Latta Plantation Nature Preserve is Mecklenburg County’s largest nature preserve and protects over 1,365 acres of natural communities including the Beatties Ford Basic Forest natural heritage area. This preserve forms a green peninsula extending into Mountain Island Lake, the drinking water source for over 900,000 residents in Mecklenburg and Gaston counties. Its diversity of natural communities includes upland and bottomland hardwood forests, open fields, streams, and a Piedmont Prairie restoration site protecting the federally endangered Schweinitz’s sunflower. The preserve is part of the Mountain Island Lake Important Bird Area designated by the National Audubon Society due to its diversity of waterfowl, nesting birds and migrating songbirds, and protection of bottomland hardwood forests, a threatened natural community in North Carolina.

Latta Plantation Nature Preserve offers endless opportunities for outdoor recreation. Visitors can literally spend the entire day at the preserve. Canoe and kayak enthusiasts will find two landing areas that provide access to Creek and Mountain Island Lake. Anglers will find numerous fishing opportunities on Mountain Island Lake (use fishing license). Three reservable (30 person) picnic shelters and an accessible trail with eight picnic platforms that provide picnic opportunities with restrooms nearby. For more information call 704.875.1391 or visit www.parkandrec.com.

**Fishing and Boating**

Fishing is allowed on Mountain Island Lake, but all anglers are required to purchase a valid North Carolina fishing license. North Carolina fishing licenses can be purchased at www.wncnc.gov or through area retailers. Canoe and kayak enthusiasts will find two landing areas that provide access to Creek and Mountain Island Lake. Anglers will find numerous fishing opportunities on Mountain Island Lake (use fishing license). Three reservable (30 person) picnic shelters and an accessible trail with eight picnic platforms that provide picnic opportunities with restrooms nearby. For more information call 704.875.1391 or visit www.parkandrec.com.

**Trails**

Latta Plantation Nature Preserve has 16 miles of trails offering hikers, nature enthusiasts, and horseback riders the opportunity to explore a variety of terrain while enjoying scenic views of the lake, forests, and streams. It is the only Mecklenburg County property open to horseback riding. Bicycles are allowed only on paved roads within the preserve. Dogs are welcome on paved roads but must remain on a six-foot leash at all times. Visitors bringing their own horses can park in the designated horse trailer parking lot. All trails are clearly marked with color symbols.

**Horseback & Hiking Trails**

**Split Rock Trail** - 1.15 miles

Accessed from either Hill or Piedmont Prairie trails, this moderate trail skirts the southern edge of the Piedmont Prairie restoration site, where the endangered Schweinitz’s sunflower can be seen in bloom from mid-September to October. Also offers views across Mountain Island Lake. This trail follows a more rocky terrain that is not accessible to horseback riders, but does offer views across the area of the washed area of the pasture. To gain access to the water source. To minimize erosion around the overlook, horses are restricted from entering the trail. Final 500 feet.

**Cove Trail** - 2.54 miles

This moderate trail can be accessed from Hill or Split Rock trails. Heading north from the Piedmont Prairie restoration site, the trail crosses a powerline right-of-way and then traverses the southern border of the Beatties Ford Basic Forest natural heritage site. Its looped section contains very rocky terrain that may not be suitable for all horseback riders, but does offer views across the southern border of Mountain Island Lake.

**Hill Trail** - 2.21 miles

This moderate trail starts at the southern terminus of the horse trailer parking lot, the trail primarily follows powerline right-of-ways and gravel maintenance roads before traversing the eastern edge of the Piedmont Prairie restoration site and eventually the western edge of the Beatties Ford Basic Forest natural heritage site. Along the prairie’s edge from spring through fall, look for native wildflowers and occasional wildlife sightings. The trail’s northern terminus at the Latta Springs accessible parking lot. This trail provides the only public access to the nature preserve outside of the main entrance on Sample Road.

**Shady Trail** - 1.60 miles

Accessed across the main road from the horse trailer parking lot, this easy loop begins in a young mixed pine-hardwood forest. The trail heads south towards Gar Creek where views of the infield Mountain Island Lake can be seen during the winter months. The trail skirts the edge between bottomland hardwood and upland hardwood forests before turning back north, crossing the main road and returning to the horse trailer parking lot via a powerline right-of-way.

**Buzzard Rock Trail** - 0.3 miles

An easy trail that passes through a mixed pine-hardwood forest in a loop through a young mixed pine-hardwood forest. The Buzzard Rock overlook consists of a large, wooden deck nestled between a cluster of huge boulder outcrops. To preserve vegetation and minimize erosion around the overlook, horses are restricted to the life site at a hitching post located 100 feet before the deck.

**Catwawa Trail** - 1.25 miles

Another trail that passes through a mixed pine-hardwood forest, this easy trail passes through both upland hardwood and bottomland hardwood forests. The trail provides excellent views across Mountain Island Lake. A connector trail can be used to reach the horse trailer parking lot, providing access to Shady Trail which can then be traveled west back towards the Buzzard Rock trail.

**Lauro’s Trail** - 0.3 miles

Officially named in 1998 in memory of Laura Anderson of the Carolina Raptor Center, this easy trail traverses through a young mixed pine-hardwood forest with some of the largest tulip poplar trees in the nature preserve. The trail terminates at a large cluster of diorite boulders, known as the Wash Rock overlook, providing excellent views of Mountain Island Lake. Wash Rock was named after the rock upon which legend has it, early settlers of the area washed their garments. To preserve vegetation and minimize erosion around the overlook, horses are restricted from entering the trail. Final 500 feet.

**Beechwood Trail** - 0.9 miles

A moderate loop trail accessed from the horse trailer parking lot. This trail begins in a young, dry pine-hardwood forest and then proceeds along several seepage slopes through a mature hardwood forest. Connects the North Canoe Access with the southern edge of Mountain Island Lake. See abundant Christmas ferns and spring wildflowers as the trail progresses. Schweinitz’s sunflower can be seen in bloom from mid-September to October. Also offers views across Mountain Island Lake. A connector trail can be used to reach the horse trailer parking lot, providing access to Shady Trail which can then be traveled west back towards the Buzzard Rock trail.

**Laura’s Trail** - 0.3 miles

Officially named in 1998 in memory of Laura Anderson of the Carolina Raptor Center, this easy trail traverses through a young mixed pine-hardwood forest and then proceeds along several seepage slopes through a mature hardwood forest. Connects the North Canoe Access with the southern edge of Mountain Island Lake. See abundant Christmas ferns and spring wildflowers as the trail progresses. Schweinitz’s sunflower can be seen in bloom from mid-September to October. Also offers views across Mountain Island Lake. A connector trail can be used to reach the horse trailer parking lot, providing access to Shady Trail which can then be traveled west back towards the Buzzard Rock trail.

**Laura’s Trail** - 0.3 miles

Officially named in 1998 in memory of Laura Anderson of the Carolina Raptor Center, this easy trail traverses through a young mixed pine-hardwood forest and then proceeds along several seepage slopes through a mature hardwood forest. Connects the North Canoe Access with the southern edge of Mountain Island Lake. See abundant Christmas ferns and spring wildflowers as the trail progresses. Schweinitz’s sunflower can be seen in bloom from mid-September to October. Also offers views across Mountain Island Lake. A connector trail can be used to reach the horse trailer parking lot, providing access to Shady Trail which can then be traveled west back towards the Buzzard Rock trail.

**Picnic Loop Trail** - 0.3 miles

This short, accessible paved trail provides access to eight picnic sites with primitive grills, a fishing pier, Caital and Audubon trails. Bicycles are allowed only on paved roads.

**Audubon Trail** - 0.8 miles

An easy trail accessed from the picnic area parking lot. Part of the trail passes through a mature bottomland hardwood forest containing sweetgum, pawpaw and tulip poplar trees while the remaining portions traverse a dry, mixed pine-hardwood forest. This trail has been designated a “Birds of Prey Trail” (contact nature center for details). A 0.4 mile spur trail leads to the Gar Creek canoe access.

**Nature Walk Trail** - 0.8 miles

This easy loop trail is accessed from the horse trailer parking lot. This trail winds through various stages of forest succession including pine stands, a powerline right-of-way, hurricane-disturbed woodlands, and oak-hickory forest, providing the opportunity to view century-old trees. Be sure to look for the unusually large, old large and uniquely shaped sourwood specimen, a North Carolina Treasure Tree.

**Trellis Trail** - 0.7 miles

This easy loop is accessed from the horse trailer parking lot. This trail winds through various stages of forest succession including pine stands, a powerline right-of-way, hurricane-disturbed woodlands, and oak-hickory forest, providing the opportunity to view century-old trees. Be sure to look for the unusually large, old large and uniquely shaped sourwood specimen, a North Carolina Treasure Tree.

**Caital Trail** - 0.8 miles

Accessed from the picnic loop trail, this easy loop follows the edge of a peninsula along Mountain Island Lake. After passing through a mature hardwood forest containing tulip poplars, oaks, hickories, and sweetgum trees, the trail’s westernmost point terminates under the canopy of several large water oaks.

**Piedmont Prairie Trail** - 0.3 miles

This moderate trail meanders through a mixed pine-hardwood forest, with occasional steep inclines, connecting the North Canoe Access with the southern edge of the Piedmont Prairie restoration site. Look for abundant Christmas ferns and spring wildflowers as the trail traverses several seepage slopes.

**Nature Walk Trail** - 0.2 miles

This easy trail that passes through a mixed pine-hardwood forest, with occasional steep inclines, connecting the North Canoe Access with the southern edge of the Piedmont Prairie restoration site. Look for abundant Christmas ferns and spring wildflowers as the trail traverses several seepage slopes.

**Caital Trail** - 0.8 miles

Accessed from the picnic loop trail, this easy loop follows the edge of a peninsula along Mountain Island Lake. After passing through a mature hardwood forest containing tulip poplars, oaks, hickories, and sweetgum trees, the trail’s westernmost point terminates under the canopy of several large water oaks.

**Educational Programs**

Latta Plantation Nature Center serves as the gateway to the nature preserve and is the source for nature classes, programs, and information on the preserve’s natural communities, flora, and fauna. The center features live, native animals, a discovery hall, an outdoor amphitheater, and a gift shop. Outside, visitors can stop and observe nature in action at the National Wildlife Federation certified Backyard Habitat Garden which includes bird feeding stations, butterfly gardens, garden stream, and soil invertebrate trails guided by naturalists. Carolina Raptor Center is an education and rehabilitation facility dedicated to the conservation of birds of prey and home to the Southeast’s largest eagle aviary. Latta Equestrian Center is a facility providing guided horseback rides, pony rides, horse shows, lessons, and a tack store. Historic Latta Plantation is a restored 1700s colonial style home and living history farm of James Latta, public tours and interpretive programs available.

**Nature Preserve Rules**

- Collection, removal, or disturbance of any natural or cultural object is prohibited.
- All pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet.
- Non-alcoholic beverages are allowed except with a valid alcohol license.
- Motorized and non-motorized vehicles are restricted to paved roads.
- Effective March 18, 2015, Mecklenburg County parks and buildings will be tobacco-free. The tobacco-free designation includes cigarettes, e-cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, water pipes, etc.
- For your safety and the protection of the preserve, please walk with a friend and stay on designated trails. To prevent damage to fragile vegetation and erosion, do not create switchbacks or short-cut water areas.
- Introduction of plants or animals to the nature preserve is prohibited.
- All weapons except property concealed firearms pursuant to valid permit.
- No swimming or wading is allowed.
- Avoid natural surface trails for a minimum of 24 hours after a heavy rain, since, in some areas, erosion can be extreme.
- All notices are not posted.
- Children under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult while riding bicycles, skateboards, or rollerblades.