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 Virginia’s exemplary natural communities and rare species habitats, providing visitors with a unique outdoor experience. We invite you to discover the preserves — some of Virginia’s greatest treasures.

The preserves include examples of natural communities from nearly all areas of the state, a strategy that helps protect both common and rare living resources. From karst landscapes of sinkholes and underground streams in Lee County to giant bayside sand dunes on the Eastern Shore, the preserve system protects outstanding examples of natural communities and the habitats of rare, threatened and endangered species. Visitors will experience some of Virginia’s most treasured and ecologically important lands and waters.

PUBLIC ACCESS
Public access opportunities are available at the 21 preserves included in this guide, and visitors can participate in activities such as hiking, canoeing, photography and wildlife watching.

Additional preserves not included in this guide have limited or no access facilities but visits may be arranged by contacting the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation’s Natural Heritage Program. Some preserves may also be closed at times to allow for management activities, such as prescribed burning, invasive species control or to protect sensitive species such as nesting colonial shorebirds.
Visitation guidelines

PLAN AHEAD
- Research your route before your trip. For driving directions to any of the preserves, visit www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage.
- Carry maps, a compass and/or GPS unit and plenty of drinking water.
- Research and keep an eye on weather conditions.
- Know your limitations and skills, as well as those of your group.

RESPECT NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE
- Preserve the past; examine but do not remove cultural or historic artifacts.
- Leave rocks, plants, animals and other natural objects as you find them.
- Camping and fires are not allowed.

BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHER VISITORS
- Obey posted signs.
- Keep pets on a leash.
- Horses, bicycles, ATVs and off-road vehicles are not allowed.

RESPECT WILDLIFE
- 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 YOUR WASTE PROPERLY
- Clean up trash or waste; leave the preserve cleaner than you found it.
- Don’t dispose of human or pet waste in bodies of water.

NOTES:
VISITOR HOURS ARE YEAR-ROUND, FROM SUNRISE TO SUNSET, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

TO RETAIN THE NATURAL CONDITIONS OF PRESERVES, FACILITIES ARE LIMITED. PRESERVES DO NOT HAVE RESTROOMS AND MAY HAVE POOR OR NO CELL PHONE COVERAGE. ALWAYS TELL SOMEONE WHERE YOU ARE GOING BEFORE YOU VISIT A PRESERVE.

HIKING TRAILS MAY BE STEEP, NARROW AND REMOTE. MOST ARE INACCESSIBLE TO EMERGENCY VEHICLES.
Near the southern tip of the Eastern Shore, this preserve provides important resting and feeding habitat for migratory songbirds during fall migration. A wheelchair-accessible boardwalk meanders through the maritime forest and dune scrub habitat to an overlook on the Chesapeake Bay. The beach is home to the federally listed northeastern beach tiger beetle. The preserve is part of the Lower Delmarva Important Bird Area.

Located on the Atlantic Ocean side of the Eastern Shore, this preserve encompasses newly restored upland migratory songbird habitat, maritime forest, salt marshes, a remnant Carolina bay and a globally rare sea-level fen natural community. Sea-level fens are open, freshwater wetlands located between uplands and seaside tidal marshes. Characterized by low-nutrient, acidic soils, sea-level fens harbor plants not often seen on the Coastal Plain. Due to the fragility of this community, the fen area is not open for public visitation. Two walking trails offer views of White's Creek and the Atlantic.

Bring your binoculars to see songbirds in the 217-acre migratory songbird habitat restoration area. Follow the White's Creek Trail and watch waterfowl and shorebirds foraging along the creek. Follow the Marsh Trail through the restoration area to the Atlantic 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 as they scurry in and out of muddy burrows.
THINGS TO SEE

Visitors can see some of the highest and best developed sand dunes in Virginia. The maritime forest and dune woodland contain native coastal tree, shrub and flower species. Look for post oaks, water oaks, sassafras, blueberries and pink lady’s-slipper orchids. Listen for spring peepers, green tree frogs and cricket frogs. Notice painted turtles sunning on logs and dragonflies feeding around the ponds. Follow the 0.75-mile Beach Trail through the forest and dunes to the Chesapeake Bay. Look for monarchs and other butterflies gathering nectar on seaside goldenrod. Walk the beach and watch foraging sandpipers, terns and pelicans, and scurrying ghost crabs.

This preserve features two marked walking trails that meander through diverse coastal natural communities, including Chesapeake Bay beach, maritime grasslands, a globally rare maritime dune woodland, maritime forest and natural freshwater ponds. Former agricultural fields have been restored to provide migratory songbird and butterfly habitat. These varied communities support songbirds, butterflies, dragonflies, frogs, turtles and small mammals. A mile of Chesapeake Bay beach supports one of the largest known populations of the federally listed northeastern beach tiger beetle. Part of the Lower Delmarva Important Bird Area, Savage Neck Dunes is an excellent outdoor classroom for students and naturalists.
Magothy Bay

Woodlands, forested wetlands and an extensive salt marsh make up this preserve on the southern tip of the Eastern Shore. Migratory temperate and neo-tropical songbirds stop here to rest and feed during fall migration. Southern wax myrtle shrubs were planted on more than 100 acres to provide resting perches, cover and a food source for migratory birds. Over time, the shrubs will grow into the forested habitat the birds prefer. The preserve is part of the Lower Delmarva Important Bird Area.

Cumberland Marsh

This preserve, a mixture of freshwater tidal marsh and wooded upland along the tidal Pamunkey River, provides pristine habitat for wetland species and migrating waterfowl. Cumberland Marsh supports the world’s largest population of the rare plant sensitive joint-vetch. An observation deck on the marsh and extensive woodland trails provide opportunities to view a wide variety of bird species, including bald eagles. This preserve is owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy in partnership with DCR.

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

THINGS TO SEE
A wheelchair-accessible boardwalk and observation deck look over the tidal freshwater marsh. A separate 1.5-mile trail leads along a tidal creek and through upland forests. Hiking trails range from easy to moderate. The birding at this preserve is also very good. Spring and fall are good times to see migratory songbirds. Late fall and winter are good times to spot waterfowl.

HOURS
Open Saturdays and Sundays from dawn to dusk. Woodland trails closed November through January.

NEW KENT COUNTY

THINGS TO SEE
A 3-mile walking trail loops through the migratory songbird habitat restoration area into maritime forest and onto a dike overlooking a salt marsh, the Atlantic Ocean and barrier islands. The return loop crosses into the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. Look for warblers and other migratory songbirds, as well as year-round resident birds. Listen for northern bobwhites and look overhead for northern harriers, Cooper’s hawks, bald eagles and American kestrels. At the salt marsh, look for bright red glasswort growing in the salt pans.
**VIRGINIA BEACH**

**THINGS TO SEE**
A half-mile trail follows elevated boardwalks through the beautiful swamp forest. A canoe launch providing access to a water trail along Altons Creek is at the end of this trail. This preserve is home to a wide variety of butterflies, including swallowtails, red-spotted purple and skippers. The wetlands provide habitat for numerous reptiles and amphibians. Flowering plants can generally be seen from spring through the fall. A nearly pure stand of Atlantic white cedar exists on the eastern side of the preserve.

**MATHEWS COUNTY**

**THINGS TO SEE**
The birding at Bethel Beach can be spectacular. More than 185 species of birds have been observed here. In any season, it’s possible to see beautiful winged creatures. Summer brings views of the least tern. Tundra swans and waterfowl can be seen in the winter. Numerous shorebird species frequent the preserve throughout the year.

**HOURS**
Bethel Beach is open from sunrise to sunset. However, the southern end of the preserve may be closed during the least tern nesting season, which is May 1 through Sept. 15.

**North Landing River**

This is Virginia’s first natural area preserve. Almost entirely wetland, it is home to more rare plants, animals and natural communities than any other place east of the Blue Ridge in Virginia. Wind tidal marshes, cypress swamps, pocosins and Atlantic white-cedar forests are all wetland communities found at North Landing River Natural Area Preserve.

**Bethel Beach**

This preserve has a long Chesapeake Bay beach, low dunes and salt marshes. The beach habitat is perhaps the most important part of this preserve, as it 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 dogs.
New Point Comfort

On a peninsula jutting into the Chesapeake Bay, this preserve is a key stopover point on the Atlantic Flyway for neo-tropical songbirds and other migratory birds. It is also home to many waterbirds. New Point Comfort has three major natural habitats: tidal salt marsh, maritime forest and sandy beach. This preserve is owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy in partnership with DCR.

Bush Mill Stream

This preserve takes its name from Bush Mill Stream, which forms the preserve’s northern boundary. The stream is a brackish Chesapeake Bay tidal creek that is home to blue crab, Atlantic menhaden and white perch. A rare shrimp-like animal, the tidewater amphipod, lives in the preserve’s springs and groundwater.

**MATHEWS COUNTY**

105 ACRES

**THINGS TO SEE**
Excellent birding can be had along the road edge between forest and marsh, especially during spring and fall migrations. A wheelchair-accessible boardwalk with an observation deck extends over the salt marsh, providing a view of Mobjack Bay and historic New Point Comfort lighthouse. The boardwalk is also a great place to watch fiddler crabs and the seaside dragonlet, Virginia’s only saltwater dragonfly.

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY**

102 ACRES

**THINGS TO SEE**
A 0.7-mile trail leads to an observation platform that looks out over the tidal Bush Mill Stream from a high bluff. The variety of aquatic life brings an array of birds to the area. Visitors may see eagles, ospreys, wood ducks and hooded mergansers feeding off the great supply of food provided by this tidal system at the headwaters of the Great Wicomico River.
From the parking area, a 0.3-mile trail leads you through old-field succession forest and shrub thickets to a 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 is a quick portage from Mill Creek, with Ingram Bay a short paddle away.

Canada geese, tundra swans and diving ducks can be seen during winter. In the spring and summer, biting flies are pervasive so some visitors prefer the cooler seasons. Download a brochure for a self-guided tour from the DCR website.

Made up of salt marsh, sand beach and shrub-forest habitats, Dameron Marsh contains some of the most significant wetlands for marsh-bird communities in the Chesapeake Bay. Its sandy shorelines are also home to the federally listed northeastern beach tiger beetle.

The Piedmont fameflower is a rare plant to spot on rock outcrops at Grassy Hill Natural Area Preserve. See page 14.
Hughlett Point

Hughlett Point is on the north side of Dividing Creek on the Northern Neck of Virginia. Made up of wetlands, beach, dune and pine forest, this preserve is teeming with wildlife. The mixture of natural communities provides habitat for waterfowl, songbirds and birds of prey. This preserve also protects the federally threatened northeastern beach tiger beetle. Please help protect the habitat by preventing sand disturbance (digging) by children and dogs.

Hickory Hollow

Consisting largely of upland mixed pine-hardwood forest, Hickory Hollow also features a forested wetland, Cabin Swamp, which is home to nearly 500 plant species and supports a rare natural community, a northern-coastal plain basic seepage swamp. 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.

THINGS TO SEE

Interpretive signs, a 1-mile trail and two observation platforms are found 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 beach sections may be closed seasonally to protect nesting shorebirds such as least terns.
Crown’s Nest

Rich in biodiversity, natural beauty and historical significance, Crow’s Nest is a crown jewel among Virginia natural areas. The preserve is a peninsula between two tidally influenced creeks, Potomac and Accokeek. Steep, deep ravines and expansive freshwater tidal marshes contribute to the peninsula’s dramatic topography. Perhaps Virginia’s best examples of mature Coastal Plain hardwood forest are found at Crow’s Nest. Oaks and tulip poplars as large as 4 feet in diameter and more than 100 feet tall are common. Archaeological finds indicate that humans have inhabited this land for at least 11,000 years. Today, walking and water trails enable recreationists to enjoy Crow’s Nest. DCR and Stafford County co-own this preserve.

Natural area preserves help protect plants that wildlife need. Butterfly-weed, photographed at North Landing River, provides nectar to myriad insects and is one of the larval host plants for monarch butterflies. See page 6.
**Bull Run Mountains**

Part of the eastern-most mountain chain in Virginia, Bull Run Mountains is among the larger preserves in the state natural areas system. The Bull Run Mountains comprise one of the largest unfragmented natural landscapes in Northern Virginia, providing much-needed natural resources and open space for its growing population. This preserve is owned and managed by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation in partnership with DCR.

**Chub Sandhill**

Chub Sandhill borders the Nottoway River for more than 3 miles and features a diverse set of Coastal Plain habitats ranging from cypress swamps to dry sandy uplands. Extensive deep, sandy soils support pine/scrub-oak sandhill communities featuring numerous rare plants. This preserve has been at the center of DCR’s longleaf pine restoration work since 2008. As of spring 2014, 190 acres have been planted with longleaf pine seedlings grown using seeds collected from the last few remaining mature, native longleaf pines in Virginia. A combination of thinning, burning and replacing loblolly pine with longleaf pine has already yielded expanded populations of rare plants and benefited native grassland-dependant species such as northern bobwhite.

**FAUQUIER & PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTIES**

2,486 ACRES

**THINGS TO SEE**

Nearly 10 miles of trails provide many opportunities for hiking, wildlife watching and photography. For more information, visit www.vofonline.org.

Virginia Outdoors Foundation has partnerships with Bull Run Mountains Conservancy and Potomac Appalachian Trail Club to assist with managing the preserve. Information about environmental education programs is available at www.brmcconservancy.org. For information about volunteering for trail projects, visit www.patc.net.

**SUSSEX COUNTY**

1,066 ACRES

**THINGS TO SEE**

This preserve has a small parking area and a total of 1.2 miles of walking trails, plus miles of sandy roads leading through frequently burned pine woods and restored longleaf pine communities. A small platform provides a view of the Nottoway River and floodplain forest community. Summer brings sights of flycatchers and woodpeckers. May and June are good months for viewing wildflowers such as the rare golden puccoon. Near the river, bright yellow prothonotary warblers can be spotted, as well as dragonflies, damselflies, wood ducks and the rare dwarf waterdog, a salamander.
THINGS TO SEE

Enter the preserve from State Route 39. Goshen and Little North Mountain wildlife management areas surround the preserve, so there are many opportunities for hiking and canoeing, and state-regulated fishing and hunting. A Wildlife Management Area Access Permit is required to use the parking area, swinging bridge and trail.

This preserve is beautiful in late spring when mountain laurel is blooming on the hillsides and in late summer when bright red cardinal flowers appear along the river. Winter offers spectacular views and more subtle visual treats, such as alder and ninebark fruits in the riverside shrub communities.

Formed over many millions of years by the down-cutting of the Maury River, Goshen Pass cuts through Hogback, Little North and Forge mountains. This site has been managed by DCR since 1954, when local residents raised funds to purchase the property and protect the spectacular views along the Maury River gorge. In 2002, the property was dedicated as a state natural area preserve. It contains beautiful old-aged chestnut oak forests on steep, rocky slopes as well as cliff, riverside scrub and aquatic communities. The habitats at Goshen Pass protect the state-rare Appalachian jewelwing damselfly and three rare plants: freshwater cordgrass, marsh vetchling and sand grape.
Poor Mountain

Poor Mountain Natural Area Preserve is home to intact pine-oak woodland communities that support the world’s largest known population of a rare shrub called piratebush. Periodic fires have played a key role in maintaining the pine-oak woodlands on which piratebush depends. The high-elevation ridges offer excellent views of the surrounding Roanoke area. Terrain is extremely rugged with steep, rocky slopes and narrow ridgetops.

Buffalo Mountain

Buffalo Mountain rises 3,971 feet above sea level in the midst of the Blue Ridge Mountains and is truly one of Virginia’s greatest natural treasures. Unique environmental conditions here make the mountain home to six rare natural communities, 14 rare plant species and three rare invertebrate animals.

ROANOKE COUNTY

932 ACRES

THINGS TO SEE
A 4-mile loop trail system traverses fire-dependant Table Mountain pine-oak woodlands and ascends and descends through a deep mountain ravine. Be prepared for a workout, as the main trail at Poor Mountain requires stout legs and a strong heart. The Piratebush Loop is a shorter, easier alternative. A good time to visit is in the fall, when piratebush leaves turn bright yellow. Spring and summer are ideal times to see mountain laurel, mountain fetterbush and bird species, including the scarlet tanager, Acadian flycatcher and pileated woodpecker.

FLOYD COUNTY

1,140 ACRES

THINGS TO SEE
The wind-swept summit at the end of a mile-long trail allows one of few 360-degree views of the Blue Ridge Mountains available in Virginia. The high elevation creates harsh sub-alpine living conditions for this mountain’s inhabitants. Late summer is an excellent time for a visit to see the beautiful array of wildflowers, including purple blazing-star and the seldom seen stiff goldenrod. A close look at this preserve may allow a glimpse of timber rattlesnake, black bear and ruffed grouse.
Grassy Hill

A look to the northwest from the town of Rocky Mount provides a view of Grassy Hill, a 3-mile long ridge on the west side of town. The globally rare woodland communities at this preserve are home to the rare Carolina thistle and Piedmont fameflower. The presence of sun-loving species within openings in the forest canopy, as well as numerous broad-crowned trees, indicate that this preserve once supported an open woodland/grassland community. Management with prescribed burning is helping to restore the open woodlands and historic “grassy” nature of Grassy Hill.

Shorebirds are part of the scenery at Bethel Beach on the Chesapeake Bay. See page 6.
The Channels

Located within The Channels State Forest, this preserve rewards hikers with a scene unlike any other in Virginia. Large sandstone boulders and deep crevices create a labyrinthine natural environment. Freeze-and-thaw cycles of previous ice ages are thought to have played a role in forming these features. The Channels is owned by the Virginia Department of Forestry and managed in partnership with DCR.

Pinnacle

Pinnacle is one of Virginia’s most popular natural area preserves. Bordering a state scenic river, Big Cedar Creek, which flows into the Clinch River, the preserve is named for a 400-foot-tall dolomite rock outcrop. Pinnacle preserve is home to a variety of rare and exemplary natural communities, from floodplain and rich cove forests to dry limestone woodlands that support a rich diversity of plant and animal species. The Clinch River watershed is noteworthy because it has the highest number of globally imperiled and vulnerable freshwater mussel and fish species in the United States.
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 designated in 1990. The preserve system took just 17 years to reach the 50-preserve milestone, and the program continues to grow. Most of these preserves are owned by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, while some are owned by local governments, universities, private citizens and The Nature Conservancy.

When property is dedicated as a state natural area preserve, the site is permanently conserved by placing legally binding restrictions on future activities and development. The preserve system was designed to protect Virginia’s natural communities, thus our common native species, as well as rare plants and animals. This type of resource stewardship is the most valuable form of conservation because it protects Virginia’s most treasured and ecologically significant places and life forms.

**NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM**

State natural area preserves are managed under DCR’s Virginia Natural Heritage Program, which started in 1986. Through inventory, protection and stewardship, Virginia’s biodiversity is conserved by the program. Scientists, information managers, resource management experts and an extensive conservation information system are the foundation upon which the natural area preserve system is built. Natural Heritage staff also provides 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 is a member of NatureServe, a nonprofit conservation organization that, along with its network of natural heritage programs in the Americas, is the leading source for information about rare and endangered species and threatened ecosystems. As a member of NatureServe, Virginia benefits by having ready access to global data; contributes to the study of global biodiversity; and provides for the conservation and recovery of Earth’s native ecosystems and rare and endangered species.

**STEWARDSHIP**

To manage the preserves and maintain a balance between resource protection and visitor access, DCR employs a team of regionally based natural area stewards. Stewards actively manage the preserves by controlling invasive species, conducting prescribed burns, maintaining public access and monitoring rare species populations. These actions are needed to protect, enhance and restore natural communities and rare species habitat. Many dedicated volunteers play a critical role in the stewardship of the preserves. DCR staff members also advise other landowners about techniques and methods for managing natural areas.
**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 ADJ that you wish to donate all or a portion of your refund. Enter code number 6-8 on the line for voluntary contributions.

**CONTACT**
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