WELCOME TO MALLOWS BAY PARK

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 Patomac 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 the Burning Basin, exploratory by recreational boating (see A Paddler’s Guide to Mallows Bay), and trails that provide visitors boating and wildlife viewing opportunities.

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

MALLOWS BAY

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, urn-shaped flowers in Spring. The bark is smooth and grey. Beech drops, a brown-stemmed parasitic plant, may be present in beech

PAPAW, Asimina triloba
Undershrub that blooms purple, bell-shaped flowers in spring and produces edible, oblong, yellow-green fruits that mature in early autumn. Host plant for the Zebra swallowtail butterfly.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

GREAT TREE FROG, Hyla chrysophrys
Typically greenish-yellow in color. Found near vegetation in the marshes near aquatic habitats. Active in spring and fall.

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

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

NATIVE BIRDS

CAROLINA WREN, (adult) and yellow beak.
Medium-sized with black and white striped head. Cling to tree bark. Year-round species, found in wetlands.

GROUND NESTING CELOPHANE BEETLE, Colistus inscriptus
Yellow-black bee. For solitary nests with conical piles of dirt at the entrance. Males cannot sting and females are barely dickle. Adults dive in the fall

HINNEN TREE FROG, Hyla versicolor
Brown with large, flat tail. Create dams and lodge with sticks, mud and grass. Leave pond-shaped nests on trees. Most active duik to dawn. Remain in lodges in winter

MAMMALS

BEAVER, Castor canadensis
Brown in color. Large black and yellow bee that drills holes in trees. Most active dusk to dawn. Leave pencil-shaped chew marks and lodges with sticks, mud and grass. Adult dives in the fall

WHITE-TAILED DEER, Odocoileus virginianus
Reddish-brown in color. Favours have spots. Forage on leaves and grasses, including poison Ivy (year-round species).

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

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 primary flat, gray grassy regions of the park.

EASY/MODERATE

Ridge 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.

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 rainfall.
• Leave only footprints, take only memories...unless fishing!

WELCOME TO MALLOWS BAY PARK

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

HISTORY

Mallows Bay, located in Charles County, is the largest gravelyard 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 archeological 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. Tulp peas 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 Union 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.

In the 20th century, Mallows Bay was used for the Western Marine and Salvage Corporation and the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. This 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.

Today, Charles County purchased the land from the Bethlehem Steel Corporation and transferred it to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. The park is open daily 5:30 am to sunset.

THE TRAILS

In the Park

• Ticks, chiggers, and poison ivy are present along the walking trails.
• Trails may be muddy and slippery after a rainfall.
• Leave only footprints, take only memories...unless fishing!

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

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.

For more information visit: www.marinerecstate.marinerecstate.com/mallowsbay

Funding generously provided by:
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. PALUSCINE FLOODPLAIN
This damped 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 creek feeds. This wetland is a transition zone between upland and water and is teeming with life.

6. MEADOW
This 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 bermuda cover pieces of the Wilson family home: a chimney, appliances, corrugated metal. Across the road stands the remains of the barn. Notice how plants are overtaking the wreckage.

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. The patch of forest Hong Kong had on this land, as sweetgum is a secondary succession tree, which grows rapidly as it expands 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 beetles, spiders, butterflies 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, Halesia calabaca. 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 up 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 perist. 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 and your town.”

PRIVATE PROPERTY! The area surrounding Mallows Bay is primarily privately owned and trespassing is prohibited.

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
650-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
4,467-acre, mature riparian forest along Mattawoman Creek, used for hiking, fishing and hunting. Shooting range available.