

Frequently Asked Questions about Crow's Nest Natural Area Preserve

How much land was protected?

1,770 acres was purchased in April 2008 (Phase I). 1,102 acres were added in July 2009 for a total of 2,872 acres.

Why was Crow's Nest purchased by the state and county?

Crow's Nest has long been a conservation priority for local citizens and the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Natural Heritage Program. It is a large and complex conservation project that required the negotiation and financial partnership of Stafford County, DCR, The Nature Conservancy, Northern VA Conservation Trust, Trust for Crow's Nest and others. It is an intact, historical and environmental treasure that protects habitat for native plants and animals. With its minimal but outstanding public access facilities, it provides a unique opportunity for visitors to experience wildness in a part of Virginia more commonly associated with urban sprawl.

How much did it cost to purchase Crow's Nest?

\$34.1 million for the 2,872 acres.

How can I get in to visit?

A 20-space parking area located along Brooke Road provides access to a ½-mile long walking trail along the north shore of Accokeek Creek with viewpoints of the tidal marsh and great wildlife-watching opportunities. The Brooke Road Access serves as the trailhead for the Crow's Nest Water Trail. A hand-carry boat launch consists of a 375-foot pier and floating canoe/kayak launch platform.

In April 2017, the Raven Road Access point opened to the public, featuring a 1.5-mile long single-lane gravel entrance road with turn-outs that leads to an 18-space parking area. Located here are trailheads, maps and interpretive signs for four different marked hiking trails offering varied opportunities for quiet walks and wildlife viewing within the extensive old-age hardwood forests of the Crow's Nest peninsula. The Raven Road Access point is open on Thursdays thru Sundays, year round.

Open hours for both the Brooke Road and Raven Road access points are from 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. from November 1 to March 14; and, from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. from March 15 to October 31.

DCR will continue to offer focused field trips (e.g., birding, wildflowers, big trees, colonial history, etc.) for smaller groups by request and as staff are available.

Can I paddle my canoe/kayak to get to the preserve?

Yes, but with restrictions. Paddlers using the Crow's Nest Water Trail may launch their canoe or kayak at the Brooke Road access point and paddle four miles by water to Boykin's Landing. There, they can beach their boats and hike the trails at Crow's Nest. Currently, Boykin's Landing is the only designated and safe location for paddlers to gain access to the Crow's Nest peninsula.

Now that the land is a publicly-owned "natural area", there won't be any hunting, right?

Not true. DCR conducts managed waterfowl hunts (by lottery) each year at Crow's Nest in order to comply with the Virginia Waterfowl Blind Laws. Thus, the public waters surrounding Crow's Nest are hunted under controlled conditions, once per week during the fall/winter waterfowl seasons. This approach balances use by hunters with use of the preserve by the non-hunting public, and gives migratory waterfowl a place to rest and feed, undisturbed for six days a week, during their annual migration south. Managed deer hunting may be conducted in the future at Crow's Nest as it becomes clear through monitoring that deer are causing negative impacts to native vegetative communities.

Can I go hunting at Crow's Nest?

Yes, waterfowl hunting opportunities are available by way of a lottery system. Applications are taken beginning around June of each year. Hunting is restricted to one day per week. See the Crow's Nest Natural Area Preserve webpage for updates (www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/natural_area_preserves/crowsnest.shtml).

Is fishing going to be allowed?

Yes, the public waters surrounding the preserve are open to fishermen in boats. There are very few places to fish from the shoreline at Crow's Nest, and no fishing piers or docks will be constructed. Fishing is not permitted from the Brooke Road Access canoe/kayak launch platform on Accokeek Creek.

Can I go camping at Crow's Nest?

Camping is not permitted on Virginia state natural area preserves. Static campsites cause negative impacts and degraded site conditions, over the long term. Even low-intensity (dispersed) camping causes some adverse impacts including soil compaction, damage to vegetation and waste management issues.

Can I swim at Crow's Nest?

There are no places to safely or enjoyably swim at the preserve. Shorelines at Crow's Nest are bounded either by forest or marsh. Nearly all waters adjoining the preserve have soft, muddy bottoms replete with aquatic vegetation in many locations. There are logs, woody debris and marsh detritus in most places. It is not a good place to swim.

Why aren't horses or mountain bikes going to be allowed to use the trails?

Bicycles, along with licensed motorcycles, will be permitted to use the entrance road and access the preserve parking areas designed for automobile access. However, the use of bicycles, motorized vehicles and horses on trails within state natural area preserves is prohibited. These uses cause trail damage from soil disturbance, leading to increased erosion and spread of invasive plants. All trails at Crow's Nest are for foot travel only.

What kinds of public uses are going to be permitted?

Public access facilities at Crow's Nest are now complete and provide great opportunities for a variety of passive recreation and outdoor education experiences. Two parking areas have been constructed. At the Brooke Road Access along Accokeek Creek, a ½-mile walking trail features wildlife viewing areas and interpretive signs. A canoe/kayak launch accesses the 4-mile (8-mile round-trip) Crow's Nest Water Trail. Adventurous paddlers can venture the four miles out to Boykin's Landing, where they can beach their boats and explore the Crow's Nest peninsula via hiking trails. At the Raven Road Access, visitors can access the interior of the preserve via a 1.5-mile long entrance road. An 18-car parking area and extensive system of hiking trails opened in April 2017. Managed waterfowl hunts and guided hikes/educational programs will continue to be offered.

What is a state natural area preserve? Is that like a park?

The Virginia Natural Area Preserve System was established by law in 1989 to protect and conserve *natural heritage resources* (habitats of rare plants and animals; exemplary natural communities; other rare natural features) throughout the state. This system of protected lands is administered by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and managed by the Division of Natural Heritage. Natural Area Preserve Dedication, in accordance with the *Code of Virginia*, offers strong levels of protection by placing privately and publicly held natural areas into a legally established statewide preserve system with statutory protection against most forms of condemnation and conversion to other land uses. Unlike state parks, public access and recreation facilities on state natural area preserves are secondary to the primary objective of resource protection. Crow's Nest Natural Area Preserve is Virginia's 54th preserve, dedicated on April 18, 2008.

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