

Seneca Creek State Park, Lake Clopper

Lake Clopper in Gaithersburg is a refreshing place to exercise, picnic, or just take in the views. A nominal entrance fee is required but what you get for it is a park that's not very crowded, and one that has plenty of places to explore. Begin by checking-out its namesake lake. A dirt loop trail open to mountain bikes, when it's not wet, circles the lake staying close to the water almost the whole way. Other trails go in and out of various stream valleys. The Lake Clopper Visitor Center is at one end of the new Greenway Trail. All but a small section of it near a construction zone at Rte. 28 has been completed as of June, 1999. The Greenway Trail can be followed approximately 14 miles to Riley's Lock on the C&O Canal. It connects several existing trails. It was created through the joint efforts of the Maryland State Forest and Park Service and the Friends of Seneca Creek State Park, a volunteer non-profit organization (301 924-2127). Cycling is not allowed on it except for a small portion within Lake Clopper Park.

Getting There

From the Capital Beltway (I-495), take I-270 headed west. About 10 miles from the beltway, take Exit 10, Clopper Road headed west. Turn left 2 miles later into the park. Pay the entrance fee (annual and life passes are available). Bear right onto Seneca Creek Road. After half a mile, turn left into the Kingfisher Overlook parking area.

Area Routes

Lake Shore Trail (3.45 or 4.6 miles, II or IV)

Lake Clopper was created by damming the Long Draught Branch. The loop starts with great views across the length of the lake. Kingfisher Overlook parking is at a vantage above the dam. The loop can be considered flat, but you will at first descend gradually toward the boat center as you go clockwise. After the boat center, the trail hugs the shoreline, mostly following the lake's fingers. Parts of the trail, on the way to the far end of the lake, are unevenly sloped and have exposed tree roots. Care is necessary to avoid falling. Some side trails separate from the main loop and come back again. Follow the blue blazes. After rounding to the other side and coming most of the way back, the Mink Hollow Trail (white blazes) offers an option to extend the loop. While hillier, this trail has better footing and is fun to run as it twists up, around and down to the Long Draught Trail. Just before hitting the Long Draught Trail, the Mink Hollow Trail passes over a small boardwalk through a wetland. The Long Draught Trail climbs the stream valley back to the dam and the Lake Shore Trail. This loop, including the optional extension is open for mountain biking, but may be closed when conditions are damp.

Long Draught Trail (4 miles, IV)

From the Kingfisher Overlook parking lot, go west (not on the Lake Shore Trail) to the car turn-around circle and follow the dirt trail downhill to the road at an intersection. Cross the road and continue downhill on the left side of the intersecting road (on the opposite side). This is the Long Draught Trail (blazed yellow) and is also the Greenway Trail. The trail switchbacks down to a pleasant tree covered but open stream valley. Intersect the Mink Hollow Trail which shares the same path for a short way, but keeps going on, under the Great Seneca Highway. After the

highway, pass wetlands on the right. They mark the confluence of the Long Draught Branch and the Great Seneca Creek. The trail passes a wooden observation tower on the right side, then follows a gravel road. Turning left before the end of the road, separate from the Greenway Trail on the loop portion of the Long Draught Trail. Climb gently at first, then very steeply up a hillside with many ferns and mountain laurel. Cross a dirt road in the middle of a power line clearing, climb a little more, then begin a descent to another stream valley. At Riffleford Rd, loop to the right, where two valley's and trails merge. Pick-up the gravel road and Long Draught/Greenway Trail for the return. This loop is open to mountain bikes, weather conditions permitting.

Great Seneca Trail (2.55 miles, III)

To make this route a loop, follow the Lake Shore Trail to just past the boat center. Before the trail goes downhill and enters back into the woods, turn left, uphill on the boat center road. At a T intersection, cross to the other side continuing uphill on a grassy trail identified by a small wooden bridge and a sign. This is a spur portion of the Lake Shore Trail and is blazed blue. At the next T intersection at Seneca Creek Rd., go right and left to continue the climb toward the Visitor Center. Once there, take the orange blazed Great Seneca Trail back down. The beginning of this trail is also the trail head for the Greenway Trail. It crosses field clearings for power lines and pipelines before bottoming out at the very picturesque Great Seneca Creek. Springtime flowers bloom abundantly among the rocks and partially wooded valley there. The creek is deep and wide. Follow it downstream for a way, then climb out of the valley back into the power line clearing. Going to the right, the trail rolls and climbs more before descending steeply back to Great Seneca Creek. After a short stretch along the banks, it once again climbs steeply to return you near the Lake Clopper dam, and the Kingfisher Overlook. The Great Seneca Trail is not open to cyclists.

Nearby and Connecting Zones

Seneca State Park, Black Rock Mill
Seneca State Park, Schaeffer Farm
Rock Creek Park, Lake Needwood

What to do Afterward

Food and Drink

Earnies Restaurant and Pub - 301 869-8200
Bagels DeLox - 301 216-0070
Spring Mill Bread Co. - 301 977-7733

Entertainment and Edification

Agricultural History Farm Park - 301-948-5053
Montgomery County Fairgrounds - 301 963-3247

Lake Shore Trail

Distance: 3.45 or 4.6 miles

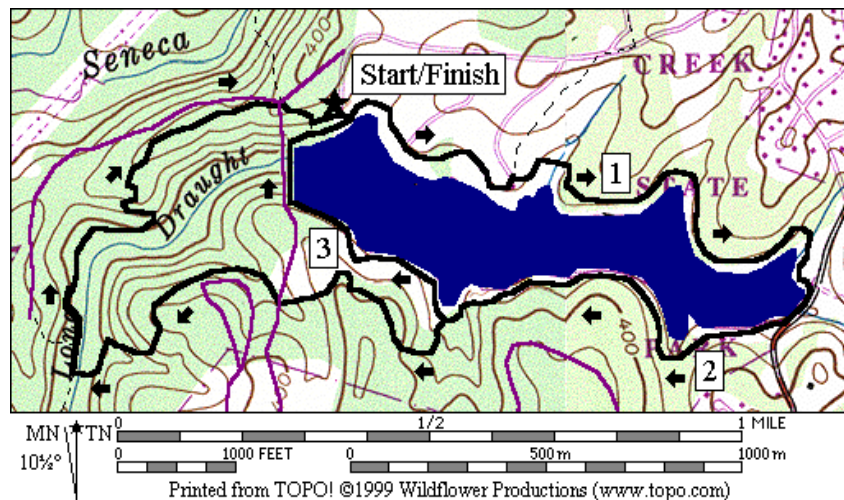
Rating: II or IV; dirt trails through wooded lakeside trails

3.45 Mile Route

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| <p>0.0 toward the lake from the bulletin board at the east end of the lot</p> <p>L 0.0 Lake Shore Trail (blue blazes)
0.45 parking circle at boat center</p> <p>BR 0.5 trail goes down into woods as road bends L to go uphill</p> <p>L 0.8 at the trail X and wooden bridge to stay on the Lake Shore Trail; follow blue blazes
1.3 gravel road X</p> <p>BR 1.6 at trail X on L toward Long Draught Rd to stay on Lake Shore Trail (end of lake; begin to loop back)</p> | <p>BR 1.65 Long Draught Branch (stream pipe); BR afterward to stay on Lake Shore Trail</p> <p>1.85 closed road on L</p> <p>>*</p> <p>2.8 Mink Hollow Trail on L (white blazes)</p> <p>BR 3.05 trail X on L to stay on the Lake Shore Trail; follow blazes
3.1 lake overflow spillway field</p> <p>BR 3.2 on gravel trail at dam and Seneca Creek Rd (unmarked)</p> <p>R 3.3 at break in fence to leave dam; uphill
3.35 trail X on L to west end of Kingfisher Overlook parking</p> <p>L 3.45 trail X on L to bulleting board (east end); Kingfisher Overlook parking</p> |
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*4.6 Mile Route

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| <p>L 2.8 Mink Hollow Trail (white blazes) goes uphill
3.2 cross Seneca Creek Rd</p> <p>R 3.75 Long Draught (yellow blaze) and Greenway Trail at T after marsh bridge
3.9 Mink Hollow Trail goes L
4.5 Seneca Creek Rd
4.55 turnaround circle at Kingfisher Overlook parking
4.6 bulletin board (east end); Kingfisher Overlook parking</p> |
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Long Draught Trail

Distance: 4.0 miles

Rating: IV; dirt trails through stream valley woods with some steep hills

4.0 Mile Route

- 0.0 head west across the parking lot from the bulletin board at the east end of parking
- 0.05 gravel trail head at Kingfisher Overlook parking turn-around circle

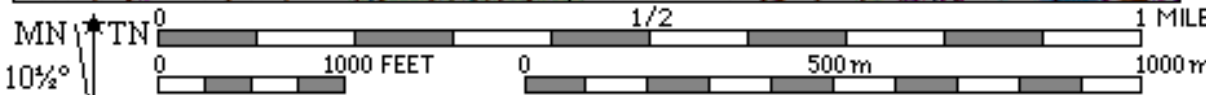
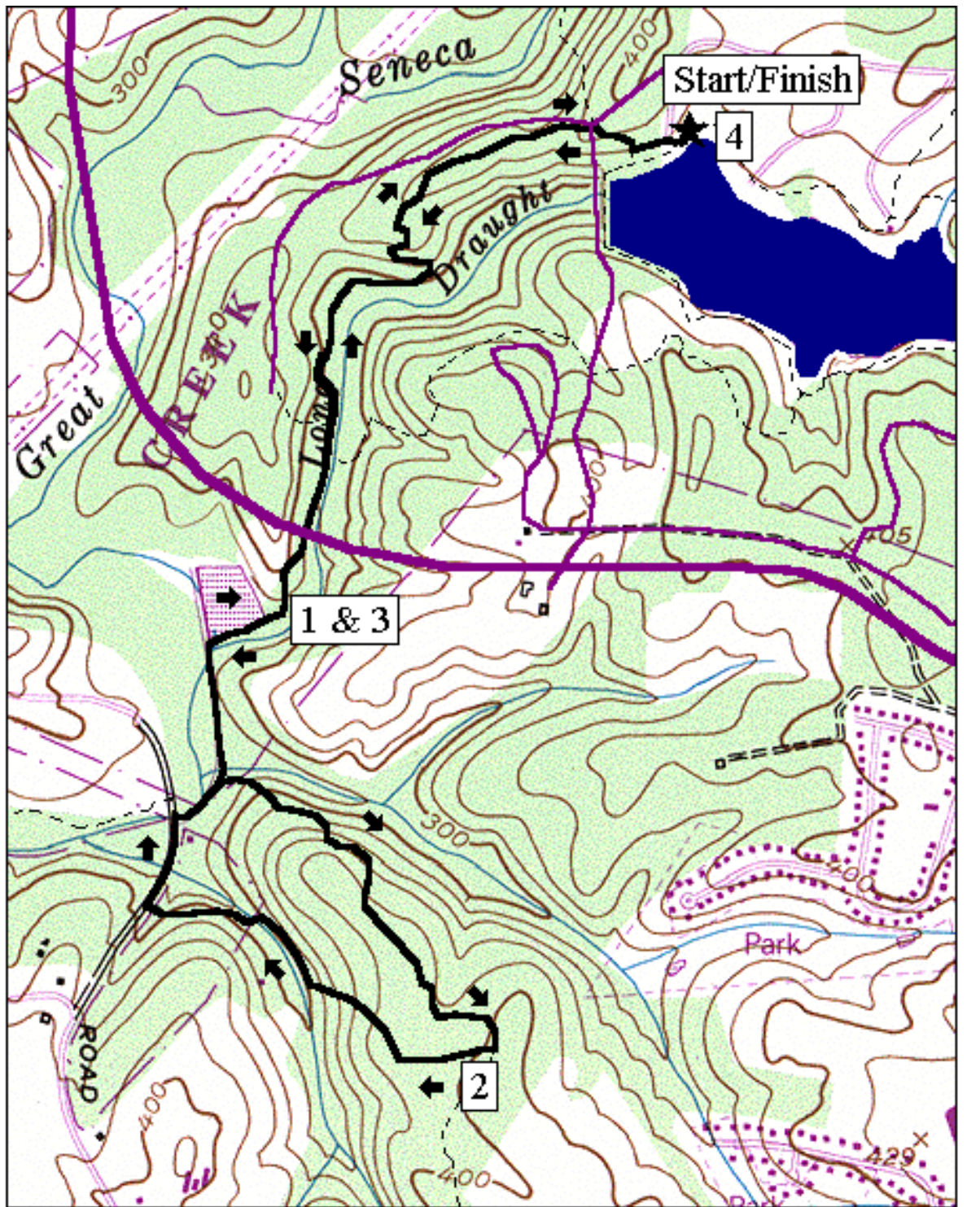
- BL 0.1 cross Seneca Creek Rd to pickup the Long Draught Trail head (yellow blazes) and the Greenway Trail on the L side of the intersecting road
- 0.7 Mink Hollow Trail (white blazes) joins from R; follow yellow/white blazes S
- 0.85 Mink Hollow Trail goes L on a wooden bridge; continue S following teal/green blazes for Greenway/Long Draught Trails
- 0.95 underpass Great Seneca Highway
- 1.05 observation platform for wetland
- 1.15 trail continues by bearing L on gravel road

- L 1.3 loop portion of Long Draught Trail (steep hill and yellow blazes); Greenway and Long Draught return is S
- 1.75 dirt road in power line clearing
- 1.95 trail X on L to McDonald Chapel Dr (unmarked)

- R 2.5 Riffleford Rd (use shoulder)

- R 2.6 gravel road on R (Greenway Trail, Teal/Green blazes) before creek bridge; passes utility building ahead
- 2.7 complete Long Draught Trail loop at trail X on R (same as mile 1.3)
- 2.85 trail bears R at wetland and end of gravel road
- 2.95 observation platform for wetland
- 3.05 underpass Great Seneca Highway
- 3.15 Mink Hollow Trail (white blaze) joins from the R from the wooden bridge; follow white and yellows blazes S
- 3.3 Mink Hollow Trail goes L; follow yellow blazes S
- 3.9 cross Seneca Creek Rd at road X to gravel trail
- 3.95 gravel trail at Kingfisher Overlook turn-around circle
- 4.0 bulletin board at east end of Kingfisher Overlook parking

Long Draught Trail



Great Seneca Trail

Distance: 2.55 miles

Rating: III; dirt trails and park roads with some steep hills

2.55 Mile Route

- 0.0 toward the lake from the bulletin board at the east end of the lot
- L 0.0 Lake Shore Trail (blue blazes)
0.45 parking circle at boat center
- BL 0.5 on road going uphill as Lake Shore Trail goes down into woods
- S 0.55 Rd X at T; Lake Shore Trail spur goes uphill over small wooden bridge on a grassy trail (blue blaze)
- R/L 0.7 at Seneca Creek Rd; continue uphill toward park exit
0.9 entrance gatehouse
- L 1.0 2nd road on L toward Visitor Center Parking
- R 1.1 Great Seneca Trail (orange blazes) and Greenway Trail head
1.15 power lines clearing
- L 1.3 at T at Great Seneca Creek; bottom of hill after gas pipeline
1.8 Old Pond Trail on L and wooden bridges in power lines clearing
1.9 trail X on L to Chickadee parking
2.05 trail leaves power line clearing
- BR 2.2 at trail X on L; follow orange blazes down to Great Seneca Creek
- BL 2.3 at trail X on R; leave the creek and follow orange blazes up the steep hill
- S 2.45 end of Great Seneca Trail; cross Seneca Creek Rd at intersection on R to the gravel trail going uphill into the woods
2.5 gravel trail ends at Kingfisher Overlook turn-around circle
2.55 bulletin board at east end of Kingfisher Overlook parking

Great Seneca Trail

