Goshen Pass Natural Area Preserve

937 acres – Rockbridge County, Virginia

The Site: Goshen Pass has long been treasured for its rugged scenery and the Maury River. The preserve is home to an exemplary chestnut oak forest community, three rare plants and one rare animal. The preserve also contains high quality forest, woodland, cliff, riverside scrub and aquatic natural communities. The property has been owned and managed by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) since 1954 as a natural area. At that time, local citizens of Rockbridge County organized to raise funds to purchase the timber rights on the tract and the Perry Foundation donated funds to purchase the land that was then deeded to the state. In 2002 the tract was dedicated as a State Natural Area Preserve.

Natural History: About 420 million years ago the area that is now Goshen Pass was part of a large, shallow inland sea. The sea bottom accumulated sediments that eventually became sandstone, shale and limestone. Around 320 million years ago the Appalachian Mountains were being formed. This mountain-building consisted of uplifting, compression, warping, and faulting of the earth's surface and resulted in the ridges we see above the Pass today. The Pass itself was formed over millions of years by the action of the Maury River down-cutting through rock, in combination with uplifting of the land surface. The ridges extending to the north and south of Goshen Pass are part of the Clinton Formation, comprised of siltstone, sandstone and quartzite – materials more resistant to weathering and erosion than the limestone and shale underlying nearby ridges and valleys. The narrow, steep-sided gorge in Goshen Pass is the result of the Maury River's tenacious, powerful cutting action through the erosion-resistant rocks that comprise the adjacent Little North, Forge, and Hogback Mountains.

Goshen Pass Natural Area Preserve encompasses most of the steep slopes on the northeast side of the gorge. In addition to jagged rock outcrops, much of the preserve is characterized by forests. Dry, acidic, thin-soiled sites are vegetated with Table Mountain pine (*Pinus pungens*), pitch pine (*P. rigida*) and a variety of heaths including mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), huckleberry (*Gaylussacia baccata*) and blueberry (*Vaccinium pallidum*). On much of the preserve, oak forest dominated by chestnut oak (*Quercus montana*) is the prevalent community type. Mixed oak forests are also present consisting of white oak (*Q. alba*), black oak (*Q. velutina*) and scarlet oak (*Q. coccinea*), along with various hickories (*Carya* spp.).

The Maury River and its banks are home to some Virginia rarities. The Appalachian jewelwing (*Calopteryx angustipennis*) is a rare damselfly (a delicate-looking relative of dragonflies) that may be spied flitting about the boulder-strewn shore. In the river's scour-zone – the area that is frequently flooded – are patches of the rare freshwater cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*), a predominantly midwestern species, closely related to the cordgrasses found in Virginia's tidal marshes. Also found on rocky and sandy areas along the river are populations of two other rare plants: marsh vetchling (*Lathyrus palustris*) and sand grape (*Vitis rupestris*) that, like the freshwater cordgrass, are more common in the Midwest.

Resource Management: Scientists continue to study the preserve's flora and fauna to better understand which species live here and how to best manage them. DCR's resource managers are developing plans to control non-native invasive plants that threaten the rare native species in the floodplain of the Maury River.

Public Access: The preserve is best accessed from the trailhead parking area owned and maintained by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) at the swinging bridge near the northwest corner of the preserve. Numerous hiking trails provide access to the preserve and the adjoining Little North Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA) managed by DGIF. The most popular trail starts at the swinging bridge and heads southeast following the Maury River for 0.6 miles. A 3-mile loop can be hiked by following the Goshen Pass Trail up to Chambers Ridge, then heading northwest back down to the swinging bridge by following the Hunters Trail.

Compatible Uses: The preserve is ideal for hiking, birding, and wildlife viewing. Camping, motorized vehicles, mountain bikes, horses and unleashed dogs are not permitted in the preserve. Hunting is permitted, with regulations the same as for the adjoining Goshen-Little North Mountain WMAs. Contact the DGIF Verona office (540-248-9360) for information on hunting seasons and regulations.

Location: The preserve borders the northeast bank of the Maury River where it runs through Goshen Pass. State Route 39 is on the opposite side of the Maury. The southern-most corner of the preserve is about 2.5 miles northwest of Rockbridge Baths. To reach the trailhead parking area near the northwest corner of the preserve take I-81 to I-64 (exit 191) near Lexington. Go 0.5 mile to Route 11 north (Exit 55). Bear right at the end of the ramp onto Route 11 and go 0.1 mile to the first traffic light. Turn left onto State Route 39 west. Go 15.4 miles and turn right on the gravel road that leads into the parking area. This gravel road is unmarked and is 1.7 miles north of the VDOT rest area near the middle of Goshen Pass.

Natural Heritage Resources

Natural Community
chestnut oak forest

Plants
vetchling (*Lathyrus palustris*) G5/S1
freshwater cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*) G5/S2
sand grape (*Vitis rupestris*) G3/S1?

Animals
Appalachian jewelwing (*Calopteryx angustipennis*) G4/S2

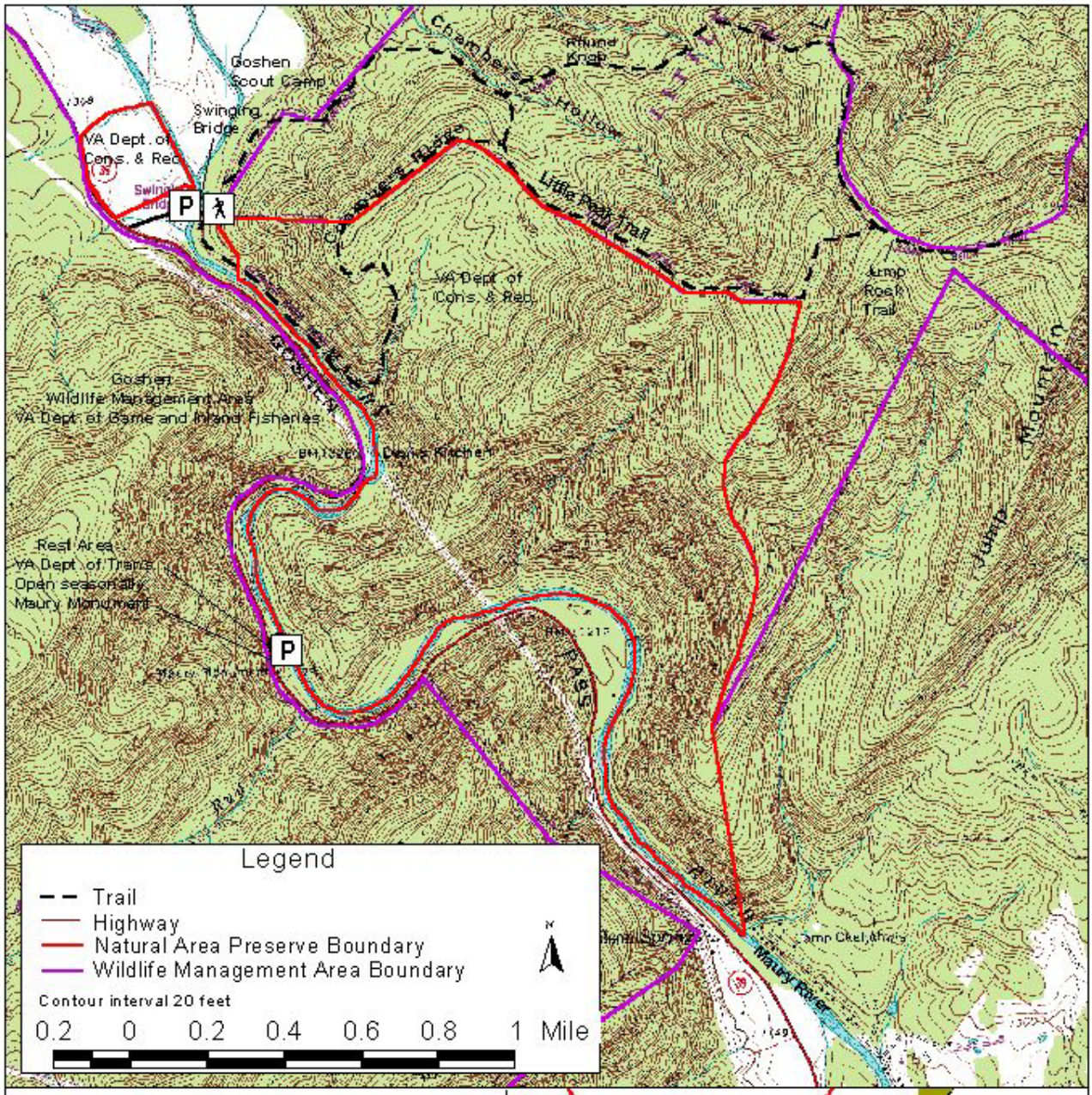
For more information please contact:

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
Natural Heritage Program
Mountain Region Steward (540) 265-5234
or
600 East Main Street; 24th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219 (804) 786-7951
Website: www.dcr.state.va.us/dnh/

03/22/04

Department of Conservation & Recreation
CONSERVING VIRGINIA'S NATURAL & RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Goshen Pass Natural Area Preserve



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Maps created 04/14/00. Data sources: Topographic map - USGS 7.5' Goshen quad, 1967, photorevised 1983. Roads & waterways - USGS, 1:24K DLG transportation & hydrology. Preserve boundaries approximated from property map, 1966.

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