

Stop 3

Freshwater Marsh

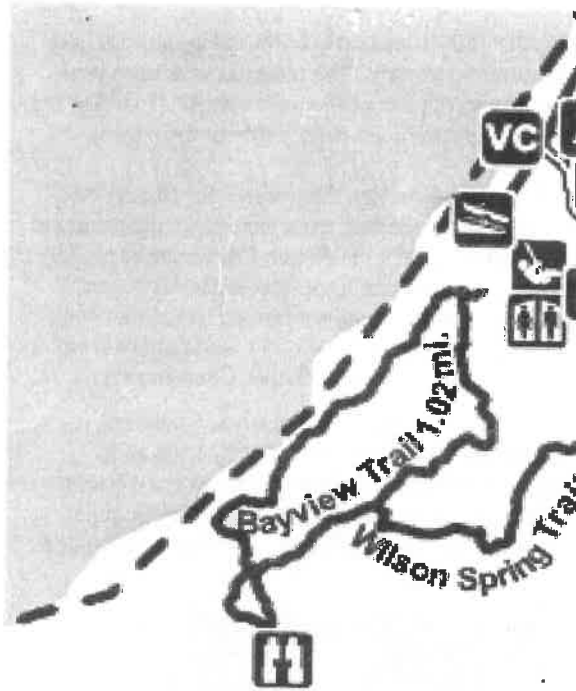
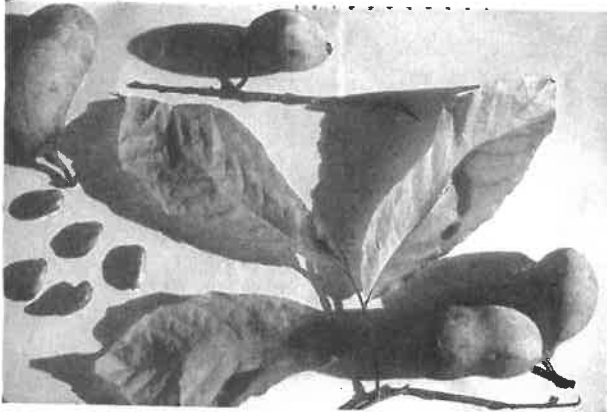
Freshwater marshes are a type of wetland that is teeming with both animal and plant life. See if you can spot a muskrat. These large, aquatic mammals call this marsh home. They look similar to beavers and even build lodges like them! Freshwater marshes are usually low-lying, open areas located near creeks, streams, rivers and lakes, where water flows into the marsh. Marshes are especially common at the mouths of rivers. The waters are rich in minerals and the water level varies seasonally. The marshes at the park are also affected by the tides.

A marsh is different from a swamp, which has a greater proportion of open water surface and may be deeper than a marsh. In North America, the term "swamp" is used for wetland dominated by trees rather than grasses and low shrubs.

Stop 4

Pawpaw Trees

The Pawpaw tree is a favorite for both animals and people. The pawpaw tree is a small tree with large leaves and fruit, native to eastern North America. The genus includes the largest edible fruit indigenous to the continent. A single fruit weighs 5 to 6 ounces and can be 3 to 6 inches long. These plants are a favorite for the Zebra Swallowtail. Pawpaws were discovered in 1541 by the Spanish explorer, Hernando Desoto, on an excursion into the Mississippi Valley, and he sent samples of this plant back to Europe. Even before European explorers arrived, the Native Americans were cultivating the pawpaw fruit. The founding fathers of the United States were also fond of the pawpaw fruit. Chilled pawpaw fruit was a favorite dessert of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.



Trail Information

The Bay View Trail is an easy 1 mile interpretive trail that is accessible from the picnic area. It forms a loop taking hikers over several boardwalks as they pass through marshes along Belmont Bay and into a mature hardwood forest. The trail also features a bird blind overlooking a marsh and access to the Wilson Spring Trail.

Bay View Trail Self Guided Tour

Tour stops 1 through 4 are marked by numbers along the trail.

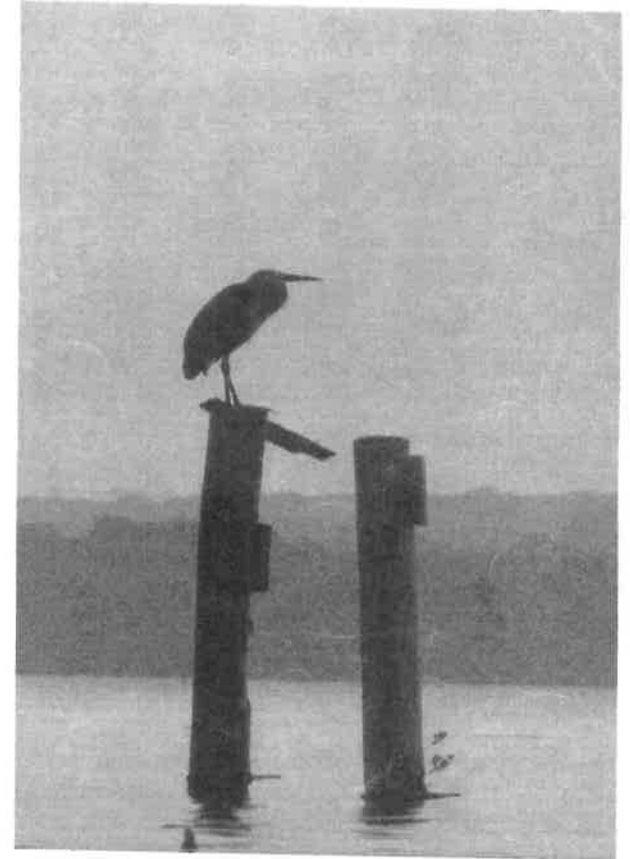


Mason Neck State Park
7301 High Point Road
Lorton, VA 22079
Phone 703-339-2380

Virginia State Parks

Mason Neck State Park

Bay View Trail Self Guided Tour



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Mason Neck State Park

BAY VIEW TRAIL SELF GUIDED TOUR



History of Mason Neck

Mason Neck State Park is steeped in natural and cultural history, encompassing 1,825 acres. The park shares 'The Neck' with Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge, Pohick Bay Regional Park, Gunston Hall and BLM's Meadowood Special Recreation Area. Combined, these areas provide over 6,400 acres dedicated to recreation, preservation and wildlife management.

The first recorded history of Mason Neck was by Captain John Smith in 1608. He wrote of his meeting with the Dogue Indians and charted the chief's village of Tauxenent on his map of Virginia. The area was originally referred to as Doggs Island and Doeg Neck. Later, this peninsula received its current name from the Mason family.



During the 1800's and early 1900's, logging was the area's primary industry. The removal of mature pine, hardwood and the use of the pesticide DDT, led to the decline of the American Bald Eagle in the region.

In 1965 the Conservation Committee for Mason Neck formed to preserve the area from increasing development pressures. In July 1967, the Nature Conservancy made its first purchase of land to protect areas of Mason Neck. Later, funds were appropriated to federal, state and local agencies to begin buying land parcels from private land owners and the Nature Conservancy.

The park is now managed for passive recreation, environmental education and the protection and preservation of habitat for the American Bald Eagle and other animals in the area. Animals that frequent Mason Neck include: bald eagles, hawks, white-tailed deer, fox, beavers and over 200 species of birds.



Stop 1

Heron Hangout

From here you can see Belmont Bay. The bay is teeming with both animal and plant life. Great Blue Herons like to search for food here. They will eat frogs, fish, snakes, small mammals, insects and even other birds! They are easy to identify. They are the only large, blue-grey bird here that has a long neck & legs. When they fly, their long legs stick straight out behind them like a tail. The largest Heron rookery on the east coast is in the National Wildlife Refuge. A rookery is an area where birds of the same species nest or sleep. See how many Great Blue Herons you can spot!

Stop 2

Shoreline Stabilization

Mason Neck State Park is a unique management area, which includes 2.4 miles of shoreline on Belmont Bay and Occoquan Bay along the west/northwest boundary. The southern boundary is shared with the Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck Wildlife Refuge, while the eastern boundary is shared with Gunston Hall Plantation. Since 1985, when Mason Neck State Park opened for public use, there has been a dramatic need to reduce the effects of shoreline erosion and to protect park property. This erosion is directly related to tidal energy and boat wakes from the Occoquan River and Belmont Bay. The gabion basket wall, before you, was built to control the effects of unchecked erosion. There are several positive outcomes from this project. First, the Gabion Basket wall has decreased the effects of erosion along the west/northwest shoreline. Second, the wall has preserved and enhanced wildlife habitat by allowing back filling and the creation of new tidal wetlands. Third, trails and boardwalks along the shoreline are protected to increase safety.

Gabion Basket Wall

