

Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge Tubman Road Hiking Trail



Welcome to the Tubman Road Hiking Trail on the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge.

This 27,000-acre Refuge, established in 1933, is managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Blackwater Refuge is one of the main wintering areas for migratory waterfowl using the Atlantic Flyway. It is also a haven for the endangered Delmarva fox squirrel, and the bald eagle (listed as threatened).

This hiking trail provides visitors with opportunities to observe forest management techniques, small mammals, birds and a variety of amphibians.



The marsh at sunrise. The Refuge has a variety of habitats, including tidal marshes, freshwater ponds, mixed evergreen and deciduous forests and small amounts of cropland.

From Forest to Farm & Back to Forest



A stand of mature trees damaged by a tornado in 2002.

Sites along this trail reflect the area's history of cattle farming, logging and recent reforestation.

The first part of the trail shows the impact of a sudden and catastrophic event – a tornado ripped through this area in 2002. It dramatically altered the forestscape by destroying dozens of mature trees,

eliminating habitat for some wildlife species while creating new habitat for others such as turkey and deer.



Refuge staff and volunteers plant young loblolly pine and oaks as part of the reforestation program.

One goal of this Refuge is to increase habitat for the Delmarva fox squirrel and forest interior-dwelling birds. This area is being reforested so it will eventually provide the dense, mature forest habitat these species need.

Further along the trail you will see the remains of a homestead. In the late 1600s, several families settled in this region to farm. The Tubman Road, along which part of this trail runs, was part of a private road constructed to access the various homesteads.

The trail passes White Marsh, a brackish marsh that attracts a variety of birds including eagles, great egrets, snowy egrets, swans, kingfishers, pintail ducks, teal and shovelers.

Bald Eagle



The bald eagle, with its 7-foot wingspan, can be easily identified by its bright white head and tail.

The bald eagle population was drastically reduced by pollution and pesticides in the 1960s. Through careful management in places such as Blackwater Refuge, the population has rebounded.

Once listed as endangered, the bald eagle was upgraded to "threatened" status several years ago and may soon be removed from the federal Endangered Species List.

The Refuge's woodlands and waterways support the largest nesting population of eagles on the east coast, north of Florida.

Hop, Skip, Jump & Slither

This part of the Refuge supports a wide variety of amphibians and reptiles. Frogs, turtles, salamanders and snakes abound in area ponds, vernal pools, freshwater sloughs and ditches.

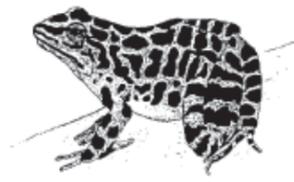
The Refuge's delicate aquatic habitats provide food and breeding areas for insects, mammals and migrating birds.



Spring Peeper



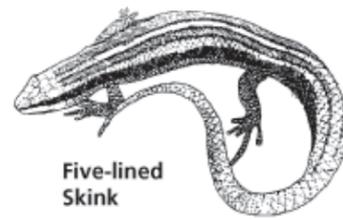
Marbled Salamander



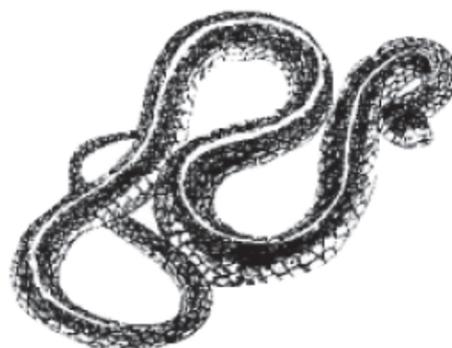
Pickerel Frog



Green Treefrog



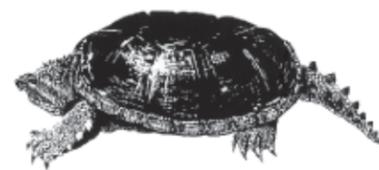
Five-lined Skink



Garter Snake



Box Turtle



Snapping Turtle

Tubman Road Trail

This trail follows new paths and existing roads as it winds through the forest. The trail is approximately 2 miles long and takes about 1 1/2 hours to hike. Yellow markers will guide you along the entire trail.

-  Old Tubman Road
-  Private Property
-  Refuge Property



Poison Ivy

Refuge Rules...Please:

- Stay on designated trail at all times.
- Per Federal code, do not disturb, harass or remove any plants or wildlife.
- Travel by foot only. Bicycles and other vehicles are prohibited.
- All pets are prohibited.
- Pick up and dispose of litter.
- At times, this area is used for scientific study. Do not disturb any flagging, marking or instruments.

Trail Stops

① Catastrophic Change

In 2002, a tornado tore through this area, dramatically altering the landscape. Many large pines and hardwoods were snapped or ripped out of the ground. This destruction, followed by the regrowth of the forest, make this area a perfect home for edge-dwelling animals.

② Reclaimed Fields

Formerly used as cattle pasture, this site regenerated naturally into a "mixed forest" (pines and hardwoods). The Refuge staff conducts timber management activities which will allow the pines and oaks to reach maturity and provide habitat required by the Delmarva fox squirrel.

③ Slough

This channel-shaped wetland is rich in diverse aquatic plants, including smartweed, needle-rush and spartina. The flow of water through the slough effectively disperses plant seeds.

④ Old Home Site

The Tubman Road and surrounding farmsteads were once busy and productive sites – hard to imagine as they revert to forest. Look for remnants of cattle pastures, plow ridges, ditches and an old well.

⑤ White Marsh

White Marsh is the brackish semi-tidal wetland to the north. This haven for migrating and over-wintering birds is a finger of the Blackwater River. The rising sea level has increased the salinity of the water. The salty marsh waters are seeping into forested areas, killing surrounding trees.

⑥ Young Forest

This part of the homestead was grazed by cattle and used for other agricultural purposes until the 1960s. Notice evidence of cattle grazing – minimal low brush, old barbed wire fencing and signs of plowing. Under the Refuge staff's care, slow-growing pines and oaks are taking hold, and one day will provide habitat for Delmarva fox squirrels and forest birds.

⑦ Double Ditch Mystery

Historically, a single ditch often served as a property boundary. Along this old property line we find two ditches running side by side. The reason for two ditches is a mystery, but they clearly signal a change in land use, and the age and composition of the forest.

⑧ Spots of Sunlight

Note the large, dead trees to your left. The death of these trees created an opening in the forest canopy. This gap allows sunlight to reach to the forest floor, encouraging seeds

to germinate and grow. Competition for sunlight and nutrients is intense in the forest – only the most vigorous plants survive.

⑨ Frogs and Toads

The Refuge supports 13 species of frogs and toads. These creatures are a vital link in the food chain. They consume tons of insects every year, and are consumed in turn by animals higher in the chain such as herons, egrets, eagles, hawks, snakes and raccoons.

⑩ Turkeys

Signs of wild turkeys can be seen throughout this area. This beautiful, shy bird was once abundant here. Unrestricted hunting and land use changes eliminated turkeys from all but a few counties in Western Maryland by the early 1900s. To help reestablish populations, wild birds were captured and relocated throughout the state. Today, the turkey population at Blackwater Refuge is large enough to allow biologists to capture wild birds here for transplant to other locations.

Tracks shown (from left to right) are: raccoon, sika deer, Delmarva fox squirrel and wild turkey.

For More Information

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service manages more than 540 refuges. The Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat, and represents the most comprehensive wildlife management program in the world.

Funding for this trail was provided by the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network, the Waterfowl Festival, and the Friends of Blackwater.

- The Friends of Blackwater www.friendsofblackwater.org
- The Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center
2145 Key Wallace Drive
Phone 410-228-2677
Exhibits, gift shop with field guides for sale.
- Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge
<http://blackwater.fws.gov>
Email: fw5rw_bwnwr@fw.gov
Mailing address:
2145 Key Wallace Drive
Cambridge, Maryland 21613

Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, a Chesapeake Bay Gateway, is one of your entry points to enjoy and learn about the places, stories, spirit and mysteries of the Chesapeake and its watershed. Explore this and other sites in the Gateways Network. Visit www.baygateways.net for more information.

