



Middle Creek in Motion

Winter 2022

Middle Creek's 50th Anniversary

Middle Creek and the Pennsylvania Game Commission will be ringing in the New Year a little differently this year. The reason being, 2023 is our 50th Anniversary.

We have already made preparations for this exciting time including our patch and decal design contest which we announced the winner of in our Fall 2022 issue. Once the Visitors Center opens there will be several things to see and participate in.

First, we will have all of our submissions hanging for our patch and decal design contest. A diverse set of artists of all ages and backgrounds submitted 30 designs!

If you want a free decal sticker with the winning design, you must complete the 50 Things to do at Middle Creek Challenge. A checklist of activities and a rules sheet can be picked up at the front desk of the Visitors Center or printed out online (details on page 2).

Our Speaker Series and Outdoor Explorer Series are set to resume in February with a list of brand new, diverse, and exciting topics (page 7). We have a new event flyer that is available on our website and at the front desk so you can get the events you are the most interested in on your calendar as early as possible. It's worth noting that we are hoping to have some pop-up events in 2023 that are not yet on the calendar, so always keep your eyes peeled for flyers and on our Facebook Page. Last year we had successful pop-up guided hikes that were open to the public. We are also looking to have some special opportunities at National Hunting and Fishing Day in September to celebrate our 50th, so stay tuned!

At the end of 2023, we will be dedicating a small time capsule that will go in the Conservation Heritage Museum to be opened 50 years from now, at our 100th Anniversary.

So, there is a lot of exciting things happening in 2023, and more to be announced. Middle Creek has not only positively impacted hundreds of species of wildlife, but has also impacted generations of outdoor enthusiasts and conservationists who have hunted, hiked, boated, or observed all that Middle Creek has to offer. Please join us in celebrating this special year!



Photo by Nancy Reber

Important Reminders!

It's generally the off season here at the Visitors Center for things like school groups, boating, and looking for wildflowers, but it's the peak season for activities such as hunting and planning events for next year.

The Visitors Center is closed to the public until February 1st and wearing orange is recommended if you choose to go for a hike or observe wildlife, so be prepared when traveling to Middle Creek.

In February, depending on the weather conditions, the snow geese and tundra swans will be moving through Middle Creek during their spring migrations. Please refer to our Facebook Page and website for information as most questions can be answered there or by checking our snow goose camera. More information on page 5.



Middle Creek's 50th Anniversary: 50 Things to do Challenge

This new year is a special one for us here at Middle Creek as well as for the wider agency of the Game Commission. It marks our 50th Anniversary. In the summer of 2022, we selected the winning design for the 50th Anniversary patch and decal design, and we wanted a way for everyone else to join in and celebrate with us.

To that end, we are introducing the "50 Things to do at Middle Creek Challenge" which challenges visitors to get out there and enjoy Middle Creek in a way they may never have before!

So, how does this challenge work? There is a check list of activities that fall into 6 categories. A certain number of activities must be completed in each category. The categories are: hunting and fishing (complete 1 activity), outdoor recreation (complete 3 activities), Middle Creek events (complete 5 activities), online/at home (complete 10 activities), get involved (complete 1 activity), and Middle Creek & beyond (complete 5 activities). Out of the 50 total activities, a total of 25 must be completed.

If you check the required number of boxes in their respective categories, you can turn it in to the front desk for a decal sticker of our winning 50th anniversary design. Decals will be available after February 1st, 2023. The challenge will continue for the rest of 2023, so you have time to complete it!

The checklist and the sheet of rules are both available to print out on our webpage under the "Events and DIY Activities" tile, or can be picked up at the front desk of the Visitors Center.

Meet Middle Creek's New Land Manager

Meet our new Game Lands Maintenance Supervisor for Lancaster and Chester Counties, which includes Middle Creek, Alex Murray. Alex was previously a State Game Warden in Southern Berks County from 2021 to this last October. Alex is no stranger to Middle Creek, as he worked on the habitat crew he now supervises 6 years prior to being a Warden.

Alex is a resident of Lancaster County and has a bachelors degree from Kutztown University in Environmental Science with a focus in Biology. He can first remember visiting Middle Creek as a college student for classes. Alex is looking forward to working with our partner organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and the PA Fish and Boat Commission on important habitat work and upgrades. He also looks forward to handling a larger leadership role with the local habitat crew than when he previously worked here. If you see Alex around, be sure to say hello!

#MC 50

50 THINGS TO DO AT MIDDLE CREEK TO CELEBRATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY



Target shoot at the archery range

Hunt on Middle Creek lands

Apply for a special hunt opportunity

Go fishing on Middle Creek Lake

Sign up for a mentored hunt

Take a kayak out on Middle Creek Lake

Go bird watching

Find a wildflower in bloom

Take a wildlife or scenic photo

Hike a trail at Middle Creek

Take a drive on the Tour Road

Tune into 1620AM in your car

Find an animal track or nest

Find a Geocache

Attend a Speakers Series event

Attend an Outdoor Explorer event

Visit the Conservation Heritage Museum

Attend the snow goose migration

Attend National Hunting & Fishing Day

Attend the Wildlife Art Show

Attend the World Migratory Bird Day event

Run or walk the Wild Goose Chase

Read about Middle Creek's history

Read a copy of Game News

Put up a bird house at your home

#MC 50

50 THINGS TO DO AT MIDDLE CREEK TO CELEBRATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY



Plant a native plant at your home

Like or Follow the PGC on social media

Watch a Wildlife on WiFi video

Watch a wildlife livestream

Watch a PGC YouTube video

Explore PGC's Mapping Center

Learn about impoundment drawdowns

Like Middle Creek's Facebook page

Learn about Middle Creek's Motus tower

Learn about watersheds around MC

Volunteer at a VC garden workday

Volunteer to pick up litter at MC

Volunteer for trail maintenance

Enter a wildlife sighting inside the VC

Bring someone to MC for their 1st time

Do the scavenger hunt inside the VC

Read Middle Creek in Motion

Talk to a State Game Warden

Find a wildlife mount inside the VC

Talk to a MC staff member about wildlife

Touch an animal pelt inside the VC

Go for a walk at Middle Creek

Have a picnic at Middle Creek

Find the 3D map of Middle Creek

Check out a Discovery Backpack



Notes from the Visitor Center Gardens

By Ellen Rupp

As winter settles in around Middle Creek, so too do the gardens. The remaining plants that still look good are the winterberry and American beautyberry.

From the first crocus to the last aster, the volunteers at the gardens have cleaned up leaf litter, weeded, mulched, planted and watered. Special thanks to Hinkletown Mennonite School for their annual trip here to mulch all the gardens in the spring. Also thanks to the PGC habitat crew who help when needed.

Beginning in mid-March, as weather permits, we cut down the perennials that were left standing through winter to provide shelter for mammals, birds, and even native insects. New native perennials are planted as needed. Then by early May, the trusted annuals: zinnias, marigolds and salvias are added.

The bird feeders, which have been kept filled all winter thanks to Ken Reinard are cleaned up. We thank the Lancaster County Bird Club for providing the seed. Also, the hummingbird feeders are now cleaned and filled and wait their arrival.

As we move through summer, it is mostly a job of weeding and watering. The big events at Middle Creek, the Wildlife Art Show and National Hunting and Fishing Day, are the highlights of the year and we try to have it all looking good for each of them.

Early fall, the mums are planted to fill in empty spaces. Native asters bloom in abundance and pumpkins and corn shocks are added to welcome the season of cooling temps and falling leaves.

As days shorten, we do one last clean up mid-October: tools are cleaned and stored, solar pond removed, and hummingbird feeders also stored. Most native perennials are left standing to provide winter aesthetics and wildlife cover/protection.

Looking ahead to spring, we start planning in early February. Construction of a memorial garden to the north of the center and the celebration for the 50th anniversary of the Visitors Center will be major events in 2023.

Volunteers are welcome and needed. If you have an interest in gardening, you are welcome to join us. We meet almost every Wednesday from about 8-8:30 am and work a couple of hours with a coffee break. Call the Visitor Center with your name, phone, and email and you will be contacted in early spring. There will also be a spring Volunteer Day on April 22nd. More details will be shared in the near future.



Editor's note: a HUGE thank you to all who offered their photographs for this newsletter. There were many submissions and far too little space!



For birds that breed in the northern hemisphere, our fall and early winter often means birds are not only more “boring” in terms of their plumage, but also harder to identify since they lack distinguishing colors. This is known as their eclipse plumage. If it weren't for their shovel-like beaks, northern shovelers during this time of year might be mistaken as an odd looking mallard, due to their similar colors. Another way to notice them from a distance is their small flocks of 5-10 feeding behavior: swimming in circles with their head's constantly being dipped below the surface.

Photo by Curtis Wilke

Healthy wildlife populations come down to many factors, but basically boils down to proper management and conservation. In the “off season” at Middle Creek, some of our property is off-limits to the public, besides a few controlled hunts. Regardless of what time of year, sometimes it's nice to just sit back and look at the landscape from a distance, rather than always driving or walking through. This doesn't only give wildlife a break from human disturbance, but it also gives us all a time to anticipate getting that closer look at wildlife. Scenes like this always inspire and relax.

Photo by Kelly Heckman



Since the American mink is a semi-aquatic mammal, they thrive here at Middle Creek. The mammalian predator-prey relationships and diversity of mammals is why we are designated as an Important Mammal Area. This member of the weasel family can be seen throughout the year scampering from one place to another with an arched back. They are often seen running across the road below the Visitors Center, so be sure to look out while driving through so they can safely go about their day!

Photo by Karen Juhl



Paver Project Update

Our long awaited paver program has broken ground here adjacent to the new addition that is the Conservation Heritage Museum. Pavers helped to fund the creation of the museum and will now augment our wonderful native plant gardens already in front of and behind the center. Only native plants will be used in the landscaping, further benefitting our wildlife. If you are ever interested in getting a paver dedicated to a friend or loved one, it is not too late! The pathway leading around the Center can have blank pavers removed and ones that have been etched can replace them, at any time. The current goal is to have the walkway completed in time for the spring. Pavers can be purchased here on our website: <http://bit.ly/3gwfAVi>



2023 Snow Goose Forecast

Some things at Middle Creek are constant: the date the tour road closes, the date the visitors center reopens, our mission of managing for wildlife, and so on. Another constant is the most asked question throughout the year at Middle Creek; "When will the snow geese come?" The answer, however, varies from year to year.

When the snow geese peak at Middle Creek depends on multiple environmental factors. First, the main lake at Middle Creek needs to be mostly unfrozen. This provides the roost site, or resting area, for the snow geese as they migrate. Next, they need snow free fields at and around Middle Creek for feeding. Just like people, snow geese need plenty of rest, water, and food for fuel to continue their daily lives.

So when will the snow geese peak at Middle Creek this year? Annually, mid-February to mid-March typically showcase peak snow goose numbers, but time will tell. If the lake never freezes or we do not get larger snow events, snow geese can arrive as soon as January. Be sure to keep an eye on the snow goose cam on Middle Creek's website to see if you can predict when the snow geese will arrive!



Photo by Karen Juhl



Middle Creek's Controlled Hunt Fall Summary

The 2022-23 Middle Creek waterfowl hunting season is off to a productive start for both youth and adults. The first three hunts of the season took place in November and provided great action and a nice mixed bag of ducks. Eight different species of ducks were harvested with the largest portion being mallards (29) and gadwalls (16). However, American black ducks (9) and green-winged teal (5) have made a good showing up to this point in the season. Additionally, wood ducks, buffleheads, ring-necked ducks and ruddy ducks have dropped in over the blinds.

Canada goose hunters have also found success with a total harvest of thirty geese taken so far. While the harvest has consisted largely of resident geese, a couple of migrants from the Atlantic population have been checked out so far. Atlantic population geese are smaller than our local residents and are tracked based on weight.

Waterfowl hunting at Middle Creek will be back underway on the 24th of December and will continue every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday until the 21st of January. If you were unable to draw a goose blind prior to the season, you can apply for no-show goose blinds and duck blinds for each hunting day the remainder of the season. Visit the Middle Creek website a week prior to each hunt date to put in your application.

As for the controlled deer hunts, our annual archery hunt was canceled this year due to an outbreak of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease, or EHD. This disease is caused by a virus transmitted by midges, particularly during dry years like this past summer. However, this year's flintlock/late season archery hunt was able to happen as planned since the midges were killed off by frost and some wetter conditions in the fall helped the EHD threat to subside.

Compared to last year's harvest of just two deer, this year had a much bigger success at nine. A better turn out of participants and great deer hunting weather. It's important to have these hunts in the propagation area each year because as deer season progresses, hunting pressure in the public areas naturally pushes deer into the propagation and controlled areas. This results in high deer density in a smaller area and can cause higher levels of browse on plant communities that many other species rely on for habitat. These limited hunts not only keep deer populations more balanced with the available habitat, but also gives some hunters some of the best hunting experiences of the year! Who needs the elk hunt when you can get drawn for a fun hunt at Middle Creek, anyways!



50 Years of Waterfowl Hunting: Not quite! More like 49 years. Although Middle Creek opened to the public in 1973, the first waterfowl hunt was not held until 1974. However, after 49 years, people still go home happy after a day in the field.

Upcoming Events at Middle Creek

February 1st—March 20th

Wednesday, February 8th at 6:30 PM in the Auditorium: The Great Hiking Trails of Pennsylvania

Learn about the Commonwealth's amazing estate of long-distance hiking trails. From nationally designated trails like the Appalachian and North Country, to lesser known but more remote trails like the Chuck Keiper and Donut Hole, there are routes awaiting exploration in every corner of the state. Take a virtual tour of them with the statewide organization that advocates for their responsible use, care, and protection.

Saturday, February 11th at 1:00 PM at the Willow Point Archery Range: Archery is for Everyone!

Do you like sharpening your senses, challenging yourself or maybe the thrill of competition? Archery can provide you with all these things. Archers come in all shapes, sizes, ages, and abilities and is not just for hunters. Join us on the new Middle Creek archery range where you will learn the basics of equipment and shooting techniques. Archery truly is for everyone!

Saturday, March 11th at 2:00 PM at the Visitors Center: The Science of Antler Growth and how to Hunt Antler Sheds

Join us to learn the science about the growing outdoor activity that is shed hunting. In this program, we will take a closer look at the White-tailed deer antler growth cycle and discuss some tips and tactics to make your shed hunts more successful. Weather permitting, we will head outside to search for antlers.

Wednesday, March 8th at 6:30 PM in the Auditorium: Spring Turkey Hunting in Pennsylvania

Join 5-time World Turkey Calling Champion, Matt Morrett, as we discuss turkey hunting in Pennsylvania. Matt has travelled the country chasing Spring Turkeys for the past 30 plus years, but always loves to come home to the most challenging hunting in the US. We will discuss scouting, calling, tactics and everything in-between.

**Want to see what
events we have
planned for 2023?
Pick up a brochure at
the Visitors Center or
on our webpage!**

