



MATTAWOMAN CREEK, CHARLES COUNTY



KERRY WIXTED

Paddle Mattawoman Creek from Mattingly Park upstream and experience the Chesapeake Bay in miniature. Follow the migration route of herring, shad and yellow perch to spawning sites in the upper Mattawoman drain-age. The extensive wetlands and the large beds of submerged aquatic vegetation are a critical nursery and feeding grounds for fish, including these anadromous species as well as weakfish, spot, croaker and the rare longnose gar (*Lepisosteus osseus*). These areas are attractive to anglers for national fishing tournaments as well as to large fish-eating birds like herons, egrets, and bald eagles.

From the brackish marshes of the estuary near the put-in to the fresh-water tidal forest and the nontidal marshes at the Route 224 bridge, the wetlands of this Natural Area are diverse and teeming with wildlife. The Indian Head Rail Trail offers views of the wetlands by bicycle or on foot from the north side of the creek. On the south side, a walk on the George Wilmot Trail reveals a variety of colorful forest songbirds in the spring and summer. This trail leads to several vantage points on the creek where almost 20 species of waterfowl can be seen in the fall as they stop over in large flocks to rest and feed before



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Longnose gar

continuing on their journeys. The rare and elusive marshbird, king rail (*Rallus elegans*), can be found during the breeding season in the dense tidal freshwater marsh. In early summer, visitors may see the beautiful flowers of the rare American lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*) floating on the open water of the creek. Native Americans consumed the potato-like tuber of this aquatic plant as well as the leaves and seeds, and may have spread the species for their use.



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The stunning American lotus plays a key role in the aquatic ecosystem at Mattawoman Creek. The submerged parts of the plant provide food and shelter for invertebrates. In turn, these tiny animals provide food for fish and other wildlife species.

KEY ELEMENTS

- Longnose Gar
- Tidal Freshwater Marsh
- American Lotus and Primrose-willow
- Floodplain and Mesic Deciduous Forests



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Left: Primrose-willow (*Ludwigia decurrens*) is a rare perennial herb that can grow up to six feet tall. Look for its attractive, yellow flowers in mid-summer.

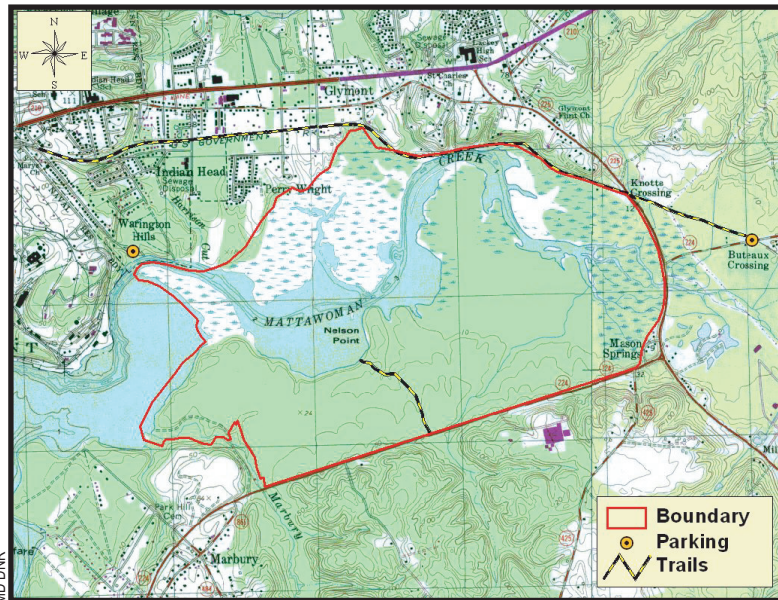
Mattawoman Creek Natural Area includes over 1,300 acres in north-western Charles County. This area is one of Maryland's most significant natural resource areas, and the estuarine portions of the creek have been described by some as a model for a fully restored Chesapeake Bay. The Natural Area is owned by the State and is managed by the Maryland Park Service. Charles County manages the Indian Head Rail Trail.

THE BASICS

- Marked Trails
- Information Boards
- Facilities at Mattingly Park
- Canoe/Kayak Access Areas



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Mattawoman Creek Natural Area

Directions

From Washington, DC: Travel I-95/495 (Capital Beltway) to Exit 3 at MD 210 (Indian Head Highway). Take MD 210 south about 18 miles to Indian Head. To launch a boat, continue through town about 2 miles and turn left onto Mattingly Avenue, just before the naval base gatehouse. Proceed 0.75 mile to the boat ramp at Mattawoman Creek. To reach the Indian Head Rail Trail, turn left (south) at MD 225. After 1.2 miles, turn left onto MD 224 (Livingston Road) and continue 0.4 mile to a parking lot on the left. To hike the George Wilmot Trail, from MD 210 turn left (south) at MD 225. After 1.6 miles, turn right on MD 224 (Chicamuxen Road) and continue 0.7 mile to Lackey High School on the left. The trailhead is off the right shoulder 0.3 mile beyond the school driveway. Look for small signs after the first telephone pole beyond a guard rail.

Forest Interior Dwelling Species

The intact, mature forests of the Mattawoman Creek watershed are prime habitat for Forest Interior Dwelling Species (FIDS). These species are mainly neotropical birds that migrate from Mexico and points south to the United States and Canada to breed in the summer.

Among these colorful birds is the northern parula, a small warbler that nests in tree mosses. Pedal or hike the Indian Head Rail Trail to view these birds in spring and summer.



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Northern parulas actively forage among the mid- to upper level of the tree canopy. Listen for their fast, trilling "zee-yip" calls in the spring.

Spawning Saga

Anadromous fish spend most of their lives at sea and migrate upstream into freshwater rivers to spawn. A decrease in spawning sites has been documented recently in Mattawoman Creek. Biologists are concerned that development activity in the watershed is reducing the water quality of this prized fishery. Forest clearing and runoff of stormwater from roads and buildings raise stream water temperature, increase the flow of water, which erodes stream banks, and cause sedimentation and pollution of streams. Local citizens have responded to the threats to this exceptional resource by assisting with stream monitoring, educating the public and partnering with county, state, regional and national organizations to work with government officials and private landowners to ensure protection of the watershed.

WATCH OUT FOR!

- Ticks
- Biting Flies
- Mosquitoes

CONTACT

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 Marbury, MD 20658
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For more information:
<http://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/southern/smallwood.aspx>



USEFWS

Anadromous fish, like this alewife, develop spawning marks on their scales for every year that they reproduce. These marks make it easy for marine biologists to determine how many times the fish have spawned in their lives.