waterfalls are There?](#)
- [Maryland DNR – Adoption Statement Maryland Brook Trout Management Plan 2006](#)
- [Biology Dictionary – Sporangium](#)
- [Maryland DNR – Coyotes in Maryland](#)