At the western edge of central New Jersey’s densely populated urban centers, between the cities of Trenton, Hamilton, and Bordentown, lie the Abbott Marshlands. Included here is the Delaware River’s northernmost tidal freshwater wetland. In addition to tidal marshlands and swamps, ponds, creeks and forests add to the natural landscape. The Marshlands’ diverse habitats support over 1,200 species of plants and wildlife. Among these are 245 species of birds including red-winged blackbirds, thrushes, warblers, woodpeckers and owls. Water birds, such as ospreys, great blue herons, ducks, geese and egrets, thrive in and around the waterways. In addition, more than 900 species of plants, 22 species of mammals, 23 species of amphibians and reptiles, 62 species of fish and 34 species of butterflies make their home in the Marshlands. A number are rare or endangered.

The Abbott Marshlands have also supported humans since pre-historic times. Native Americans lived here 13,000 years ago, drawn to the area by readily available sources of food, fuel and shelter.

Present-day visitors to the Abbott Marshlands can experience this fascinating area on over 8 miles of walking trails and 11 miles of water trails. You are invited to explore this amazing natural and historic world and discover its mysteries and magic for yourself.

What is a Marsh?

Marshes are wetlands that are frequently or continuously inundated with water and are characterized by emergent soft-stemmed vegetation adapted to saturated soil conditions. Swamps, in contrast, are dominated by trees and shrubs. Life rhythms of the wetlands are dominated by the twice-daily 6 to 9-foot freshwater tides.

A Vital Natural Resource

The Abbott Marshlands are a significant ecological and environmental resource. The wetlands, in particular, reduce flood damage by holding large volumes of water and removes excess nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorous, and other pollutants from surface runoff. They recharge ground water that eventually becomes municipal drinking water. The lush plant growth of the Marshlands supplies food chains within its borders as well as the lower Delaware estuary.

In fact, the tidal marshes approach tropical rainforests in the amount of ecological productivity each year. Since 1973, more than 60 scientific studies have been published based on research conducted here. Students come to learn about ecology, the role of wetlands in urban landscapes and the principles of field research, making it an important educational as well as natural resource.

A Prehistoric Record

Indian artifacts dating back 13,000 years have been recovered from the Abbott Marshlands. Many are on display in the New Jersey State Museum in Trenton. To help safeguard this important archeological site, the United States Department of Interior designated a major portion of the Marshlands as the Abbott Farm National Historic Landmark in 1976, the highest designation bestowed by the federal government.

How to Find the Abbott Marshlands

Hamilton
- From Interstate-295, take Arena Drive (east) exit. Turn right onto Woodside Ave.; from Woodside, turn right onto South Broad S. (Rt. 206).
- To Spring Lake: From S. Broad St., turn left onto Sewell Ave.; at the end of Sewell, turn left and drive down the hill to parking.
- To Nature and Interpretive Center and Watson Woods: from S. Broad St., turn left onto Park Ave., turn right at sign for Watson House. The nature center is on the left. Drive down the hill, turn left to Watson Woods.
- To Duck Is., D&R Canal towpath bike & walking trail: From Rt. 129 south (not noted on this map), past Lalor St., take Lamberton Rd. exit; turn left onto Lamberton Rd. There is towpath parking along the Rt. 129 ramp and behind PSEG, and parking at end of road for the trail to the Delaware River. (The towpath trail can also be accessed from the I-295 scenic overlook).

Bordentown City and Bordentown Township
- To Bordentown Beach: From Rt. 206, follow Park St. to the end. Continue straight following the road down the hill, under the railroad bridge to parking area.
- To Northern Community Park: From Rt. 206 North or Rt. 130 N (of Bordentown City) take Groveville Rd. to Northern Community Park.
Historic and Cultural Connections

Europeans began settling the Abbott Marshlands in 1682. They brought with them the technology for diking and damming the marshland, ‘reclaiming’ lands for farming. The Watson House, the oldest building in Mercer County, was built near the edge of the Marshlands in 1708.

During the Revolutionary War, colonists sank boats in Crosswicks Creek to keep them from falling into British hands.

Attracted by the magnificent view, Napoleon’s brother Joseph Bonaparte built a mansion on the bluffs overlooking the Marshlands and lived there from 1816-1838. Part of his estate was preserved in 1996 by D&R Greenway Land Trust and the NJDEP Green Acres Program.

In the 1830s, the Delaware & Raritan Canal and the Camden and Amboy Railroad were built along the western edge of the Marshlands. The light rail service between Camden and Trenton now follows the original track route.

Noted archaeologist and naturalist Charles Conrad Abbott also made his home at the edge of the Marshlands from 1874-1914.

During the 19th century, a dike was constructed to create White City Lake (now known as Spring Lake) a part of the White City Amusement Park. This park attracted people from throughout the region. The remains of the ornate steps that linked the dance pavilion at the top of the bluff to the lake below are still visible today. Civic concern about proposed development in the 1930s resulted in the purchase of 300 acres that were deeded to Mercer County, establishing John A. Roebling Memorial Park as a wildlife refuge. The park has grown to 468 acres. Other public lands here include the D&R Canal State Park at the southern tip of Duck Island, and Northern Community Park in Bordentown.

Today, despite being surrounded by residential neighborhoods and industrial facilities and bisected by a major highway, the Marshlands provide a natural oasis and a tangible cultural and historic legacy.

A Place for Recreation and Relaxation

The Abbott Marshlands contain well-marked land and water trails where you can walk or paddle along pathways once traveled by Native Americans, colonists and nobles. Please be cautious when near water; currents can be swift and dangerous. Interpretive signs enhance understanding of the Marshlands natural and historic significance. After exploring the Marshlands, you can picnic at facilities available at Watson Woods, Spring Lake, Northern Community Park and Bordentown Beach.

Learn More About the Abbott Marshlands
Please visit www.marsh-friends.org. Links to tide tables and to trail maps can also be found at this website.

Friends for the Abbott Marshlands

The richness of the cultural, historical and natural resources will be lost forever unless we protect and preserve what remains. The Friends for the Abbott Marshlands are an all-volunteer group organized in 2002, in partnership with D&R Greenway Land Trust (www.drgreenway.org). The goals of the Friends are:

• To protect and preserve the natural, historical and recreational resources provided by the Marshlands.
• To promote research and actions that lead to enhanced stewardship within the Marshlands.
• To expand education, public awareness and appreciation of the Marshlands.

We invite you to join Friends for the Abbott Marshland. Membership benefits include special educational and recreational programs. Please visit www.marsh-friends.org for membership and volunteering information.

Tulpehaking Nature Center

The Tulpehaking Nature Center opened in Fall 2014 as the main educational facility for the Abbott Marshlands. Programs and exhibits encourage visitors to discover the Marshlands’ many cultural, historic, and natural resources, as well as its archaeological and scientific legacy. The center’s name, ‘Tulpehaking,’ means Land of the Turtle in Lenape, and is a link to the Marshlands cultural heritage.

Visit the center for program information and trail maps, as well as to view exhibits, stroll through the native plant garden, and more. The nature center, located at 157 Westcott Avenue, Hamilton NJ, is the result of a partnership between Mercer County, D&R Greenway Land Trust, and the NJDEP Green Acres Program. It is owned by Mercer County and operated by the Mercer County Park Commission. For more information: www.mercercountyparks.org/.