



FALL 2020

# OUTDOOR GUIDE

Discover Middlesex County

**MIDDLESEX**  
COUNTY • NJ



Just because summer is over doesn't mean the adventures are. On the contrary, they're getting better! Get outside, breathe that crisp air, and go where the leaves are changing. Explore some of the region's most beautiful scenery with our wooded hiking trails, freshwater fishing spots, birdwatching areas, and scenic bike routes.

Marvel at Middlesex County's vast array of outdoor art in the form of vibrant murals and unique sculptures and visit exceptional historical sites stretching multiple towns and centuries. Spend some time outdoors to recharge and reset!

*\*While engaging in outdoor activities, we ask that you follow current health guidelines and maintain a 6-foot social distance from other people. While our parks and trails are open, some of our facilities are not. Please check the [Parks & Recreation page on our website](#) and plan accordingly.*



## **DID YOU KNOW? MIDDLESEX COUNTY HAS...**

**6,300+ acres**

of parks and conservation areas, perfect for hiking at any skill level

**Historic towns and picturesque farmland**

you can tour and visit by bike

**312 species of birds**

—some very rare—waiting to be sighted

**Fish from bass to bluegill**

in our lakes, rivers, and sea

**Beautiful outdoor art & historic sites**

from sculptures to murals and landmarks

## GET OUT AND EXPLORE

With hundreds of acres of leafy parks, freshwater streams, untouched woodlands, and beautiful farmland throughout Middlesex County, hikers can get up close and personal with wildlife while exploring some of the region's richest landscapes. The County has hikes that range from easy 1-mile loops, to intermediate 9-mile trails, to stunning 34-mile treks. Come for a solo adventure or bring the crew for a day trip.

Don't forget to take photos and tag #discoverMiddlesex on social media.



### › Thompson Park & the Thompson Park Conservation Area:

These 9 miles of hiking trails in Monroe Township are some of the oldest and most well-used trails in the County. They're great for fall foliage and seasonal bird migration. Some trails have moderate inclines and wander in the floodplain of the Manalapan Brook.



› **Tamarack Hollow Preserve:** 165 acres in East Brunswick that's a patchwork of heavily wooded forest mixed with farmland that supports local agriculture. The gentle rolling terrain and variety of plants and animals make it a top choice for hiking, walking, bird watching and photography.



› **Van Dyke Farm:** The historic Van Dyke Farm is a 200-acre preservation area that dates back to the Revolutionary War. Much of the property remains as farmland, but the eastern section of the property are wooded wetlands. A small gravel parking lot off Davidson's Mill Road gives access to a nearly mile-long section of hiking trail. The Wood Road trail brings visitors through the sections filled with red maple and cat-brier. The Van Dyke Loop traverses a mature beech forest with views of vernal wetlands. Look for migrating songbirds in the spring and fall.



› **Davidson Mill Pond Park:** A tranquil spot in the heart of 482 acres of scenic former agricultural land, these fun-but-tough switchback trails take you under thick forest canopy and around babbling brooks all the way to the Davidson Mill Pond boat launch. Located conveniently off of Route 130, no permit is required for visits or for blanket picnics (no fires, please). Memorable features include a butterfly house, garden displays, and a captivating waterfall.

› **Cheesequake State Park:** With easy-to-moderate trails and remarkable scenery, Cheesequake State Park is famed for its unlikely range of contrasting natural vistas including a swath of upland hardwood forest, a vast white-cedar swamp, and miles of coastal saltwater marshes. Near the trailhead, the Nature Center helps visitors with guidance on the best trails and sites. This is a great place to camp!

› **Philips Preserve:** For plant and animal diversity, little compares to the John A. Phillips Preserve. Located in the heart of the ecologically rich Spotswood Outlier, hikers come to catch sight of the colorful sugar maples, huckleberries, sweet pepperbushes, and imposing pitch pines. With over 1,782 acres of trails, the park office produces handy route guides and overviews of the region's fascinating natural history. Hikers can spend days here exploring the marshlands, sand trails, blueberry flats, and the stunning Pine Glenn Spur.

› **Heathcote Meadows Preserve:** Nestled just outside the small village of Kingston, the preserve offers a glimpse into the rich farming history of the area. Combined with Heathcote Park, the **Cook Natural Area**, Mapleton Preserve and the **Delaware & Raritan Canal State Park**, the Heathcote Meadows Preserve creates a dense belt of foliage around the village of Kingston for fall leaf peepers. This provides stream protection for Heathcote Brook and Carter Brook and wonderful opportunities for hiking, walking, and wildlife viewing. Try a leisurely 1.4-mile hike or a more strenuous 34-mile adventure along the Delaware & Raritan Canal Towpath.

› **Ireland Brook Conservation Area:** This conservation area is over 500 acres. The blue-blazed Forest Brook trail is a short, 0.8 mile loop off of Riva Avenue in East Brunswick which has views of the rushing, rocky Ireland Brook near its outflow into the Lawrence Brook. The 2.9 mile Ireland Brook Trail (yellow blaze) crosses the old Fast Line Trolley line, into the beech and maple forest above the Ireland Brook and meanders through meadows and alongside an active farm field towards the eastern edge of the preserve. Download trail map, [here](#).

› **Scott's Corner Conservation Area:** This 159-acre preserve is located between the Township's Rowland Park and the Plainsboro Preserve—home of the New Jersey Audubon Nature Center. It has a tidy, ½ mile loop trail (Beechwood Loop—orange blaze) that winds through towering beech trees and lush ferns towards a bird blind that overlooks a small, hidden pond full of turtles, frogs and red-winged blackbirds. Download trail map, [here](#).

## GRAB YOUR BIKE AND GO

Middlesex County is a destination for cyclists across New Jersey. Hit the trails and ride on our challenging, multi-use, and hard-pack routes that run along rolling hillsides, serene fields, and upland forest cover. Then break out into acres of pristine meadows and open spaces beneath the autumn sun. Grab your road bike to escape the city and explore historic towns and peaceful farmland. Great for group trips, solo rides or weekend adventures!

› **15 miles – Princeton/Cranbury:** This 15-mile loop takes you through a rural countryside, past farm-stands, and through quaint, historic downtown Cranbury.

[Click for map](#)

[Click for turn-by-turn](#)

› **27 miles – Princeton/Cranbury to Thompson Park:** If you're looking to tack on some extra miles, add the Thompson Park extension to the loop above. The out-and-back extension will take you to Thompson Park where you can explore the park grounds, including a lake and animal haven with pigs, goats, deer, and more.

[Click for map](#)

[Click for turn-by-turn](#)

› **25 miles - New Brunswick to the Greenway:** This 25-mile loop starts in New Brunswick and takes you out to the trails on the Middlesex Greenway. You'll pass through the Dismal Swamp, a marshy preservation area with lots of wildlife to spot along the way.

[Click for map](#)

[Click for turn-by-turn](#)

› **42 miles – New Brunswick to the Waterfront:** If you're looking for a longer ride, this 42-mile loop takes you through many of our beautiful parks and conservation areas, including: Johnson Park, the Middlesex Greenway, Raritan Bay Waterfront Park, Jamesburg Park, and the Ireland Brook Conservation Area.

[Click for map](#)

[Click for turn-by-turn](#)

› **White Trail at Cheesequake State Park:** This 2.5 miles of looping, swooping bike trail—famous for its scenery, as well as its challenging twists and turns—is not for the faint of heart. A short but adventurous ride, the trail continues onto additional park trails if you want to keep biking. It also links to Arrowpoint, which offers striking marshland views.

› **Thompson Park:** Packed with hillside and hard-pack trails that are open to hikers, bikers, and equestrians alike, this complex of short-to-medium sized trails cuts close to a local zoo, disc golf course, and lakeside scenery. Great for experienced and beginner bikers who want a quick, challenging ride that will get your heartrate going.

› **Delaware & Raritan Canal Tow Path:** Once a path for mules and horses to tow cargo along the canal, the 69.5-mile D&R Canal State Park Trail is now one of the most popular recreational areas in New Jersey. The trail stretches from New Brunswick to Trenton and is an absolutely spectacular ride featuring open fields, freshwater estuaries, stone walls, cobblestone spillways, historic covered bridges, and old-growth forest. With many unique places to visit along the way, this is a great ride for groups and day-trippers alike. Commuters [click here](#) for navigation from the New Brunswick Train Station to the northern entrance of the towpath.

**Note:** Always remember to wear a helmet and use proper road safety. While some of these routes use biking trails, please be aware the majority of your ride will be on a public road. For accurate times and distances, make sure Google Maps is set to cycling (located in the blue menu bar).



## FALL BIRD WATCHING

Whether you're a novice or expert bird watcher, you'll be sure to spot a great variety of birds, including migratory and rare birds here.

Never birded before? Well check out any of these beautiful preserves or parks below and you just might discover a new passion. Seasonal birds to look for at these locations:

› **Julian L. Capik Nature Preserve: Red-breasted Nuthatch**

Scan the pine trees of this Sayreville park and listen for the 'toy-horn' sounds of this occasional cold-weather visitor.

› **William Warren Park: Fall Migrants**

This County Park is one of the best places to search for migrating birds in the fall—including thrushes, warblers, vireos and orioles.

› **Rutgers Ecological Preserve: Fall Migrants**

A 360-acre conservation area, managed by the University. The wooded trails are a bird migration hotspot.

› **Bicentennial Park: Golden-crowned Kinglet**

With views of Farrington Lake and tree-lined pathways, this East Brunswick park is a pleasant birding location.

› **Elmer B. Boyd Park: Greater Black-backed Gull**

New Brunswick's 20-acre park fronts along the Raritan River where groups of gulls gather, especially during low tide. This is the largest gull that occurs there.

› **Raritan Bay Waterfront Park: Saltmarsh Sparrow**

Birders who walk the shoreline towards the spartina marsh may hear the raspy songs of this sparrow, especially during fall migration.



Middlesex County is home to the **NJ Audubon Society**, located in the **Plainsboro Preserve**. Get expert advice about local birding hotspots, walk the five miles of trails, or just take in the scenery on this 1,000-acre wildlife sanctuary. For an in-depth resource that highlights hundreds of species of birds spotted in Middlesex County, check out [this report](#).

## THE FISH ARE BITING

Whether you're looking for lake, river, pond, or saltwater fish, Middlesex County offers a relaxing experience. For a fun outing by the water, check out Davidson's Mill Pond Park where largemouth bass, pickerel, sunfish, catfish and bluegill are biting. Prefer saltwater fishing? Charter a boat out of Perth Amboy for a "reel" adventure on the bay!

**Check out some of our favorite fishing spots:**

› Trout, Crappie, Bluegill: **Roosevelt Park Pond:**

Earn some bragging rights by reeling in stocked trout, yellow perch, bluegill, and channel catfish (casting from shore). And, when you're done visit the Veterans' Memorial and local sculptures in this historic park.

› Largemouth Bass, Pickerel, Sunfish:

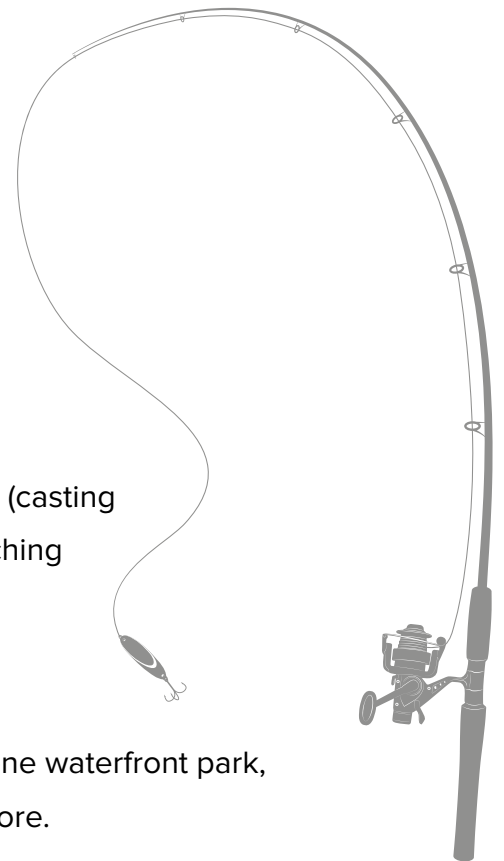
**Davidson's Mill Pond:** Pick up some pickerel and sunfish (casting from shore or boat) and enjoy free use of the small launching ramp and the scenic waterfalls and garden displays.

› Striped Bass:

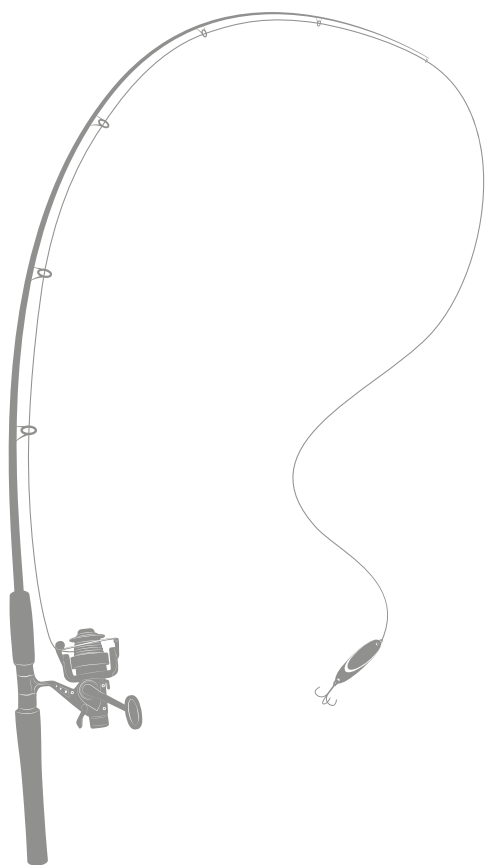
**Raritan Bay:** Enjoy a beautiful day on the bay at this serene waterfront park, where you can fish from a boat or go crabbing on the shore.

› Carp, Catfish, Eel: **Donaldson Park:** Bring in a boatload of carp, perch, and catfish (casting from shore) while taking advantage of the boat ramp and public dog park.

› Striped Bass, Perch: **New Brunswick Landing:** Catch striped bass and bluefish (casting from shore) anytime between sunrise and sunset and also enjoy a floating dock and free boat slips.







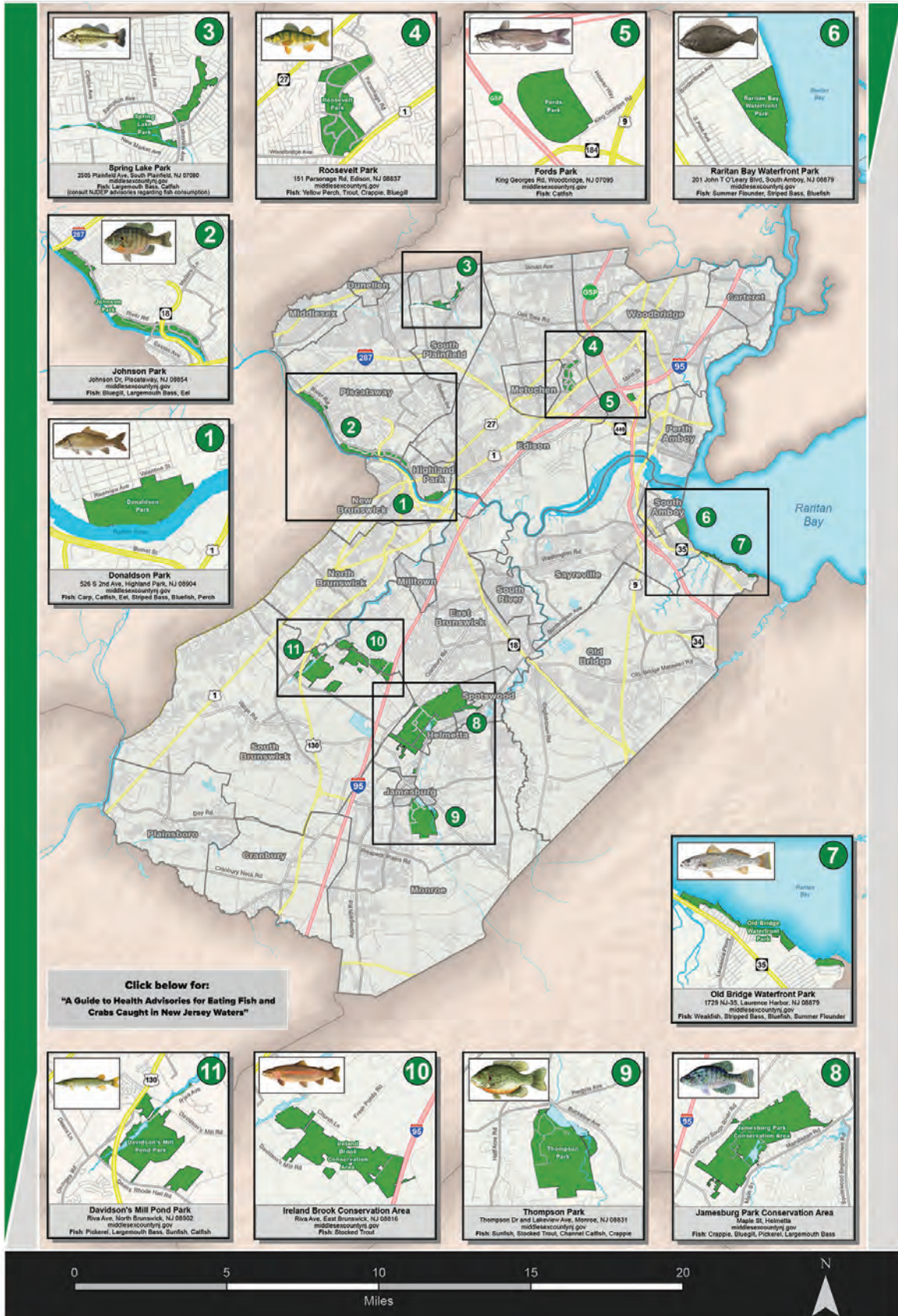
› Stocked Trout: **Ireland Brook Park:** This serene conservation area boasts a spectacular lake and unique rock formations found nowhere else in the County.

› Largemouth Bass, Bluegill: **Johnson Park:** Hook a bucketful of channel catfish and bluegill (casting from shore or boardwalk). Bring the kids along to enjoy the picnic groves and fun animal haven with pigs, goats, llama, deer, and more.

For information about each location, available fish, and where to cast, you can visit the Middlesex County website [here](#).

**\* Don't forget to pick up your freshwater fishing license.** Everyone between the ages of 16 and 69 must have a license and an additional trout stamp if you plan on trout fishing. For more information and to purchase a license, visit the **NJ Division of Fish & Wildlife**.

# FISHING

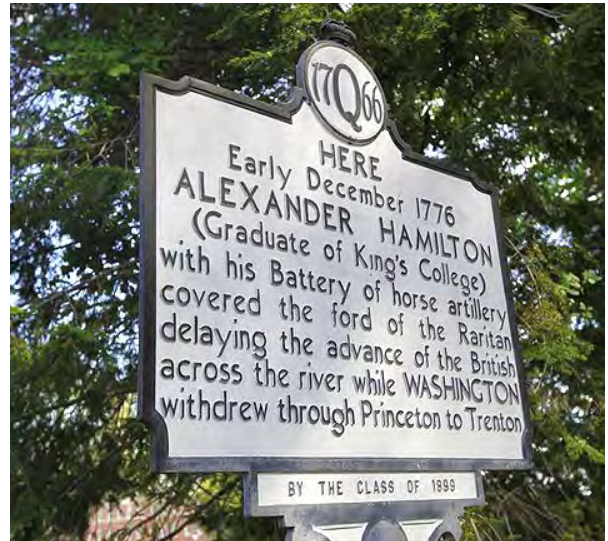




## MIDDLESEX COUNTY HISTORY TOUR

Do you know which famous family in Middlesex County brewed beer in colonial times? What about how Alexander Hamilton contributed to the County's rich history?

Use your mobile device to follow our unique tour of landmarks throughout New Brunswick, Highland Park, and Piscataway. It's easy to walk or drive between historical sites, plus stay outdoors and socially distant while you explore! History buff or not, you're bound to learn something new. [Click here!](#)

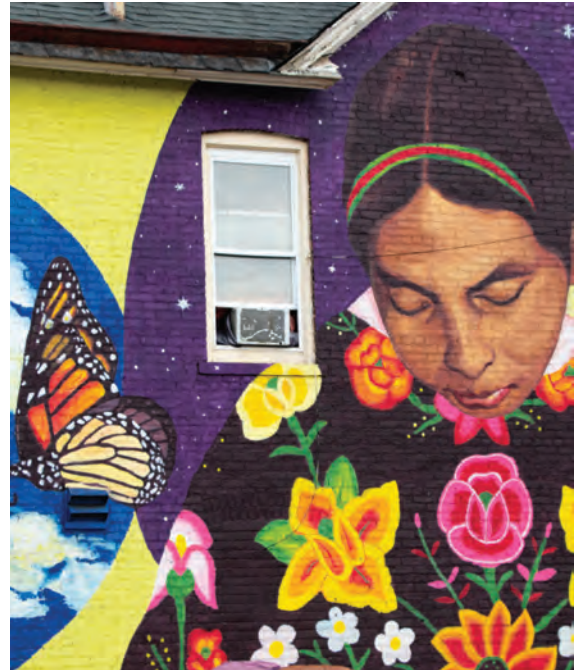
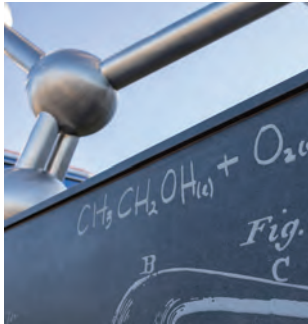




## THERE'S ART ALL AROUND YOU

Middlesex County is home to unique, wonderful outdoor art – from vibrant wall-to-wall murals to one-of-a-kind sculptures. All are free to see and easily accessible. These works bring streetscapes and parks to life while getting us to think and react a little differently about the world around us. Use this guide to visit these outdoor wonders and gain a new appreciation for local art and artists.

Go on your own outdoor art tour now! [Click here!](#)



[www.middlesexcountynj.gov](http://www.middlesexcountynj.gov)

