



# VIRGINIA'S NATURAL AREA PRESERVE SYSTEM





# Welcome

Virginia's Natural Area Preserve System includes some of the most interesting, unusual and beautiful natural features in the state. Natural area preserves harbor many of Virginia's exemplary natural communities and rare species, providing visitors with a unique outdoor experience. We invite you to discover the preserves — some of Virginia's last great places.

The preserves include examples of native habitats from nearly all areas of the state and help to protect our common and rare living resources. From karst landscapes of sinkholes and underground streams in far western Lee County to giant bayside sand dunes on the Eastern Shore, the preserve system protects outstanding examples of natural communities and 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 many preserves, and visitors can experience such activities as hiking, canoeing, photography and wildlife-watching. Some preserves have limited access, but visits may be arranged by contacting the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. Preserves may also be closed at times to allow for management activities, such as controlled burning, or to protect sensitive species, such as nesting colonial shore birds.

Visitor hours are year-round, from sunrise to sunset, unless otherwise noted.

# Visitation guidelines

## PLAN AHEAD

- RESEARCH YOUR ROUTE BEFORE YOUR TRIP. FOR DRIVING DIRECTIONS TO ANY OF THE PRESERVES, VISIT [WWW.DCR.VIRGINIA.GOV](http://WWW.DCR.VIRGINIA.GOV).
- CARRY MAPS AND NAVIGATIONAL AIDS.
- 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 WILDLIFE FROM A DISTANCE. USE BINOCULARS AND CAMERAS.
- NEVER FEED ANIMALS. FEEDING WILDLIFE 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.

## 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.

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





## Cape Charles

On the southern tip of the Eastern Shore, this preserve provides important resting and feeding habitat for neo-tropical 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.



## Savage Neck Dunes

This preserve features diverse coastal natural communities, including Chesapeake Bay beach, dune woodland, maritime forest and a large pond that is home to a variety of frogs, turtles and dragonflies. Former agricultural fields are being restored to provide additional habitat. These varied communities support migratory songbird habitat, as well as one of the largest communities of the federally listed northeastern beach tiger beetle. This preserve is also part of the Lower Delmarva Important Bird Area.

### NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

29 ACRES



#### THINGS TO SEE

The preserve is full of songbirds throughout the year. During fall migration, neo-tropical warblers abound. Look for yellow-rumped warblers feasting on insects and berries in the wax myrtle thickets. Terns, pelicans, ospreys and eagles can be observed from the overlook.

### NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

298 ACRES



#### THINGS TO SEE

Visitors can take a 0.75-mile, marked trail through some of the highest sand dunes on the Eastern Shore. Savage Neck's dunes reach up to 50 feet in height. In the fall, the annual Eastern Shore Birding and Wildlife Festival provides a wonderful opportunity for birdwatchers to visit Savage Neck Dunes and see a variety of neo-tropical warblers and other migratory songbirds.

## NEW KENT COUNTY

1,193 ACRES



### 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 are 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.



## Cumberland Marsh

This preserve, a mixture of freshwater tidal marsh and wooded upland along the tidal Pamunkey River, provides pristine habitat for wetlands 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.

## VIRGINIA BEACH

3,441 ACRES



### THINGS TO SEE

A nearly pure stand of Atlantic white cedar exists on the eastern side of the preserve. A 0.5-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 swallowtail, red-spotted purple and skipper. The wetlands provide habitat for numerous reptiles and amphibians. Flowering plants can generally be seen from spring through the fall.

***North Landing River is closed because of increased illegal activity and DCR's lack of funding to support the staff to manage this area. To arrange a visit, please contact the DCR southeast region steward at (757) 925-2318.***



## North Landing River

This is Virginia's first natural area preserve. Almost entirely wetland, this preserve is home to more rare plants, animals and natural communities than is any other place east of the Blue Ridge in Virginia. Freshwater wind tide 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, the 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.

## MATHEWS COUNTY

105 ACRES



### THINGS TO SEE

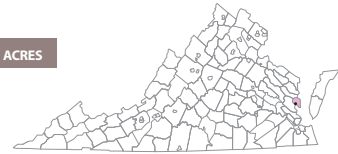
The birding at Bethel Beach can be spectacular. More than 185 species of birds have been observed here. In any season, it's possible to see beautiful winged creatures. Summer brings views of the least tern. Tundra swan and waterfowl can be seen in the winter. Numerous shorebird species frequent the area 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.

## 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 and boardwalk leads to an observation platform that looks over the tidal Bush Mill Stream. The variety of aquatic life brings an array of birds to the area. Visitors may see eagles, osprey, wood duck and hooded mergansers feeding off the great supply of food provided by this tidal system at the headwaters of the Great Wicomico River.



## Bush Mill Stream

This preserve takes its name from Bush Mill Stream, which runs along the preserve 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.

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY

316 ACRES



### THINGS TO SEE

Dameron Marsh is a prominent marshy peninsula extending more than a mile eastward into the Chesapeake Bay. A 0.3-mile trail leads you through a former agriculture field, which now supports young forest and shrub thickets, and onto a boardwalk that leads to a viewing platform overlooking the Chesapeake Bay. A canoe/kayak launch site opened in 2008.

Hundreds of geese and tundra swans can be seen here, especially in the winter. Biting flies are common to this preserve in the summer, so it's good to wait for cooler weather for a visit. A self-guided field trip guide is available on the Dameron Marsh page of the DCR website.



## Dameron Marsh

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.





## 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 upland forests, 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 by children and dogs.



## Hickory Hollow

Mostly made up of an upland mixed pine-hardwood forest, Hickory Hollow also has a forested wetland, named Cabin Swamp, that is home to nearly 500 plant species. Migratory songbirds, wood ducks, kingfishers and wild turkey are commonly seen at this preserve, which is owned by the Northern Neck Audubon Society and managed in partnership with DCR.

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY

204 ACRES



### THINGS TO SEE

Interpretive signs, a one-mile trail and two observation platforms are here. Look for the July-blooming eastern rose mallow, river otters, gray foxes, diamondback terrapin, herons, egrets, tundra swans in the winter, bald eagles and ospreys. Known for birding during spring and fall migrations, songbirds and hawks can be seen nesting and feeding in the upland forest. Some beach sections may be closed seasonally to protect nesting shore birds.

## LANCASTER COUNTY

254 ACRES



### THINGS TO SEE

This is one of the best preserves for a hike, as it has a 4.2-mile system of trails that allow you to wander through this beautiful Northern Neck forest. Bring a picnic lunch or snacks and rest in the picnic areas or shelter. Summer rains bring mushrooms and woodland orchids.

## FAUQUIER & PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTIES

2,486 ACRES



### THINGS TO SEE

The nonprofit Bull Run Mountain Conservancy helps the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) to provide public access to 800 acres of the preserve. Nearly 10 miles of trails provide ample space for hiking, wildlife watching and photography. Environmental education programs are also available. Visit [www.brmconservancy.org](http://www.brmconservancy.org) for more information.



## Bull Run Mountains

Part of the eastern-most mountain chain in Virginia, Bull Run Mountains preserve is one of the largest in the natural area preserve 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.

## SUSSEX COUNTY

599 ACRES



### THINGS TO SEE

Two sections of the preserve support a total of 1.2 miles of trails. A small platform provides a view of the Nottoway River and floodplain forest community. Summer birding opportunities bring sights of flycatchers and woodpeckers. Late June is a wonderful time for wildflower viewing, including the rare golden puccoon. The bright yellow prothonotary warbler is a welcome sight close to the river, as are dragonflies and damselflies, wood ducks and the rare dwarf waterdog, a salamander.



## Chub Sandhill

Chub Sandhill preserve borders the Nottoway River for more than two miles and was once the shore of an ancient estuary. This history left the preserve with deep, sandy soils that support a pine, scrub oak sandhill community and numerous rare plants. While previous owners mined sand from the property, much of the uplands remain intact. In 2008, 125 acres of former farmland were planted with longleaf pine seedlings as a first step in restoring native longleaf pine communities in Virginia.



## Goshen Pass

Formed over 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 citizens raised funds to purchase the property and protect the spectacular views along the Maury River gorge. In 2002, it was dedicated as a natural area preserve. Made up of a beautiful chestnut oak forest on steep, rocky slopes, this preserve protects this significant natural community, 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. The high elevation ridgetops offer exciting views of the surrounding area.

## ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY

936 ACRES



### THINGS TO SEE

This preserve can be accessed from the trailhead parking area owned by Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Surrounded by the Goshen and Little North Mountain Wildlife Management areas, opportunities for outdoor activities abound. Numerous hiking trails cross both the preserve and the wildlife management areas, and the Maury River is renowned for canoeing and fishing. Hunting is permitted and regulated by DGI.

This preserve is beautiful in late spring when mountain laurel is blooming and in late summer when cardinal flower blooms.

## ROANOKE COUNTY

925 ACRES



### THINGS TO SEE

A new trail system includes stretches through low-growing, table mountain pine-oak woodlands. Good times to visit are in the fall when the piratebush leaves turn bright yellow. Spring and summer are ideal times to see mountain laurel, milkweed, butterflies, ruffed grouse, wild turkeys and pileated woodpeckers.



## FLOYD COUNTY

1,140 ACRES



### THINGS TO SEE

The wind-swept summit at the end of a one-mile trail allows one of the few 360-degree views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The high elevation creates sub-alpine conditions that make a unique living situation for this mountain's inhabitants. Late summer is an excellent time for a visit to see a beautiful array of wildflowers, including the purple blazing-star and the seldom seen stiff goldenrod. A close look at this preserve may allow a glimpse of timber rattlesnake, black bear, red fox, white-tailed deer and ruffed grouse.



## Buffalo Mountain

Buffalo Mountain stands 3,971 feet tall in the middle of the Blue Ridge Mountains and is truly one of Virginia's greatest natural treasures. Unique environmental conditions here make it home to six rare communities, 14 rare plant species and three rare invertebrate species.

## FRANKLIN COUNTY

1,440 ACRES



### THINGS TO SEE

Six miles of trails make this preserve a wonderful place for a hike. Summertime is good for birding when one might see woodpeckers, cardinals and blue jays. Red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks can be seen year round.



## Grassy Hill

A look to the northwest from the town of Rocky Mount provides a view of Grassy Hill, a three-mile long ridge on the west side of the town. The globally rare woodland communities at this preserve are home to the rare Carolina thistle and Menge's fame-flower. Evidence of sun-loving species within the openings in the forest canopy, plus broad-canopied trees, indicate that this preserve was once more open and dominated by sun-loving grasses. Management with controlled burning is helping to restore the open woodlands and historic "grassy" nature of Grassy Hill.





## Pinnacle

Pinnacle is one of Virginia's most popular natural area preserves. It borders a state scenic river, Big Cedar Creek, which flows into the Clinch River. 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 mussels and fish species in the United States.

## RUSSELL COUNTY

683 ACRES



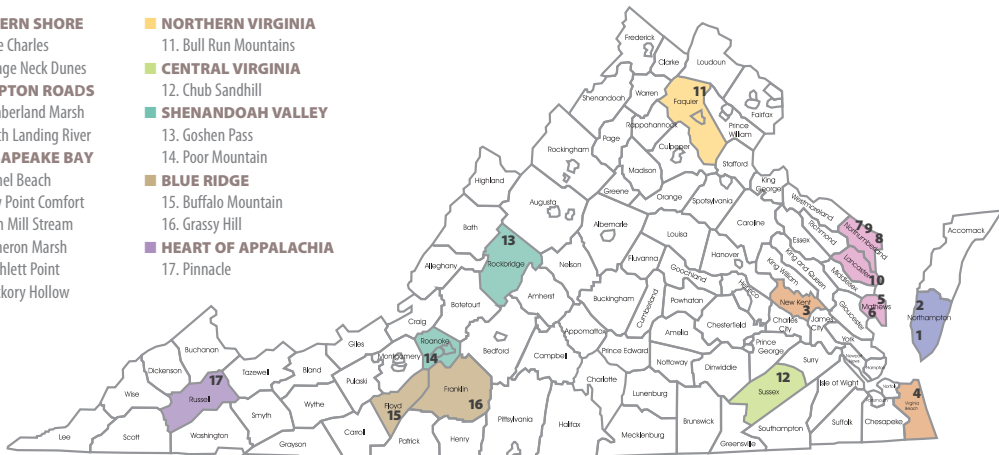
### THINGS TO SEE

An expanded trail system makes this preserve ideal for hiking. It offers spectacular views. Bring a picnic lunch and take a walk over the suspension bridge that crosses Big Cedar Creek. The abundance of water here provides good habitat for amphibians, so keep your eyes open for frogs and salamanders. Nearby, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries manages two boat ramps on the Clinch River, which is an excellent stream for canoeing and fishing.

## VIRGINIA NATURAL AREA PRESERVES WITH PUBLIC ACCESS FACILITIES

- **EASTERN SHORE**
  1. Cape Charles
  2. Savage Neck Dunes
- **HAMPTON ROADS**
  3. Cumberland Marsh
  4. North Landing River
- **CHESAPEAKE BAY**
  5. Bethel Beach
  6. New Point Comfort
  7. Bush Mill Stream
  8. Dameron Marsh
  9. Hughlett Point
  10. Hickory Hollow

- **NORTHERN VIRGINIA**
  11. Bull Run Mountains
- **CENTRAL VIRGINIA**
  12. Chub Sandhill
- **SHENANDOAH VALLEY**
  13. Goshen Pass
  14. Poor Mountain
- **BLUE RIDGE**
  15. Buffalo Mountain
  16. Grassy Hill
- **HEART OF APPALACHIA**
  17. Pinnacle



# 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 habitat 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 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

The 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 management and resource experts, and an extensive conservation information system are the foundation upon which the natural area preserve system is built. Program staff also provide land conservation and planning information to the public to help individuals, organizations and companies make the most-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 pro-

grams in the Americas, is the leading source for information about rare and endangered species and threatened ecosystems. As a member of NatureServe, the Virginia program contributes to the study of global biodiversity and provides for the conservation and recovery of the 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 natural area stewards. The stewards actively manage the preserves through biological monitoring, invasive species control, public access facilities maintenance, controlled burning and other actions. These actions are 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 also advises other landowners about techniques and methods for managing natural areas.

## CONTACT

Virginia Natural Heritage Program  
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[www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural\\_heritage](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage)



Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation  
State Parks • Soil & Water Conservation • Natural Heritage  
Chesapeake Bay Local Assistance • Land Conservation  
Outdoor Recreation Planning • Dam Safety & Floodplains



