



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION



VIRGINIA'S NATURAL AREA PRESERVE SYSTEM





IS A NATURAL AREA PRESERVE THE SAME AS A PARK?

No. DCR's state natural area preserves were established to protect the best examples of Virginia's natural communities and habitats for our rarest species of plants and animals. Recreation is a secondary objective. Wherever possible, DCR provides opportunities for the public to visit these special places using access strategies that prevent or minimize harm to the sensitive resources protected. A quiet experience in nature, away from the crowds, is what you can expect when visiting one of Virginia's natural area preserves.

DCR also manages Virginia State Parks where the primary management objective is providing a broad array of high-quality outdoor recreation experiences. Information on Virginia State Parks is available at virginiastateparks.gov. DCR is proud to offer Virginians and visitors access to both the parks and the preserves.

Welcome

Virginia's Natural Area Preserve System includes some of the most beautiful, interesting and unusual natural features in the state. Natural area preserves harbor many of our exemplary natural communities and rare species habitats and provide visitors with unique outdoor experiences. We invite you to discover the 24 preserves listed here — some of Virginia's greatest treasures of conserved biodiversity.

NATURAL COMMUNITIES

A natural community is an assemblage of native plants and animals that occurs repeatedly on the landscape under similar ecological conditions. Natural area preserves feature examples of natural communities from nearly all areas of the state — a strategy that helps protect both common and rare plants and animals. From karst (limestone) landscapes of sinkholes and underground streams in Lee County to impressively large bayside sand dunes on the Eastern Shore, the preserve system protects outstanding examples of natural communities along with habitats for rare, threatened and endangered species.

PUBLIC ACCESS

Public access on natural area preserves is available for those looking for quiet and relaxing moments away from the rush and noise of modern life. Visitors can commune with the natural world while hiking, canoeing, taking photos and observing wildlife. These low-impact activities are compatible with DCR's work to conserve and manage sensitive natural heritage resources. The parking areas are small — usually from four to 20 spaces. This is intentional. A full parking lot indicates that the preserve has reached capacity. If you arrive and no parking spaces are available, please return another time.

Other state natural area preserves (not included here) have no access facilities but can still be visited by contacting DCR's Natural Heritage staff. At times, preserves may be closed while management activities such as prescribed burning and invasive species control are being conducted, or during certain times of year such as shorebird nesting season.

Visitation guidelines

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Some preserves are open year-round, from sunrise to sunset. However, others have limited hours and may be closed for management purposes. Before you visit, check the preserve's web page for updates and driving directions at dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/natural-area-preserves/.
- Research and keep an eye on weather conditions. Know your limitations and skills, as well as those of your group.
- Poor, or lack of, cell phone coverage is common. Always tell someone where you are going before you visit a preserve. Trails may be steep, narrow and remote. Most are inaccessible to emergency vehicles. There is unlikely to be DCR staff on site when you visit a preserve, so be prepared and have an emergency action plan.
- Carry maps, a compass or GPS unit and plenty of drinking water.

RESPECT THE RULES

- Park only in designated spaces.
- If the parking area is full, the preserve is at maximum capacity. Please come back another time.
- Obey posted signs.
- To protect fragile habitats and prevent damage to trails, stay on marked trails.
- Keep pets leashed.
- ATVs, off-road vehicles, camping and fires are not allowed.
- Horses and bicycles are not allowed (unless specifically permitted).
- Preserve the past; examine, but do not remove, cultural or historic artifacts. Leave rocks, plants, animals and other natural objects as you find them.

WILDLIFE

- Respect wildlife and observe wild animals from a distance. Use binoculars and cameras.
- Never feed wild animals. Feeding wild animals damages their health and exposes them to predators and other dangers.
- Avoid wildlife during sensitive times, such as when they are mating, nesting or raising young. If you observe a wild animal acting strangely (not running away from you), use caution and back away as the animal may have rabies and pose a serious danger.

MANAGE WASTE PROPERLY

- Clean up trash and waste. Leave the preserve cleaner than you found it.
- Please do not dispose of human or pet waste in bodies of water. Most preserves have no restrooms or trash receptacles. Plan accordingly, and always pack out your trash and bagged pet waste.



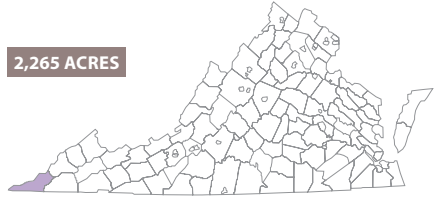
The Cedars

PLANNED FOR OPENING IN 2024-25

The Cedars protects an impressive karst landscape that supports one of the highest concentrations of rare plants, animals and natural communities in the state. The preserve is underlain by calcium-rich limestone bedrock, which is key to the presence of these rarities. Many rare plant species thrive in the shallow, drought-prone soils that cover the limestone bedrock. In addition, an amazing diversity of site-specific cave-adapted fauna populate the springs and cave systems below ground.

LEE COUNTY

2,265 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

An interpretive karst trail showcases the beautiful landscape characterized by limestone features and affiliated plant communities. You can observe the unique hydrology of sinking underground streams that resurface in karst windows. You'll also see historic features like the Lee County Natural Bridge – a local landmark along the Daniel Boone Wilderness Trail that Boone himself used when traveling to Cumberland Gap.

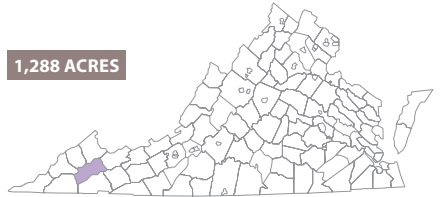


Cleveland Barrens

Cleveland Barrens protects habitats for at least 13 rare plant species and three rare insect species. The preserve lies within the Clinch River Valley, one of the top six biodiversity hotspots in the United States. Globally rare natural communities known as dolomite barrens occur on steep southwest-facing slopes. These unusual openings in the surrounding forest canopy are characterized by thin, rocky soils and dominated by native warm season grasses such as Indian grass, big bluestem and little bluestem.

RUSSELL COUNTY

1,288 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

Three miles of hiking trails include an overlook of the Clinch River and short, scenic wheelchair-accessible trail to a view of Tank Hollow Falls. The parking area has five spaces plus one accessible spot. If the parking area is full, please return later when it's less crowded. Hours are sunrise to sunset.

RUSSELL COUNTY

1,147 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

An extensive trail system makes this preserve ideal for hiking, with overlooks offering spectacular views. A swinging/suspension bridge crosses Big Cedar Creek. The creek provides good habitat for amphibians, so look for frogs and salamanders. Nearby, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources maintains two boat ramps on the Clinch River, an excellent waterway for canoeing, kayaking and fishing.



Bordering Big Cedar Creek – a state scenic river that flows into the Clinch River – the preserve is named for a 400-foot-tall dolomite rock outcrop called The Pinnacle. A variety of rare and exemplary natural communities are present including rich cove forests and dry limestone woodlands. The Clinch River watershed has the highest number of globally imperiled and vulnerable freshwater mussel and fish species in the United States.

WASHINGTON / RUSSELL COUNTIES

721 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

Please park in one of the 10 designated spaces in the gravel lot at Hayter's Gap on Route 80 – and not along the roadside. Enter via the Brumley Mountain Trail and be sure to respect private property for the initial 0.75-miles before the preserve boundary. Two miles of strenuous uphill hiking is required to reach the summit of Middle Knob and the Channels formations. For the challenging 6-mile Channels Trail, enter the state forest off Route 689 in Poor Valley. The preserve is open sunrise to sunset.



Located within Channels State Forest, this preserve rewards hikers with a scene unlike any other in Virginia. Large, blocky sandstone boulders and deep crevices create a labyrinthine natural environment. Weathering, erosion and freeze-thaw cycles over many millions of years all played a role in forming these unique geological features. The preserve is owned by the Virginia Department of Forestry and managed in partnership with DCR.



Bald Knob

PLANNED FOR OPENING IN 2024

Bald Knob is a cornerstone of Piedmont biodiversity conservation. This small preserve contains three natural communities, including the world's largest and finest Piedmont Mafic Barren community. The thin veneer of soil characteristic of this community supports the world's largest population of the rare Piedmont fameflower. This preserve also protects water quality for endangered fish in the Pigg River, which flows along the southern edge of the preserve.

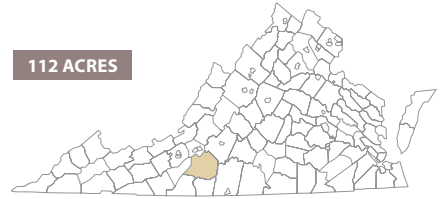


Buffalo Mountain

Buffalo Mountain rises 3,971 feet above sea level in the midst of the Blue Ridge Mountains and is known as one of Virginia's greatest natural treasures. Diverse environments across the mountain make the preserve home to six exemplary natural communities and nearly a score of rare plants and animals. At the summit, rare plants and grassland wildflowers grow in thin and fragile soils.

FRANKLIN COUNTY

112 ACRES

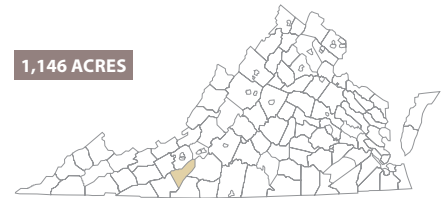


THINGS TO SEE

Once opened, a 3-mile hiking trail including an accessible segment will feature interpretive signs and views of Piedmont fameflower habitat. DCR will manage Bald Knob to provide passive outdoor recreation and natural history learning experiences at this special place in Virginia's southern Piedmont.

FLOYD COUNTY

1,146 ACRES

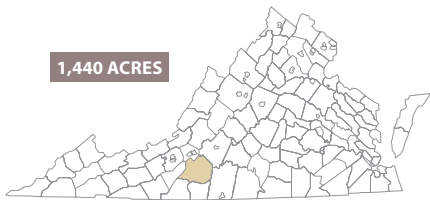


THINGS TO SEE

The summit offers exceptional views of the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains and can be reached via a 1½-mile loop hiking trail. Once atop the mountain, take the short Barrens Loop Trail. The high elevation creates harsh, sub-alpine conditions for the diminutive rare plants growing on shallow soils and in cracks between rocks. These delicate species are highly susceptible to trampling, so please stay on the trail. Quiet hikers may spot a black bear or ruffed grouse while visiting this remote preserve.

FRANKLIN COUNTY

1,440 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

Six miles of trails ascend Grassy Hill and traverse the long ridgeline, making this preserve a wonderful place for either short or long hikes. The high ridge provides expansive views of the surrounding Piedmont and glimpses of the Blue Ridge Mountains to the northwest, especially in winter. Visitors should park at the Rocky Mount YMCA lot and walk across Technology Drive to the nearby trailhead.



Grassy Hill preserve lies on a 3-mile-long ridge just north of the Town of Rocky Mount. The historic occurrence of fire here created and maintained open glades rich in native grasses and wildflowers and inspired the name "Grassy Hill" on the first maps of Franklin County. Soils here are unusually high in iron and magnesium, supporting rare species of plants such as Carolina thistle and Piedmont fameflower. To maintain and enhance habitat for these sun-loving plants, DCR conducts management actions including forest thinning and prescribed burning.

ROANOKE COUNTY

1,404 ACRES

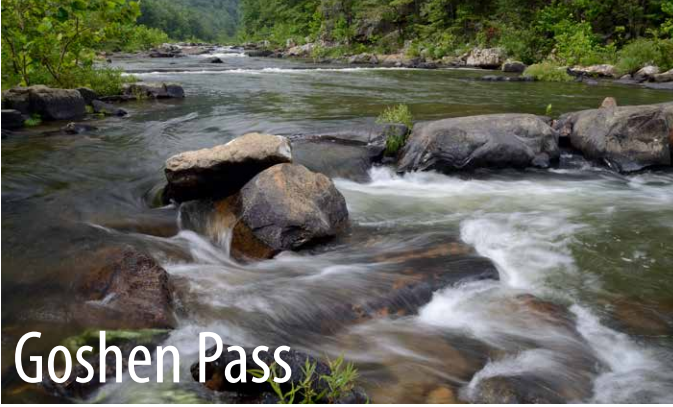


THINGS TO SEE

A 4-mile loop trail begins at the ridgetop parking area and leads through mountain laurel thickets and pine-oak woodlands before descending into a deep cove. Be prepared for a workout, as the climb back up requires strong legs (and a strong heart). The Piratebush Loop Trail is a shorter, easier alternative to the much longer and steeper Canyon Trail. Spring and summer are ideal times to see blooming mountain laurel, mountain fetterbush and many birds including scarlet tanager, Acadian flycatcher and pileated woodpecker.



Poor Mountain is home to intact pine-oak woodland communities that support the world's largest known population of a rare shrub called piratebush. The high-elevation ridges offer excellent views of the surrounding Roanoke area. Terrain is extremely rugged with steep, rocky slopes and narrow ridges.



Formed over many millions of years by the down-cutting action of the Maury River, Goshen Pass extends through Hogback, Little North and Forge mountains. A state natural area preserve since 2002, Goshen Pass contains beautiful old-aged chestnut oak forests on steep, rocky slopes as well as cliff, riverside scrub and aquatic communities. Goshen Pass protects habitat for an uncommon damselfly – the Appalachian jewelwing – and for three state-rare plant species: freshwater cordgrass, marsh pea and sand grape.



Part of the eastern-most mountain chain in Virginia, Bull Run Mountains is among the larger preserves in the state natural area preserves system. The Bull Run Mountains comprise one of the largest unfragmented natural landscapes in Northern Virginia. The preserve supports 10 exemplary plant communities and numerous uncommon and threatened plant and animal species. In addition to its biodiversity values, Bull Run Mountains permanently protects dozens of regionally important cultural history sites that tell the story of the preserve's diversely peopled past. This preserve is owned by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and managed in partnership with DCR.

ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY

936 ACRES

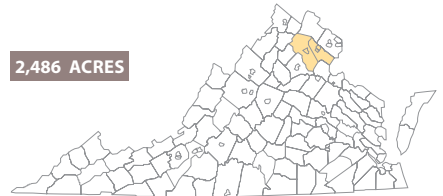


THINGS TO SEE

From State Route 39, take the short gravel driveway to a parking area maintained by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. Goshen and Little North Mountain state wildlife management areas surround the preserve and provide opportunities for public hunting, fishing and hiking. A WMA access permit can be obtained from DWR and is required to use the parking area, suspension/swinging bridge and trails providing access to Goshen Pass Natural Area Preserve. In late spring, mountain laurel blooms on the hillsides and in late summer, the red blooms of cardinal flower are conspicuous along the Maury River.

FAUQUIER/PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTIES

2,486 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

This preserve has approximately 6 miles of trails that showcase both the natural and cultural history of the Bull Run Mountains, providing opportunities for hiking, wildlife watching and photography. The trails provide access to view varying natural habitat types, including the mountain laurel-covered ridges to the beautiful low-lying seeps along Fern Hollow. Cultural features include old home sites, mill ruins and several cemeteries. Bull Run Mountains is open to visitation on Friday through Sunday. For more information, visit vof.org/protect/reserves/bull-run-mountains/.

STAFFORD COUNTY

3,116 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

The preserve is home to nesting bald eagles and more than 60 species of neo-tropical songbirds. One trail begins at the Brooke Road parking area and heads east to scenic overlooks along Accokeek Creek. The Crow's Nest Water Trail also starts at the Brooke Road parking area and features a wheelchair-accessible canoe-kayak launch. The Raven Road entrance, which provides trail access for hikers, is open Thursday through Sunday (with exceptions for managed waterfowl and deer hunts). Visit during spring and fall to see migratory birds and avoid the ticks, chiggers and biting flies of summer.



Crow's Nest

Rich in biodiversity, natural beauty and historical significance, Crow's Nest is a crown jewel among Virginia's natural areas. The preserve is situated on a long peninsula between two tidal creeks, Potomac and Accokeek. Steep, deep ravines lead down to freshwater tidal marshes, contributing to the dramatic topography. Prime examples of mature coastal plain hardwood forest, with oaks and tulip poplars as large as 4 feet in diameter and 100 feet tall, are found here. Archaeological evidence suggests humans have inhabited this land for at least 11,000 years. DCR, Stafford County and the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust co-own this preserve. Before visiting, check dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/naturalarea-preserves/crowsnest.

This native species of pale corydalis was thought to have disappeared from the Bull Run Mountains region decades ago. But under careful management at the natural area preserve, populations have re-emerged.

See page 7.





Bethel Beach

This preserve has a sandy Chesapeake Bay shoreline, low dunes and salt marsh. The shoreline habitat is home to the federally threatened northeastern beach tiger beetle. Please help protect habitat for this rare animal and prevent sand disturbance (digging) by children and leashed dogs. Unlike other DCR natural area preserves, Bethel Beach does not feature a designated parking area. Rather, visitors must parallel park along one side of Rte. 609, which ends at a set of cul-de-sac barriers.

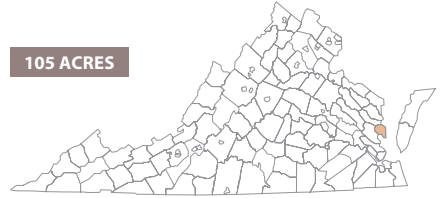


Bush Mill Stream

This preserve takes its name from Bush Mill Stream, a brackish Chesapeake Bay tidal creek that forms the preserve's northern boundary. Bush Mill Stream itself is home to myriad marine species including blue crab, Atlantic menhaden and white perch. The preserve features upland pine-hardwood forest and tidal marsh communities.

MATHEWS COUNTY

105 ACRES

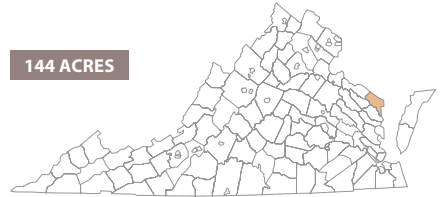


THINGS TO SEE

The birding at Bethel Beach can be spectacular in any season. Nearly 175 species of birds have been observed here. Summer brings views of the least tern. Tundra swans and other waterfowl can be seen in the winter. Numerous shorebird species frequent the preserve throughout the year but are most diverse during spring and fall migration. Bethel Beach is open from sunrise to sunset. However, the southern sand spit and shoreline may be closed during the least tern nesting season, from May 1 through Sept. 15.

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY

144 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

The 0.7-mile trail leads to an observation platform affording views out over a tidal marsh from an elevated bluff. The variety and abundance of aquatic life brings an array of birds to the area to forage. Visitors may see bald eagles, ospreys, wood ducks and hooded mergansers feeding off the abundant supply of food provided by this rich tidal system at the headwaters of the Great Wicomico River.

NEW KENT COUNTY

1,095 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

A wheelchair-accessible boardwalk and observation deck provide views of the tidal freshwater marsh and Holts Creek. To the west of the parking area, a 3.6-mile trail leads along Holts Creek, past restored wetlands and through upland mixed pine-hardwood forests. Trails range from easy to moderate. The birding can be phenomenal. See migratory songbirds in spring and fall and waterfowl in late fall and winter. Cumberland Marsh is open year-round from sunrise to sunset.



Cumberland Marsh

This preserve, with a mixture of freshwater tidal marsh and wooded upland habitats along the tidal Pamunkey River, provides pristine conditions for wetland species and migrating waterfowl. Cumberland Marsh supports one of the world's largest populations of the federally threatened plant, sensitive joint-vetch. You can view bird species in any season from an observation deck on the marsh and along the extensive woodland and creekside trails. This preserve is owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy in partnership with DCR. Unlike most other preserves, dogs are not allowed at Cumberland Marsh.

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY

316 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

From the parking area, a 0.2-mile trail leads through young old-field succession forest and shrub thickets to an elevated viewing platform overlooking the marsh and Chesapeake Bay. To the west of the parking area is a canoe-kayak launch. The hand-carry drop-off point accesses an easy portage to Mill Creek with Ingram Bay a short paddle away. Canada geese, tundra swans and many types of diving ducks can be seen during fall and winter. Visit during the cooler months to avoid the biting flies of spring and summer. Download a self-guided brochure at dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/natural-area-preserves/dameron.



Dameron Marsh

Consisting of salt marsh, sandy shorelines and shrub-forest habitats, this preserve features significant wetlands supporting marsh birds and waterfowl in the Chesapeake Bay. Its shorelines are also home to the federally threatened northeastern beach tiger beetle. Dameron Marsh and its nearby companion preserve, Hughlett Point, are located on Virginia's Northern Neck peninsula.

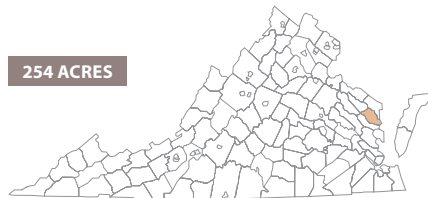


Hickory Hollow

Consisting largely of upland mixed pine-hardwood forest, Hickory Hollow also features a forested wetland, Cabin Swamp, which is home to nearly 130 plant species and supports an excellent example of a coastal plain calcareous seepage swamp natural community. Migratory songbirds, wood ducks, kingfishers and wild turkeys are commonly seen at this preserve, which is owned by the Northern Neck Audubon Society and managed in partnership with DCR.

LANCASTER COUNTY

254 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

This is a great preserve for a hike as it features nearly 5 miles of relatively level trails, enabling long walks through beautiful, quiet Northern Neck forestlands. Summer rains bring mushrooms and woodland flowers. Bring a picnic lunch or snacks and rest in the small shelter near the parking area.

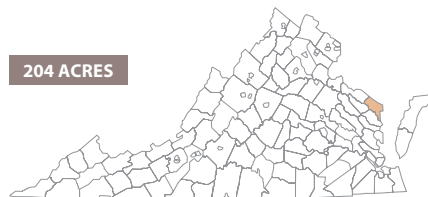


Hughlett Point

Hughlett Point lies on the north side of Dividing Creek on the Northern Neck of Virginia. Consisting of tidal marsh wetlands, sandy shorelines, low dunes and wet pine forest, this preserve is teeming with wildlife. The mosaic of natural communities provides habitat for waterfowl, songbirds and birds of prey. This preserve also protects the federally threatened northeastern beach tiger beetle. The best way to help protect habitat for this rare animal is to prevent sand disturbance (digging) by children and leashed dogs.

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY

204 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

Interpretive signs, a 2-mile trail system, and an elevated observation platform overlooking the marsh and Chesapeake Bay are available here. Look for the July-blooming eastern rose mallow, diamondback terrapin, herons, egrets, bald eagles and ospreys. Known for birding during spring and fall migrations, songbirds and hawks can be seen feeding within interior forested areas. Some shoreline sections may be closed from May into September to protect nesting shorebirds such as least terns.

MATHEWS COUNTY

105 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

Birders can combine a trip to New Point Comfort with a visit to nearby Bethel Beach preserve. At New Point Comfort, the roadsides between forest and marsh provide excellent birding opportunities, especially during spring and fall migration. A wheelchair-accessible boardwalk with an observation deck extends over the salt marsh, providing a view of Mobjack Bay and the recently-restored historic New Point Comfort lighthouse. From the boardwalk, look for fiddler crabs and the seaside dragonlet – Virginia's only saltwater dragonfly.



New Point Comfort

Located at the terminus of a long peninsula separating the Chesapeake Bay from Mobjack Bay, this preserve is a key stopover point on the Atlantic Flyway for neo-tropical songbirds and other migratory birds including waterfowl. New Point Comfort has three primary natural habitats: tidal salt marsh, maritime forest and sandy shorelines providing habitat for the federally threatened northeastern beach tiger beetle. This preserve is owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy in partnership with DCR.

Natural area preserves help protect plants that wildlife need. Few-flowered milkweed, photographed at North Landing River, provides nectar to myriad insects and is one of the larval host plants for monarch butterflies. See page 15.





Chub Sandhill

Chub Sandhill borders 3 miles of the Nottoway River and features a diverse set of coastal plain habitats ranging from cypress-tupelo swamps to dry sandy uplands. Extensive deep, sandy soils support pine and scrub-oak sandhill communities featuring numerous rare plants. As part of its longleaf pine restoration program, DCR has planted 250 acres here using seedlings grown from the seeds of the last remaining mature native longleaf pines in Virginia. Frequent prescribed burns have yielded diverse ground cover vegetation, expanded populations of rare plants and an increase in grassland-dependent bird species such as northern bobwhite, field sparrow and prairie warbler.

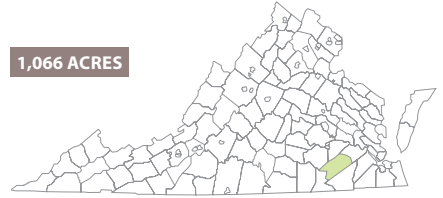


Cape Charles

Near the southern tip of the Eastern Shore, this preserve provides critical stopover habitat for songbirds during fall migration. A long boardwalk meanders through coastal forest communities including a globally rare maritime dune woodland to an overlook on the Chesapeake Bay. The sandy shoreline is home to the federally threatened northeastern beach tiger beetle. This preserve is part of the Lower Delmarva Important Bird Area.

SUSSEX COUNTY

1,066 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

A short, level trail leads to a small platform providing views of the Nottoway River and the adjacent floodplain forest community. Visitors can also walk along 2 miles of sandy roads and firebreaks through frequently burned pine woods and restored longleaf pine communities. Summer brings sights of flycatchers, tanagers, warblers, woodpeckers and wild turkeys. Wildflowers such as the rare golden puccoon can be seen in May and June. Near the river, bright yellow prothonotary warblers and wood ducks can be spotted.

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

50 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

Cape Charles is a prime site for bird watching throughout the year. During fall migration, neotropical songbirds stop to feed on the preserve's abundant food resources. Warblers abound, feasting on insects and berries. Look for yellow-rumped warblers feeding in the wax myrtle thickets. In the spring and summer, breeding songbirds fill the preserve with chorus Listen for pine warblers, Carolina wrens and Carolina chickadees. Winter is a great time to observe gannets, loons, scoters and long-tailed ducks from the observation platform.

ACCOMACK COUNTY

516 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

Bring your binoculars to see songbirds in the 217-acre restored songbird habitat area. Follow the White's Creek Trail and watch waterfowl and shorebirds foraging along the creek. Follow the Gargathy Bay Trail to the Atlantic seaside lagoon salt marsh for a view of two barrier islands, Metompkin and Wallops. Watch for terns, egrets and brants foraging on the marsh and mudflats. Look up to see raptors flying and down to watch fiddler crabs in muddy burrows.



Mutton Hunk Fen

On the Atlantic Ocean side of the Eastern Shore, this preserve encompasses recently restored upland migratory songbird habitat, maritime forest, salt marshes and a remnant Carolina bay. This site was first protected in 2005 due to the presence of a globally rare sea-level fen natural community (open, freshwater wetlands located between uplands and seaside tidal marshes). However, sea level rise has caused the loss of this rare community due to more frequent inundation by salt water. Thus, the preserve's primary conservation value is now its extensive habitat for migratory songbirds.

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

298 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

Visitors can see some of the highest and best developed sand dunes in Virginia. Look for post oak, water oak, sassafras, blackgum and pink lady's slipper orchids. Listen for spring peepers, green tree frogs and cricket frogs. Follow the 0.75-mile Bayshore Trail through dune forest to the Chesapeake Bay. Check tidal conditions before your visit, as the shoreline is accessible only during the hours immediately surrounding low tide. In late summer and fall, look for monarchs and other butterflies nectaring on seaside goldenrod. Walk the shoreline and watch for foraging sandpipers, terns, pelicans and scurrying ghost crabs.



Savage Neck Dunes

Marked trails meander through diverse coastal natural communities including Chesapeake Bay shore, maritime grasslands, globally-rare maritime dune woodland, maritime forest and natural freshwater ponds. Former agricultural fields have been restored to migratory songbird and native pollinator habitat, and Savage Neck Dunes is in the Lower Delmarva Important Bird Area. A mile-long Chesapeake Bay sandy shoreline supports one of the largest known populations of the federally threatened northeastern beach tiger beetle. However, rapid shoreline erosion caused by breakwater construction on adjacent lands has damaged tiger beetle habitat and impacted maritime dune woodlands, making shoreline public access difficult at higher tidal stages.



Magothy Bay

Woodlands, forested wetlands and an extensive salt marsh make up much of this preserve near the southern tip of the Eastern Shore. Southern wax myrtle shrubs were planted on 250 acres of former farm fields as part of DCR's habitat restoration efforts. These areas now provide critical habitat for songbirds to rest and feed during fall migration and, over time, will develop into the mature forested habitat required by many bird species. This preserve is part of the Lower Delmarva Important Bird Area.

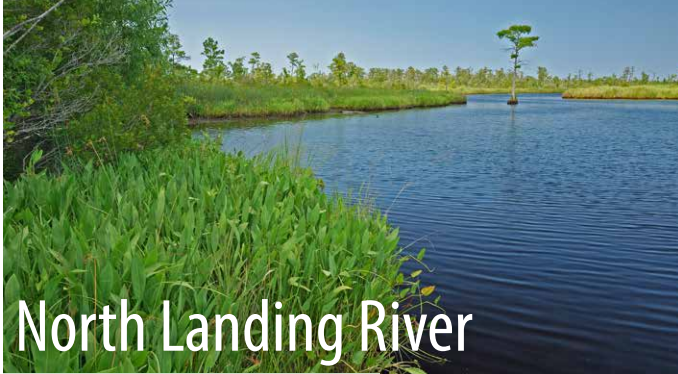
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

445 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

A 1.5-mile trail leads through restored migratory songbird habitat and into maritime forest, emerging onto an old dike overlooking salt marsh, Magothy Bay and Smith Island – one of Virginia's Atlantic barrier islands. On the south, the preserve borders the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. Look for warblers and other migratory songbirds as well as residents such as northern bobwhites. Look overhead for northern harriers, Cooper's hawks, bald eagles and American kestrels. In fall, look for bright red glasswort growing in saltpans within the tidal salt marsh.



North Landing River

PLANNED RE-OPENING IN 2024-25

This is Virginia's first natural area preserve, dedicated in 1990. Almost entirely wetland, it is home to more rare plants, animals and natural communities than any other place in Virginia's coastal plain. Thriving examples of wind tidal marshes, cypress swamps, pocosins and Atlantic white-cedar forests are all found at North Landing River Natural Area Preserve.

VIRGINIA BEACH

3,441 ACRES



THINGS TO SEE

A 1.3-mile trail begins at the parking area located off Blackwater Road and features paths and boardwalks through both upland and wetland forest communities. A platform at the end of the trail provides scenic views of Alton's Creek off the North Landing River. This preserve is home to a wide variety of butterflies including swallowtails, red-spotted purple and skippers. Forested wetlands provide habitat for numerous reptiles and amphibians. Flowering wetland plants can be seen from spring through fall.

Natural Area Preserves

Established in 1989, Virginia's Natural Area Preserve System protects some of the best examples of natural communities and rare plant and animal habitats in Virginia and the world. The first preserve, North Landing River Natural Area Preserve in Virginia Beach, was dedicated in 1990. The preserve system took just 17 years to reach the 50-preserve milestone and continues to grow. Most preserves are owned by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation; however, some are owned by local governments, universities, The Nature Conservancy and other private landowners.

When property is dedicated as a state natural area preserve, the site is permanently protected by legally binding restrictions on future activities and development. The primary objectives are to retain and enhance habitats for rare plant and animal species and to protect and maintain the best examples of Virginia's natural communities. Thus, Virginia's system of natural area preserves protects common native species as well as rare plants and animals. DCR's approach to natural heritage resource stewardship is perhaps the most valuable form of conservation because it protects Virginia's most threatened, treasured and ecologically significant places and biodiversity.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM

State natural area preserves are managed under DCR's Virginia Natural Heritage Program, which started in 1986. Through biological inventory, data management, environmental review, land protection and natural areas stewardship, Virginia's biodiversity is better understood and conserved by the program and its conservation partners. Scientists, information managers,

resource managers and an extensive conservation information system are the foundation upon which the natural area preserve system is built and managed. Natural Heritage staff also provide land conservation and planning information to the public to help individuals, organizations and companies make well-informed land conservation and land-use decisions.

The Virginia Natural Heritage Program, along with more than 50 other natural heritage programs and biodiversity conservation organizations, and NatureServe, are collectively, the NatureServe Network. NatureServe, a nonprofit conservation organization, supports the management, availability and sharing of current and high-quality information about rare and endangered species and threatened ecosystems. As a member of this network, Virginia benefits by having ready access to global data and contributes to the study and conservation of biodiversity at regional, national and international scales.

STEWARDSHIP

To manage the preserves and their natural heritage resources while also providing visitor access, DCR employs a team of regionally based natural area stewards. Stewards actively manage the preserves by controlling invasive species, conducting prescribed burns, monitoring rare species populations, and designing and maintaining appropriate public access facilities. This active management approach is needed to protect, enhance and restore natural communities and rare species habitat. Many dedicated volunteers also play a critical role in the stewardship of the preserves. DCR staff members frequently advise other landowners about techniques and methods for managing natural areas.

VIRGINIA NATURAL AREA PRESERVES WITH PUBLIC ACCESS FACILITIES

■ SOUTHWEST REGION

1. The Cedars (*opening soon*)
2. Cleveland Barrens
3. Pinnacle
4. The Channels

■ MOUNTAIN REGION

5. Buffalo Mountain
6. Poor Mountain
7. Grassy Hill
8. Bald Knob (*opening soon!*)

■ SHENANDOAH VALLEY REGION

9. Goshen Pass

■ NORTHERN REGION

10. Bull Run Mountains
11. Crow's Nest

■ CHESAPEAKE BAY REGION

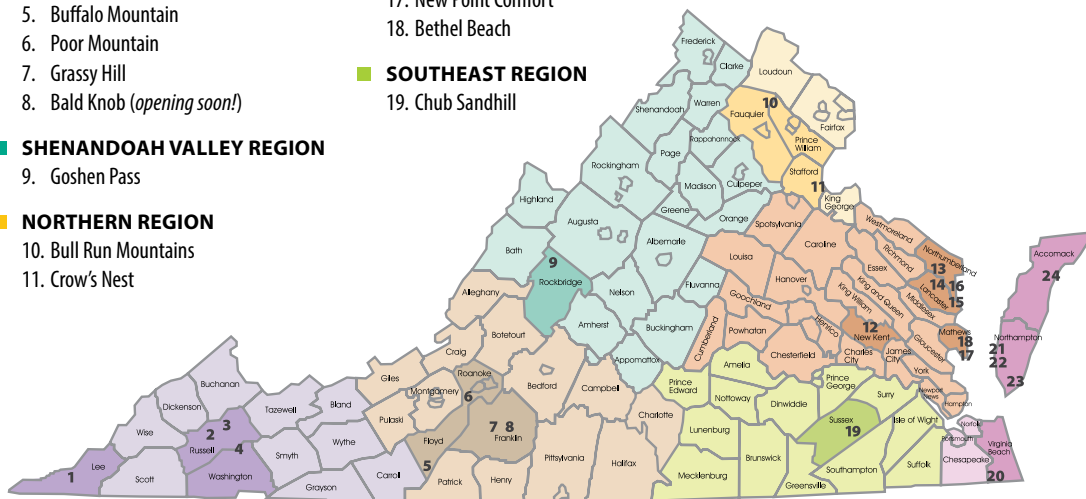
12. Cumberland Marsh
13. Bush Mill Stream
14. Hickory Hollow
15. Hughlett Point
16. Dameron Marsh
17. New Point Comfort
18. Bethel Beach

■ SOUTHEAST REGION

19. Chub Sandhill

■ COASTAL REGION

20. North Landing River (*opening soon!*)
21. Savage Neck Dunes
22. Cape Charles
23. Magothy Bay
24. Mutton Hunk Fen



HOW YOU CAN HELP

Virginia's natural area preserves benefit from voluntary contributions to the state's Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund. Donating is easy when filing a state tax return. Simply indicate on Schedule VAC that you wish to donate all or a portion of your refund. Enter code number 68 on the line for voluntary contributions.

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PHOTO CREDITS

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Magothy Bay, **Peggy Booth**; Bethel Beach, Hickory Hollow, **Zachary Bradford**; Chub Sandhill, **Bobby Clonz**;
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