



MassWildlife Lands User Guide

High Ridge Wildlife Management Area

Towns: Ashburnham, Gardner, Westminster

Acreage: 1,040

Wildlife Management Zone: 5

Description of property:

This property is the site of the former Gardner State Hospital and surrounds the current North Central Correctional Institution. It is divided by an active railroad line. Historically, the property was a working farm and there are many acres of agricultural fields that are leased to area farmers for hay and crop production. There are three major beaver wetlands and the forested interior is dominated by white pine, oaks, and hemlock. There are many apple trees scattered throughout the property and a row of Chinese chestnut trees lines the former Beech Hill Road.

Location/Access/Parking:

There are three major access points and parking lots at High Ridge. The two eastern accesses are located in Westminster at the end of Overlook and East Gardner Roads respectively. The western access is in Gardner, off of Route 140 via Smith Street. It is marked with a "Wildlife Viewing Area" sign.

Habitat Management:

Fields are farmed and mowed annually providing miles of quality edge habitat. The largest fields along Beech Hill Road are only mowed after July 31 to maximize the benefit for grassland nesting birds such as Bobolink. Nest boxes are maintained along the roadways and in open areas to provide nesting cavities for Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, and House Wren.

Hunting Opportunities:

High Ridge is a major Ring-necked Pheasant stocked area with birds released up to three times per week during the upland bird season. The mixture of field and forest is attractive to Wild Turkey, White-Tailed Deer, Eastern Coyote, and fox. The beaver wetlands are excellent waterfowl habitat for Wood Ducks and Mallards while the marshy borders hold Snowshoe Hare. The agricultural fields can be destinations for Canada Geese and American Crow.

Fishing Opportunities:

While High Ridge WMA would not be considered a fishing destination, the beaver impoundments and former Ice House Pond near the State Hospital cemetery provide warmwater habitat for panfish.

Wildlife Viewing and Other Features:

High Ridge is popular for wildlife viewing because of the diversity of habitats found there. The fields and edges provide nesting cover for Bobolink, Song Sparrow, Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow, and Wild Turkey. The beaver wetland to the south of Beech Hill Road supports uncommon marsh birds and a Great Blue Heron nesting colony. Wood Duck nest boxes are also maintained here. High Ridge is popular during the fall hawk migration as it is located between Mt. Watatic to the north and Mt. Wachusett to the south with many Broad-winged Hawks, Sharp-shinned Hawks, and other hawk species passing overhead in mid-September.

Special WMA Regulations:

During Pheasant season, a blaze orange hat must be worn by all hunters except while night-hunting Raccoon or Opossum or while hunting waterfowl from within a blind or boat. No person shall hunt before sunrise or after sunset during the open season on Pheasant, except for the hunting of Raccoon or Opossum between 9 p.m. and 3 a.m.

Useful Links

[WMA Regulations](#)

[Habitat Program](#)

[Hunting & Fishing](#)

Fishing/Hunting Licenses

[Mass.gov/MassFishHunt](https://www.mass.gov/MassFishHunt)

Learn more

[Mass.gov/MassWildlife](https://www.mass.gov/MassWildlife)

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Get Your Orange On!

All outdoor users are encouraged to wear blaze orange during hunting seasons.

Your local

MassWildlife office

211 Temple Street
West Boylston, MA 01583
(508) 835-3607