

WELCOME TO MALLOWS BAY PARK



Photo courtesy of Mitch Zeissler (Flickr)

You are surrounded by the mystery and history of the Ghost Fleet of Mallows Bay—more than 100 wooden and steel-hulled steamships scuttled after World War I in these waters. The Ghost Fleet rests south of Washington D.C. along the Potomac River, and can be accessed through Mallows Bay Park. Onshore, the land in Mallows Bay Park also holds a rich history and an abundance of diverse wildlife and plants. With this Guide in hand, explore the trails and “read” the clues underfoot to explore past and present occupants of this land.

As the historic hub of the Mallows Bay-Widewater National Register Historic and Archeological District, Mallows Bay offers visitors a unique maritime landscape in the Chesapeake Bay, where history is in the process of becoming nature itself—in the water and on the land. The landscape is home to the Burning Basin, explorable by recreational boating (see A Paddler’s Guide to Mallows Bay), and trails that provide visitors birding and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Over time, lands are shaped by the people who occupy it. At the same time, the lands shape the people. There is evidence of this historic and ongoing relationship between humans and the land throughout the park today—secondary forests, a barn, cultivated flowers. Explore the trails and “read” the clues beneath your feet to discover past and present occupants of this land.

BRIEF HISTORY

Mallows Bay, located in Charles County, is the largest graveyard of visible, historic shipwrecks in the Western Hemisphere. Much as the waters of Mallows Bay have a dense history, the surrounding terrain also has a rich archaeological and cultural heritage. Populated for 12,000 years, this region was home to some of the oldest Native American cultures, including the Piscataway peoples.

Agriculture in this region significantly impacted the land and cultural heritage. Tulip poplars and sweet gums, which spring up after the land is altered, are evidence of heavy logging and clearing for agriculture. In the 1640s, the first enslaved West African people were brought to Maryland to work the fields of tobacco, a labor-intensive cash crop. By the Civil War, half of Charles County’s residents were enslaved African Americans. Today, we recognize their cultural and economic contributions within Charles County.

During the Civil War, the United States military impacted this land. Though Charles County residents were mostly Confederate sympathizers, the region was in fact Union territory. The Union used this area to launch raids and spy operations into Confederate territory. In return, the site occasionally came under fire from Confederate batteries. Later, in the 20th century, Mallows Bay was used for the Western Marine and Salvage Corporation and the Bethlehem Steel Corporation ship salvage, the largest in American history. Bethlehem Steel transformed the land and the waters of the bay when they carved out the Burning Basin, a major visual component of the park today.



Photo courtesy of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources

In 2010, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources purchased a portion of land adjacent to Mallows Bay from the Wilson family, and made it available to Charles County to create and manage Mallows Bay Park.

WILDLIFE

Mallows Bay has tremendous opportunities for wildlife viewing. The diversity of habitats along the trails, from the marshes to the floodplain to beaver habitat and the upland forest, is ideal for observing a variety of wildlife. The list below describes some of the species you may observe during your visit.

NATIVE PLANTS

AMERICAN BEECH, *Fagus grandifolia*
Canopy tree that blooms yellow-green, pom-pom shaped flowers in Spring. The bark is smooth and grey. Beech drops, a brown-stemmed parasitic plant, may be present at its base.

PAWPAW, *Asimina triloba*
Understory tree that blooms purple, bell-shaped flowers in spring and produces edible, oblong, yellowish-green fruits that mature in early autumn. Host plant for the Zebra Swallowtail butterfly.

ROSE (MARSH) MALLOW, *Hibiscus moscheutos*
Perennial plant that blooms large, white and pink flowers in early autumn. Found in wetlands. Potential source of the park’s name.

AMERICAN SWEETGUM, *Liquidambar styraciflua*
Early succession, deciduous tree with star-shaped leaves. Produces spikey “gum balls” that are dropped in early spring.

BIRDS

CAROLINA WREN, *Thryothorus ludovicianus*
Reddish-brown back and head with a buff-colored underside. Nest in open cavities, trees and stumps. Year-round species.

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER, *Melanerpes carolinus*
Medium-sized with black and white barred back, pale-red belly and red head. Cling to tree bark. Year-round species.

BALD EAGLE, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*
Large, brown-bodied, with a white head (adult) and yellow beak. Scavenging and hunting bird. Nests near water.

OSPREY, *Pandion haliaetus*
Large, brown-backed, with a white head and dark mask. Fish-eating bird. Nests and perches near water. Flies south for winter.

Photos courtesy of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Chesapeake Bay Program, Southern Maryland Audubon Society, Michael Roswell¹, Maryland Department of Natural Resources photo contest winners (Christine Edwards² and Nathan Huber³) and Flickr user stevehdc⁴.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

GREEN TREE FROG, *Hyla cinerea*
Typically greenish-yellow in color. Found near vegetation in the margins near aquatic habitats. Active in spring and summer.

SNAPPING TURTLE, *Chelydra serpentina*
Freshwater turtle with a serrated hind shell, long tail and strong bite. Give this turtle space! Year-round species.

EASTERN BOX TURTLE, *Terrapene carolina*
Terrestrial turtle with bright yellow-orange spotted black shell, found on trails basking in the sun. Hibernates in winter.

COPPERHEAD, *Agkistrodon contortix*
Venomous snake with a triangular-shaped head and brown body with hourglass-shaped crossbands. Found in forested habitats. Hibernates in winter.

MAMMALS

BEAVER, *Castor canadensis*
Brown with large, flat tail. Create dams and lodges with sticks, mud and grass. Leave pencil-shaped chew marks on trees. Most active dusk to dawn. Remain in lodges in winter.

WHITE-TAILED DEER, *Odocoileus virginiana*
Reddish-brown in color. Fawns have spots. Forage on leaves and grasses, including poison ivy! Year-round species.

INSECTS

GROUND NESTING CELLOPHANE BEE, *Colletes inaequalis*
Yellow-black bee. Form solitary nests with conical piles of dirt at the entrance. Males cannot sting and females are typically docile. Adults die in the fall.

EASTERN PONDHAWK DRAGONFLY, *Erythemis simplicicollis*
Green-blue with four-wings and bright blue-green or reddish-brown eyes. Commonly found near water in the spring and summer.

EASTERN CARPENTER BEE, *Xylocopa virginica*
Large black and yellow bee that drills holes in wood to nest. Males cannot sting and females are typically docile. Adults die in fall.

CAROLINA MANTIS, *Stagmomantis carolina*
Pale green to grey. Adults and egg cases found on grassy vegetation. Eggs hatch in spring and adults die in winter.

TRAIL INFORMATION

GETTING THERE

MALLOWS BAY PARK
1440 Wilson Landing Road
Nanjemoy, MD 20662
(301) 932-3470

- Amenities include a boat ramp, soft launch, portable toilets, parking, walking trails, interpretive signs, and picnic area.
- The park is open daily 5:30 am to sunset.

TRAIL DIFFICULTY

There are four trails in Mallows Bay Park. All of the trails are marked by green blazes. The trails vary in difficulty. Remember to take your skill level into consideration when selecting a trail.

EASY

Beaver Trail Easy Option **0.6 miles**
Remains in primarily flat, grassy regions of the park.

EASY/MODERATE

Ridge Trail **0.5 miles**

Winds through upland forest, where fallen branches and leaves may make walking difficult.

Nature Loop **1.0 miles**

Winds down and up through floodplain habitat that is prone to wet or muddy conditions.

MODERATE/DIFFICULT

Beaver Trail **0.5 miles**

Traverses the slopes adjacent to the beaver pond. Walkers may find the steep, slanting slopes and plant roots challenging. Sturdy hiking shoes recommended.

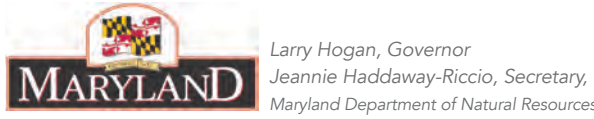
SAFETY TIPS

- Stay on the trail.
- Do not climb on the fragile shipwrecks—climbing on the shipwrecks may result in injury.
- Wildlife are wild, please do not feed.
- Ticks, chiggers, and poison ivy are present along the walking trails.
- Trails may be muddy and slippery after a rainstorm.
- Leave only footprints, take only memories...unless fishing!

While exploring the park, please respect the natural and historic integrity of the site, and enjoy!



BAY MALLOWS GUIDE TO A HIKER'S



For more information visit:
www.charlescountymd.gov/ghostfleetofmallowsbay

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HABITAT WALK

During the hike, remember how the land has shaped the people who lived here, and how those people have shaped the land. Notice evidence of this everywhere. There are rutted roads, invasive plants and evidence of an old family farm. Enjoy how the land and its inhabitants change from season to season. Observe all of the cultural and ecological history this land holds.

1. OVERLOOK

Using the permanent all-weather telescope, view some of the remains of over 100 ships resting in their watery graves in the bay. The Accomac ferry can be seen in the distance.

2. MEADOW

In the spring, summer and fall, the meadow is full of flowers. At the end of the meadow, look down to discover ground bee nesting holes. The majority of Maryland's 400+ species of bees nest in the ground and are not easily provoked into stinging.

3. SHIPWRECK

At low tide, one of the ghost ships may be visible next to the shoreline. The shipwrecks are fragile resources, please do not climb. Instead, notice how plants are overtaking the wreckage.

4. PALUSTRINE FLOODPLAIN

This damp habitat is full of *secondary succession* trees, such as red maples and tulip poplars, and are evidence of human impact. *Vernal pools* may be present following spring rains. These short-lived ponds provide important breeding habitat for amphibians, such as frogs and salamanders. In the summer, look overhead to find clusters of pawpaw fruits.

5. BEAVER POND

The beaver pond used to be a flowing stream, but as one of nature's engineers, beavers alter ponds and streams to better suit their needs, in this case by building a mud wall. Farther upstream, the beavers built a dam from logs and sticks.

6. MEADOW

The field is abuzz with insects in the spring and summer. To the back of the field, a large man-made mound planted with decorative, *non-native* plants is evidence of human impact.

7. WILSON FAMILY FARM

Remnants from the Wilson family farm still rest on these trails. At the set of power lines, brush and brambles cover pieces of the Wilson family home: a chimney, appliances, corrugated metal. Across the road stands the remains of the barn.

8. BEAVER POND

In the pond, there may be *snapping turtles* moving through the depths of the water, or turtles *basking* on fallen logs. Two *invasive* plant species, *Phragmites* and *Hydrilla*, dominate the waters. *Phragmites* is a tall marsh grass. *Hydrilla* is a type of *submerged aquatic vegetation* (SAV). Invasive species disrupt the natural environment by spreading rapidly, out-competing native wildlife and quickly becoming the dominant species in the community.

9. SWEETGUM FOREST

One clue to the sweetgum forest is the presence of spiky fruits, known as *burr balls* or *gum balls*, scattered on the ground. This patch of forest hints at the impact humans had on this land, as sweetgum is a *secondary succession tree*, which grows rapidly as uplands return to their natural state.

10. UPLAND HABITAT

The habitat changes abruptly simply by crossing the road, becoming forested *upland* dominated more by pines. It is an older forest with minimal *undergrowth*. Deer frequently roam these woods and turtles bask in the warmth of the sunlight. Upturned trees reveal a tiny ecosystem, home to bees, wasps, spiders, beetles and other insects—all beneficial to pollination and the food web here.

11. CREEK OVERLOOK

Peer down on the creek, tinted red from *tannins* leaching from plant matter. In the spring and summer months, the creek may be surrounded by a dense patch of the smelly *skunk cabbage*. Its strong odor attracts *fly pollinators* but deters hungry deer and other animals from munching on it.

12. WETLAND OVERVIEW

Snake holes are scattered amongst the mushrooms and moss growing in the rich soil of the trail. In certain seasons, chirping birds and fluttering butterflies drift from tree to tree. Where the forest thins, enjoy the expansive view of the wetland that the creek feeds. This wetland is a transition zone between land and water and is teeming with life.

13. FIELD

The field contains *non-native* trees, such as the Yoshino cherry tree, likely planted by the farmers who inhabited this land.

14. WETLAND

The wetland surrounds the Burning Basin, where Bethlehem Steel drained the water in 1942 to allow burning and scuttling of the World War I ships. The wetland is home to Great Blue herons and other nesting birds, and many species of insects and amphibians, including dragonflies and frogs. Wetlands are nature's kidneys, filtering the water coming from upland streams before releasing it into the surrounding ecosystems.

15. CHESTNUT OAK

Where the trail and the parking lot meet, a large chestnut oak stands on the eroding hillside to the left. The tree's prominent roots can be seen clinging to the slope. The Nanjemoy people say that these roots are a reminder that nature persits. Long ago, humans came in and built a road to the water. Then they altered the land. But the tree says, "I will put my roots down deep and I will still be standing and holding this hill in place long after you are gone."



NEARBY POINTS OF INTEREST

1. Smallwood State Park

628-acre park featuring the restored Smallwood Retreat House, open to visitors. Marina, picnic area, camping area, pavilions, playground and nature trails available.

2. Nanjemoy Wildlife Management Area

1,365-acre, wooded, undeveloped area used for hunting, bird watching, fishing and fossil hunting; open sunrise to sunset.

3. Chapel Point State Park

600-acre, undeveloped, multi-use park on the Port Tobacco River. Sand launch available for small john-boats, canoes, kayaks and personal watercraft. Hunting and fishing permitted. Adjacent to the park, St. Ignatius Church and cemetery, the oldest continuous Roman Catholic parish in the United States, with scenic river view.

4. Doncaster State Forest

1,447-acre *demonstration forest* offering 13 miles of trails and access roads open to equestrians, hikers, mountain bikers and cross-country skiers, as well as hunters from September through January. Forested picnic areas available.

5. Friendship Landing

382-acre park on Nanjemoy Creek used for boating, hiking and fishing. Boat ramp and ball fields available. Open dawn to dusk.

6. Myrtle Grove Wildlife Management Area

4,460-acre, mature riparian forest along Mattawoman Creek used for hiking, fishing and hunting. Shooting range available.

