

## Sandy Mush Game Lands

The Sandy Mush Game Lands abut roads in several areas. You can always recognize a game land access by the presence of an orange bar gate. However, not all of these gates have good places for parking. Here's a link to the NC Wildlife Resources Commission map of Sandy Mush parking areas: <https://www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Hunting/Game-Land-Maps/Mountain/Sandy-Mush.pdf>

**Bear Creek Rd:** Most of this area of the game lands is actively managed with prescribed burns to maintain early successional vegetation. Because of the habitat, this area is an excellent place for breeding Prairie Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chats, Field Sparrows, Indigo Buntings and possibly Blue-winged Warblers. A couple of trails lead down to Sandy Mush Creek. The creek valley has been left in deciduous woods, so be on the lookout for Acadian Flycatcher, Scarlet Tanager, Wood Pewee, Louisiana Waterthrush, Wood Thrush, Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireos.

**Cedar Hill Rd access:** From the parking area, an easy ridge trail angles north for about a mile and ends on a bluff overlooking Sandy Mush Creek. The trail passes through woods and meadows. The meadows are planted with food crops and attract a variety of birds and animals. Wild Turkey, Ruffed Grouse and Bobwhite can be found here. The area is also reliable for Common Yellowthroat, Northern Parula, Field Sparrows and Indigo Buntings. This section is probably the easiest to navigate of the four detailed, as long as you stay on the ridge trail.

**Martin Candler Rd access:** This section has a short trail that follows a hedgerow north from the parking area for about half a mile. Planted fields are on both sides. The trail ends at woods that can lead down to both Turkey Creek and Sandy Mush Creek. These woods and the two creeks are worth exploring, but the woods are steep and rocky so be careful if you go that way. East of the parking area is more accessible, with woods and fields leading over to the Cedar Hill area. Birds found in this tract are similar to those described in 2b above, although the Kestrel box sited near the trail has breeding birds most summers.

**Old SR 20 access – point D on Google map** - There is a trail that leads up the hill to the right of the parking area. Follow this through the meadows (listen for Yellow-breasted Chats and look for Kestrels in the box across the valley), and through a wood (Wild Turkey and Ruffed Grouse) to a pasture that tops the hill. The other side of this pasture has another trail that leads down to Turkey Creek. There is much beaver activity here, which is probably why there are often groups of Wood Duck in the ponds formed.

For more information, check this [\*\*Sandy Mush link\*\*](#) for thorough descriptions by Doug Johnston with directions to, and reference photos of, the entrances for the Sandy Mush Game Lands.