



REGION **23**
Hampton Roads



Scenic Virginia Beach | Sarah Hauser/Virginia Tourism Corp.

Introduction

The Hampton Roads Recreational Planning Region includes the counties of Isle of Wight, James City, Southampton and York. The region also includes the cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach and Williamsburg and the towns of Boykins, Branchville, Capron, Courtland, Ivor, Newsoms, Smithfield and Windsor.

Three major Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain river drainage systems in the region are the York, James and Chowan basins. To the east, the Atlantic Ocean and the Chesapeake Bay form an undulating natural boundary for the region. Natural features include coastal shorelines, vast expanses of open water and marshlands. The James and York rivers are predominantly estuarine. Freshwater systems include the Nottoway, Blackwater, Meherrin, North Landing and Northwest Rivers, Back Bay and the Dismal Swamp.

Regional Focus

Table 23.1 Most-Needed Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

Hampton Roads Recreational Planning Region

activity	% of households in	
	region	state
Parks	56	49
Natural areas	47	54
Water access	43	43
Trails	42	43
Historic areas	42	39
Scenic drives (driving for pleasure)	28	29
Playing fields, sports and golf facilities	21	22

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey



Enjoying the Beach | Sam Dean/Virginia Tourism Corp.

Table 23.2 Top 10 Outdoor Recreation Activities By Participation

Hampton Roads Recreational Planning Region

activity	% household
Visiting natural areas	65
Walking for pleasure	65
Driving for pleasure	63
Visiting parks (local, state & national)	57
Swimming/outdoor pool	48
Sunbathing/relaxing on a beach	47
Viewing the water	43
Visiting historic areas	41
Outdoor festivals (music festivals, outdoor-themed festivals, extreme sports festivals, etc.)	40
Swimming/beach/lake river (open water)	35

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey. Visit www.dcr.virginia.gov/vop to view regional participation rates for more than 100 activities.

Regional Featured Projects

To be considered a regional featured project, a project must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Has statewide or regional significance.
- Addresses top statewide or regional needs identified by the Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey.
- Has involvement and support from multiple jurisdictions in the region.
- Able to be initiated within the next five years.

Featured projects for the Hampton Roads region:

- Implement regional greenway plans including the Stony Run Greenway and the Green Sea Blueway and Greenway and Water Trail.
- Connect regional multi-use trails including South Hampton Roads Trail, Dismal Swamp Connector Trail and the Virginia Capital Trail from Jamestown to Fort Monroe and Jamestown to the South Hampton Roads Trail.
- Develop the Southeast Coast Saltwater Paddling Trail as a regional water trail.
- Create recreation opportunities at Fort Monroe.
- Implement the Eastern Branch Restoration Plan for the Elizabeth River.

- Initiate development of the Birthplace of America Trail, connecting the Hampton Road Region to Richmond Virginia.

The vision of the Birthplace of America Trail (BoAT) is to connect the Virginia Capital Trail to Fort Monroe and the South Hampton Roads Trail via two off-road shared-use paths, designed for active transportation. Once this vision is a reality, users can bike/walk from Richmond to the Atlantic Ocean in Virginia Beach on over 140 miles of off-road shared-use paths. In addition to connecting the region through active transportation, the BoAT seeks to link and showcase the region's unique cultural and historic heritage. There is currently a grassroots effort underway to create a foundation to support and promote the development of the BoAT.

The Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) recently completed a study to identify the route for the BoAT. It can be found at: <https://www.hrtpo.org/page/birthplace-of-america-trail/>



Lake Drummond inside the Great Dismal Swamp | John Henley/Virginia Tourism Corp.

Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact

Table 23.3 Per-Capita Spending on Parks and Recreation

Hampton Roads Recreational Planning Region

locality	dollars
Gloucester County	28.76
James City County	76.74
Isle of Wight County	56.88
Southampton County	0
Surry County	84.62
York County	30.28
City of Chesapeake	46.49
City of Franklin	42.39
City of Hampton	129.01
City of Newport News	104.62
City of Norfolk	105.23
City of Poquoson	61.04
City of Portsmouth	81.77
City of Suffolk	80.88
City of Virginia Beach	95.40
City of Williamsburg	75.42
Statewide	71.09

Source: Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts, "Comparative Report on Local Government Revenues and Expenditures," 2016.

Table 23.4 Virginia State Parks 2017 Attendance and Economic Impact

Hampton Roads Recreational Planning Region

state park	location	overnight visitors	day-use visitors	total visitors	economic impact
False Cape	Virginia Beach	5,022	59,132	64,154	\$1,322,762
First Landing	Virginia Beach	131,841	1,448,745	1,580,586	\$33,067,995
Middle Peninsula	Gloucester County*	-	-	-	-
York River	James City County	0	141,624	141,624	\$2,265,984

* Middle Peninsula and Hampton Roads regions share Gloucester County.
Source: Virginia State Parks

Regional Health

Table 23.5 Health Trends

Hampton Roads Recreational Planning Region

locality	adult smoking (% of adults)	adult obesity (% of adults with BMI over 30)	physical inactivity (% of adults age 20 or over reporting no leisure time/ physical activity)	access to exercise opportunities (% population with adequate access to locations for physical activity)	air pollution – particulate matter (micrograms per cubic meter)
James City County	13	25	20	91	8.4
Isle of Wight County	15	29	54	66	8.6
Southampton County	17	31	30	17	8.5
York County	13	26	22	86	8.5
City of Chesapeake	15	32	21	88	8.8
City of Franklin	20	34	26	59	8.2
City of Hampton	18	35	24	92	8.4
City of Newport News	20	32	26	92	8.6
City of Norfolk	19	30	24	96	8.6
City of Poquoson	13	25	22	51	8.3
City of Portsmouth	20	37	29	91	8.7
City of Suffolk	16	32	25	71	8.7
City of Virginia Beach	16	28	19	90	8.3
City of Williamsburg	17	26	23	100	8.2
Statewide	17	27	21	81	8.7

Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Outdoor Recreation Interface with Virginia Tourism

The Virginia State Tourism Plan was completed by Virginia Tourism Corp. in March 2023. In 2017, Virginia Tourism compiled “Nature & Outdoors” recommendations in Appendix 13 for each recreation planning region.

Regional Historic Resources

For those interested in heritage tourism, the Hampton Roads region most likely represents the most attractive area to spend time. Including Jamestown, the restored 18th century town of Colonial Williamsburg, and the site of the 1781 surrender of British forces at Yorktown, the area encompasses some of the most significant historic and cultural resources in the entire country. In addition to numerous walking, biking and driving trails, the area also contains large sections of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, a water trail

that commemorates the early 17th century journeys of Captain John Smith and his explorations of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Aided by smart buoys that contain interpretive information, users of the trail can see cultural landscapes and historic sites from the unique perspective of being on the water.

Appropriate conservation activities may include installation of highway markers to commemorate historic locations and events, placement of historic properties on the Virginia Landmarks Register or National Register of Historic Places and placement of historic preservation and open space easements. Conservation targets include: 17th, 18th, 19th and early 20th century dwellings and commercial buildings/districts; historic schools and churches; Revolutionary and Civil War-related resources and battlefields; historic transportation routes and crossroads; and significant prehistoric habitation sites. Information about historic buildings, structures and archaeological sites is maintained in the permanent files of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and is available to local planners.

Table 23.6 Regional Historic Resources*Hampton Roads Recreational Planning Region*

resource	location
Historic St. Luke's Church	Isle of Wight County
Windsor Castle	Isle of Wight County
Endview Plantation	City of Newport News
Adam Thoroughgood House	City of Virginia Beach
Great Dismal Swamp Canal	Cities of Chesapeake/ Suffolk
King and Queen Courthouse Tavern	King and Queen County

Land Conservation

Table 23.7 Conserved Lands*Hampton Roads Recreational Planning Region*

locality	easement acres	ownership acres
City of Chesapeake	1,991.97	72,001.74
City of Franklin	8.81	0.00
City of Hampton	72.51	1,616.20
City of Newport News	15.22	11,870.41
City of Norfolk	0.00	3,133.76
City of Poquoson	0.00	3,535.22
City of Portsmouth	0.00	247.89
City of Suffolk	1,442.85	38,490.30
City of Virginia Beach	835.86	31,011.04
City of Williamsburg	14.20	237.17
Isle of Wight County	3,992.65	3,791.43
James City County	3,145.34	8,586.19
Southampton County	5,515.18	1,938.14
York County	970.35	25,635.95
Total		220,100.38

Source: Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Protected Lands Inventory.

A land conservation benefits analysis may benefit this region. The importance of connecting green corridors for habitat and recreation was recognized for both urban and rural landscapes.

Natural Area Preserves and Natural Heritage Resources

Hampton Roads, though located entirely within the Coastal Plain, spans a diverse range of habitats, including sandy ocean beaches, salt marshes of the Chesapeake Bay, wind tidal fresh marshes, dry sandhills, seasonally wet ponds and blackwater swamps. These habitats support many rare and significant plant communities and rare species, including: globally rare Coastal plain dry calcareous forests, the federally and state threatened sensitive joint-vetch, and the state endangered eastern big-eared bat.

DCR recommends that conservation activities and land protection efforts in the region focus on unprotected Essential Conservation Sites and all unprotected portions of Natural Area Preserve resiliency areas. Secondly, strategic land conservation should expand upon existing managed areas and seek connectivity via protecting and/or managing intact ecological cores and natural vegetation cover between currently protected lands. Finally, attention on remaining unprotected natural heritage resources within the region should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The appropriate conservation activities and methods of protection will vary with each site but may include placing the site on Virginia's Registry of Natural Areas; developing a voluntary management agreement with the landowner; securing a conservation easement through a local land trust; acquiring the site through a locality or local land trust; dedicating the site as a natural area preserve with the current owner; or acquiring the site as a state-owned natural area preserve.

Conservation targets of special significance in the region include:

- Pine barren communities
- Seasonal depression ponds and other significant wetlands.
- Large blocks of old-growth cypress-tupelo swamps
- Habitat for rare reptiles and amphibians
- Lands along the Northwest and North Landing rivers.

Information about the location of conservation sites and the natural heritage resources they contain, as well as management assistance, is available to local planners from DCR's Natural Heritage Program. For more on the Natural Heritage Program, see Chapter 11 and Appendix 11.

Table 23.8 Natural Area Preserves

Hampton Roads Recreational Planning Region

preserve name	owner	locality
Antioch Pines	DCR	Isle of Wight County
Blackwater Ecological Preserve	Old Dominion University	Isle of Wight County
Blackwater Sandhills	Isle of Wight County	Isle of Wight County
Cypress Bridge	DCR	Southampton County
False Cape	DCR	Virginia Beach
Grafton Ponds	Newport News	York County
North Landing River	DCR	Virginia Beach
Northwest River	DCR and The Nature Conservancy	Chesapeake
South Quay Sandhills	DCR and private	Southampton County and Suffolk

Table 23.9 Natural Heritage Resources

Hampton Roads Recreational Planning Region

Number of occurrences of rare species and significant natural communities	1,109
Number of different rare species and significant community types (natural heritage elements)	339
Number of globally rare natural heritage elements	59
Number of species listed as federally endangered or threatened	10
Number of species listed as state endangered or threatened	25
Number of terrestrial conservation sites identified by DCR	165
Number of conservation sites with little or no protection	133
Number of partially protected conservation sites	30
Number of well protected conservation sites	2

Information as of Feb. 28, 2018. Source: Virginia Natural Heritage Program