

The Sandy Mush Gamelands are to be found mostly in north Buncombe County, while a small part of the Gamelands is in south Madison County. ([Map of Sandy Mush Gamelands](#)) They comprise around 2600 acres of hilly ground. Some bottomland is associated with the two creeks that flow through the Gamelands – Turkey Creek and Sandy Mush Creek. Elevation varies between 1700 ft and 2200 ft. The land is managed for hunting, but also attracts a large variety of non-game species.

Sandy Mush is a “three day” hunt gameland. Hunting days are Monday, Wednesday and Saturday of each week as well as certain major holidays. Be sure to check the website for hunting regulations if you want to visit on days on which hunting is allowed. It’s really best to limit your visits to Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays. ([Gameland regulations](#))

The gamelands abut roads in several areas. You can always recognize a gameland access by the presence of an orange bar gate. However, not all of these gates have good places for parking. The four access points described below have been chosen because of their parking areas.

Bear Creek Rd access – point A on Google map

(All directions are from the junction of Patton Avenue and Hwy 63/ Leicester Hwy in west Asheville.)

- Drive north on Leicester Hwy for 8.1 miles to the traffic lights in Leicester, turn right onto Alexander Rd.
- Drive 1.7 miles to the junction with Bear Creek Rd. Turn left.
- Drive 4.6 miles to a dirt drive on the left. This has no sign or orange gate visible. It is 0.2 miles past Redmon Missionary Baptist church on the right, and just before the top of the hill.
- Coordinates: +35 43.644 -82 42.082

Most of this area of the gamelands is actively managed with prescribed burns to maintain early successional vegetation. There are many tracks, so access to most parts is good. The tracks can be muddy after rain. 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 if their presence in the summer of 2010 is anything to go by. 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 flycatchers, Scarlet tanagers, Wood pewees, Louisiana waterthrushes, Wood thrushes , Blue-headed and Red-eyed vireos.



Bear Creek Rd. access (photo by Doug Johnston)



Bear Creek Rd. access (photo by Doug Johnston)

Cedar Hill Rd access – point B on Google map

- From the traffic lights in Leicester, follow Alexander Rd for 2.9 miles, turn left onto Tipton Hill Rd.
- Drive 1.9 miles to stop sign. Turn left. (Several road signs are missing in this area, so follow the mileage directions, GPS or a map.)
- Drive 2.0 miles to the end of Cedar Hill Rd. The last 0.4 miles are gravel.
- Coordinates: +35 43.588 -82 39.547

Although this portion is contiguous with Martin Candler section (below), it is treated as a separate area for access purposes.

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.

There are a couple of trails that lead down east to the French Broad River, but they can be a scramble to access, tending not to be cleared. Birds seen on this tract include Bald eagle (spring), Northern harrier (winter) and even Great egret (late summer). Winter migrants such as sparrows (Fox, White-crowned, White-throated, Swamp, Song, Chipping, etc.) are attracted to the leftover crops. This section is probably the easiest to navigate of the four detailed, as long as you stay on the ridge trail. It certainly has provided some good sightings.



Cedar Hill Rd. access (photo by Doug Johnston)



Cedar Hill Rd. access (photo by Doug Johnston)

Martin Candler Rd access – point C on Google map

- From the traffic lights in Leicester, follow Alexander Rd for 2.9 miles. Turn left onto Tipton Hill Rd.
- Drive 1.9 miles to stop sign. Turn left.
- Drive 0.7 miles to Martin Candler Rd. Turn left.
- Drive 0.8 miles to parking area on right.
- Coordinates: +35 43.158 -82 40.275

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

- From the traffic lights in Leicester, follow Alexander Rd for 2.9 miles. Turn left onto Tipton Hill Rd.
- Drive 1.9 miles to stop sign. Turn left
- Drive 0.2 miles to Old SR 20 (aka Old Marshal Rd). Turn left.
- Drive down hill for 0.8 miles to parking area on left, just after bridge over Turkey Creek.
- Coordinates: +35 42.283 -82 40.150

This section can get pretty overgrown in the summer, but is worth a visit. 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. The bottomland here can get very overgrown in the summer, but is more accessible in the winter. If you follow the river downstream, you can almost make a circle back to the parking area, except for the last 200 yards, which is a very difficult scramble up a steep bramble-covered hill. You are best to retrace your steps and return the way you came. You are bound to see new wildlife on the way back anyway.