

Maritime Forest Trail

Welcome to Barnegat Lighthouse State Park's Maritime Forest Trail. This self-guided trail offers visitors the chance to see a variety of plant species typically found on barrier islands.

As you walk, keep an eye out for the common plants included in this brochure and on markers along the trail. As always, please respect the wildlife and stay on the trail.

Maritime Forests

Maritime forests are wooded habitats that grow along coastal barrier islands. These unique environments have adapted to withstand strong winds, sandy soil, periodic flooding and salt spray. They are essential for storm protection, conserve important nutrients and groundwater and provide critical habitat for a diversity of plants and animals.



Barnegat Lighthouse State Park (BLSP) is located at the northern tip of the 18-mile-long barrier island, known as Long Beach Island (LBI). Historically, LBI and other barrier islands along the NJ Coast, were covered in lush maritime forests, dense coastal thickets and towering sand dunes. Over time, these coastal areas became increasingly popular, and development of cottages, homes and hotels resulted in the destruction of most maritime forests. Consequently, only small pockets of these once thriving forests remain, making them one of New Jersey's rarest plant communities. Today, BLSP preserves one of the last pockets of maritime forest on LBI.

This short, 0.2-mile loop trail begins across from the Park's Interpretive Center and meanders along an elevated boardwalk and a sand path through a great example of New Jersey's maritime forest communities. You'll also travel through small pockets of a coastal thicket and dune community. (While the trail can be explored in either direction, this interpretive brochure begins by taking a right at the first platform and following the trail counter-clockwise around the loop.)



Coastal Thickets

After descending the stairs, consider the change in vegetation. The dense growth of coastal thickets makes them impenetrable to man, but ideal for wildlife. Located behind the primary coastal dune, the reduced salt spray and increased soil moisture support many berry-producing shrubs, trees, and vines. They provide cover and rich food sources for migratory songbirds and many other wildlife species.

Coastal Dunes

Leaving the thicket, the dune landscape opens up. Primary dunes are the first line of defense from the ocean waves. Specialized plants have evolved to survive salt-laden winds and dry soil conditions. These plants stabilize the dunes, provide protective habitat, and supply a valuable food source to wildlife.

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Plants of the Maritime Forest Trail

Maritime forests are composed of deciduous, coniferous and broadleaf evergreens. At maturity, plants of the forest are often smaller than those found in other locations due to the impact of wind and weather. Many plants in the maritime forests have a waxy coating to protect them from the salt spray. However, over time, salt spray can have a pruning effect as the prevailing onshore ocean wind will cause vegetation to lean or sweep away from the beach.

Some of the common plant species highlighted on interpretive signs along the trail include:
(illustrated in order below, left to right)

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| American Beachgrass | Poison Ivy |
| American Holly | Eastern Redcedar |
| Northern Bayberry | Prickly Pear |
| Beach Heather | Seaside Goldenrod |
| Beach Plum | Virginia Creeper |
| Black Cherry | |



Birds of the Maritime Forest Trail

These areas provide essential habitat and haven for migratory birds and other animals and is why Long Beach Island is one of the best birding locations in New Jersey. It is located along the Atlantic flyway, a major bird migration route. The thicket, dunes, barrier beach and maritime forests provides habitat and food for many species. The park's bird list currently numbers 217 species, including raptors (ospreys, northern harriers, sharp-shinned hawks, American kestrels, Merlins and peregrine falcons) Shorebirds arrive in May and again in August and on many days, hundreds of black-bellied plovers, willets, least sandpipers, dunlin, ruddy turnstones, sanderlings and short-billed dowitchers can be found feeding in the mudflats. Thousands of loons, northern gannets, cormorants, scoters and long-tailed ducks also migrate past.

Animals of the Maritime Forest Trail

The Maritime Forest Trail provides habitat for a wide range of small to mid-size mammals, amphibians and reptiles. Common mammals include grey squirrels, eastern cottontails, red fox, bats and mice. Amphibians such as frogs and toads are commonly seen near freshwater habitats within the forest. As you continue down the trail, watch for reptiles such as the eastern box turtle and black racer snake that might be hiding on the forest floor or in the trees!

Please stay on the trail, take only pictures, be aware of changing trail conditions and report any trail issues to the park.



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State of New Jersey
Department of Environmental Protection
State Park Service



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