

Published February 07, 2007

McLane Nature Trail offers exercise, views

- What: McLane Creek Nature Trail
- Where: Off Delphi Road between Black Lake Boulevard and Mud Bay Road.
- To do: There is no better place for a winter hike than the McLane Creek Nature Trail. The short loop trail, which also has boardwalks, takes hikers on a half-mile route along a beaver pond and through the woods. A longer, 1.1 mile trail takes hikers past the pond and along parts of McLane Creek. However, this longer trail is closed for repairs. Floods and high winds this winter damaged boardwalks, trails and dropped trees on the longer loop. Large stacks of lumber are at the site, so this trail should be open again soon.

The shorter trail takes about 30 minutes at a brisk walk, but there is no reason to walk briskly, as you'll miss too much. It pays to walk slowly or even sit down on a bench if you want to see beavers, deer or other wildlife. Early morning is the best time to see beavers swim around the pond or visit their lodge, which looks like a giant pile of driftwood. If the beaver sees you, it will whack the water with its tail and hide.

Look for roughskin newts in the pond. These rusty-colored critters swim around and come up for air from time to time. Don't pick up any newts, as their skin has toxins that can be deadly if eaten. Quietly standing or sitting on of the short wooden piers that jut into the pond is the best way to see newts, beavers and birds.

The hike through the woods puts winter ferns and moss up close. Look for deer and raccoons. Look for beaver-chewed trees and branches. Ambitious beavers have started work on toppling some large alder and maple trees - look for their tooth marks near the base of leaning trees. Set aside at least an hour for the short loop trail. The trails have excellent signs that explain the ecology of the area and the life stories of plants and animals.

- Equipment: Rain gear, cameras, binoculars, boots, warm clothes, water and snacks.
- Safety: Don't hike this trail on windy days, as trees rooted in the shallow, muddy soil can uproot themselves and fall. Don't hike off the trail or boardwalk. Be careful on the boardwalks, as some of them don't have railings and can get slippery. This trail is not passable for people who use wheelchairs and walkers.

Don't let kids wander off to fall into the pond or into the black muck.

- Hours: The McLane Nature Trail is open daily until dusk.
- Directions: To get to McLane Nature Trail, drive west on Mud Bay Road until the intersection with Delphi Road. Turn left onto Delphi Road. Follow Delphi Road to the McLane Nature Trail sign and turn right.

Be careful driving at McLane Nature Trail, as the access road is one-lane for much of the way. Park in the second parking lot.

Comforts: There is a restroom at the trailhead.

More information: Go to www.dnr.wa.gov.