

WELCOME TO THE SHERWOOD ISLAND NATURE TRAIL

The world of the salt marsh is one of the most fascinating and dynamic communities to explore. Here you can find many unique plants and animals that have adapted to live in a world that is perpetually flooded by tides.

The intertidal zone is known as an "ecotone," where one habitat overlaps another, in this case the fluctuation occurs between the aquatic and the terrestrial environments. Ecotones are characteristically biodiverse because they provide a wider range of habitats. Nevertheless, for the animals that live here, the intertidal can also be one of the harshest, most extreme habitats that exist on earth. At high tide they are covered in water, and heavy wave action can easily dislodge an animal and smash it against the rocks. At low tide the same aquatic animals are dried out, barraged by sunlight and exposed to extreme temperatures. On the other hand, to the animal's advantage, the movement of the tides creates a cyclical flow that sweeps over the intertidal, with nutrients from the estuary coming in and waste products going out. The tidal marsh is not as extreme an environment as the rocky intertidal, and mud provides a more stable living environment. It takes thousands of years for a marsh to form into the complex and biodiverse ecosystem that you are looking at today. Without wetlands such as this one, surface water would flood our shore communities, and "run-off" water (laced with pollutants and fertilizers) would flow directly into the sound and sea. Instead, polluted waters pass through the sponge-like wetland substrate that acts like a natural filter.

Moreover, wetlands are protected nursery habitats for immature fish and marine life to grow, and without them the catch of mature fish in the sound and open ocean would be all but nonexistent. Furthermore, other wildlife like birds and small mammals would not exist in this area without this small but peaceful and healthy ecosystem where they reside or stop to rest. Please care for your wetland and feel free to pick up trash along the way!

This trail skirts a recovering wetland habitat that was largely filled, dredged and destroyed in the building of I-95, the metro north railroad, parking lots, and local marinas. Fortunately, citizens have come to appreciate the economic value as well as the environmental importance and natural beauty of these habitats.

Walk slowly and keep your eyes and ears wide open to the sights and sounds of the marsh!