

# *Come to the Upper Mud*

*By Karen McClure*

Mud, provides habitats for excellent hunting, but also offers a variety of outdoor recreation not usually found in a West Virginia wildlife management area. Upper Mud has a 306-acre fishing lake, a day-use recreation area, and places suitable for dog training as well as wildlife watching. Families flock to this public area to take advantage of all it has to offer, and anyone interested in the outdoors can find an activity to enjoy there.

The lake was developed as a flood control project to ease downstream flooding in the towns of Hamlin and Milton, which lie along the Mud River. The U.S. Department of Agriculture National Resources Conservation Service developed the project. The land is owned by the Lincoln County Commission, and is leased and managed by the DNR Wildlife Resources Section.

Upper Mud River Wildlife Management Area totals 1,425 acres, including the lake and recreation area. An earthen dam is located at the convergence of the main Mud River and the Left Fork of the Mud River. The dam gates were closed in December, 1995.

Catch-and-release largemouth bass fishing, recognized as some of the best in the state, is the number one activity on the lake. Stocking of largemouth bass before the official opening in early 1996 has provided great fishing from day one, and a reproductive population for the future. Upper Mud is also stocked regularly with channel catfish and muskellunge for legal-sized harvest. The lake has some areas

with standing timber and others with downed trees for fish cover.

Most of the twelve miles of shoreline are visible from roads within the area. Anglers will find many pull-off fishing spots along the roads, as well as a handicapped fishing pier, and a gentle fishing trail near the main, paved boat launch. A second paved boat launch with a gravel parking lot is located in the Left

**T**raditionally, a wildlife management area is a destination to hunt squirrels in October, whitetails in November, or turkeys in May. The primary focus on the area is wildlife management. Ideally, this results in the best conditions for hunters in the pursuit of their chosen game species.

In keeping with tradition, the Upper Mud River Wildlife Management Area, often referred to as Upper



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*Fishing on the Upper Mud is a great experience.*



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*The new playground equipment provides hours of fun.*

Fork headwater area. Upper Mud is becoming more popular with folks in pleasure craft. It is not unusual to see a small pontoon boat or two with families out for a day on the lake. Paddlers have also discovered the calm waters of Upper Mud for kayaks and canoes. Several casual put-ins for small craft are located along the roads. *Boaters are advised that there is a 10-hp limit on motorized watercraft.*

The recreation area at Upper Mud was opened on July 4, 1999. Facilities include: picnic shelters and tables, a softball field, volleyball court, horseshoe pits, playgrounds and a swimming beach. Summertime visitors will often find family and church groups using the two large picnic shelters that can be reserved. The sports facilities and playgrounds are favorites of children and adults. The picnic area has two modern comfort stations. The swim beach features a large shower house and a unique picnic area with shade trees and a beach view. For strolling or hiking, Upper Mud offers a self-guided nature trail, a lake view trail and the more challenging white-blaze loop trail which tours the hilly, wooded hunting area.

Hunters will find a hardwood forest with some small food plots scattered throughout the river bottom and ridge areas. Wooded areas are primarily comprised of mature oak-hickory forests, offering great opportunities for hunting deer, turkey and squirrel. Excellent trapping opportunities exist for beaver, mink and muskrat along the lake and its tributaries. Animal slides are easily detected along the steep banks and flats of the headwaters. In addition, the lake offers waterfowl hunting opportunities. The lake is a popular stopover for migrating waterfowl and supplies good habitat for geese, wood ducks and mallards. Former homesteads have become old field and scrub shrub habitats that provide cover for small game such as cottontails and



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*Killdeer eggs can sometimes be found.*

grouse. Misty mornings are often filled with the joyous baying of beagles.

Wildlife watching is gaining in popularity at Upper Mud and the area offers a nice diversity. Wildflowers populate all of the habitats, providing beauty for the visitor, and food for wildlife. Most people appreciate spotting colorful butterflies among the blossoms, and dragonflies around the water. Birders enjoy looking and listening for raptors, waterfowl, wading birds, warblers and other songbirds. Upper Mud is one of the remaining places in the Mountain State where a summer evening can be spent listening to the sounds of the whip-poor-wills.

Bass and sunfish stand out in contrast to the sandy bottom of the swim area, providing a close-up view of these attractive fish. Numerous rock outcrops offer reptile enthusiasts opportunities to observe lizards and snakes, and provide habitat for other specialized species of plants and animals. Upper Mud is well populated with box turtles, possibly West Virginia's favorite reptile. The best time for viewing box turtles is the day after a soaking rain. Spring and summer evenings are often filled with captivating choruses of singing frogs. The patient wildlife watcher can spot deer, opossums, squirrels, rabbits, beaver, muskrats, bobcats, skunks and mink.

Everybody is welcome to come spend a day at the UMRWMA. The area offers something for everyone. Bring the kids out to introduce them to hunting and fishing. Larger groups can enjoy a picnic and a swim. Solitude is readily available for the lone outdoor enthusiast. Specially designed facilities for people with disabilities make the recreation area accessible. The diversity of habitats and modern facilities ensures that you will want to return for another day.

*Karen McClure is park superintendent at Upper Mud River WMA.*