Eastern Virginia Rivers National
Wildlife Refuge Complex
Rappahannock River Valley National
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Rappahannock River Valley

National Wildlife Refuge

Magnolia Warbler
Clifford Otto

Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge is the newest of four refuges that compose the Eastern Virginia Rivers National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

This goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Established in 1996, our goal is to protect 20,000 acres of important wetland and upland habitat along the river and its major tributaries. With help from our conservation partners, including Chesapeake Bay Foundation, The Conservation Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and The Trust for Public Land, we are well on our way toward achieving our land protection goal, which includes the purchase of conservation easements.

Catherine Markham

Newly hatched bald eagle

Wildlife and Habitat Management

Two federally listed threatened or endangered species; the American bald eagle and sensitive joint-vetch are found within the refuge boundary. Bald eagles nest and roost in significant numbers throughout the refuge boundary area. In fact, the state's largest wintering roost for bald eagles is located within the refuge boundary. The sensitive joint-vetch is a rare plant found only in freshwater tidal marshes.

Wilna pond

USFWS

Shorebirds, neotropical migrant songbirds, raptors, and marsh birds rely on the Rappahannock River's corridors during the spring and fall migration periods. With help from partners and volunteers, refuge staff are restoring native grasslands and riparian forests along the river and tributary streams to provide additional habitat for these species. Focus species and species groups for management include bald eagles, forest-interior dwelling species such as wood thrush and Acadian flycatcher, and grassland nesting birds such as grasshopper sparrow and northern bobwhite.

Right: Le Conte's sparrow
Far right: Viceroy

John Fox

John Fox

Being a relatively new refuge, we are still in the process of establishing the full compliment of baseline biological surveys. We have conducted habitat mapping using geographic information systems, breeding bird surveys, marsh bird surveys, aerial waterfowl surveys during migration and winter, small mammal surveys,

Wilna grassland with flowers

USFWS

David VanGelder

Green tree frog

insect trapping, anuran (frogs) call counts, and vernal pool investigations. The refuge enrolled seven fields totaling 230 acres in a regional research study looking at different management techniques to benefit grassland-nesting birds. We have studied three different techniques for taking a census of wintering grassland songbirds.

Beginning in 2001, the refuge has taken a leadership role in controlling invasive stands of *Phragmites australis* (common reed) on both public and private lands along the entire tidal portion of the Rappahannock River. Using grants and matching private funds, we have been able to treat 120 different stands of *Phragmites* totaling over 250 acres. More than 100 private landowners have enrolled in the control program, which we expect to continue as long as funds are available.

History

The Atlantic Flyway Council first proposed establishing a national wildlife refuge on the Rappahannock River in the early 1960s. However, it wasn't until the early 1990s that individuals, conservation organizations, and government agencies united to develop a plan for conserving the natural resources of the river for future generations. Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge was formally proposed in 1994, and the first tract was acquired in 1996.

Throughout its history, the Rappahannock River has nurtured native Americans, the earliest colonists, and Revolutionary War heroes. Today the river continues to sustain many of their direct descendants. Archeological and historic sites are abundant on both sides of the river. The 18th century Bristol Iron Works was located adjacent to the refuge's Toby's Point

Rappahannock River Valley
National Wildlife Refuge
Refuge Property
Easement
Highway
Road
Miles
0 0.45 0.9 1.8 2.7 3.6 4.5
0 1 2 4 6 8 10
Kilometers
N
Rappahannock River Valley NWR
667
301
624
202
3
360
619
17
Kings Highway
James Monroe Highway
Wicomico River
Saint Clements Bay
Breton Bay
Potomac River
Nomini Creek
Rappahannock River
Styer/Bishop Units
Port Royal
Port Royal Unit
Toby's Point Unit
Mothershead Unit
Peter Unit
Wilna/Wright Units
Menokin Easement
Oldhams Road
Tayloe Unit
Franklin Unit
Warsaw
Wellford Unit
Wellford Easement
Hutchinson Unit
Tappahannock
Island Farm Unit
Thomas Unit
Laurel Grove Unit

USFWS

Wilna pond levee

Unit, while the Leedstown Resolves, a 1766 protest against the Stamp Act, was signed near the refuge's Mothershead Unit. Old pilings can still be seen from the days when steamboats made regular stops to pick up produce and passengers for transport to the Port of Baltimore.

Agriculture and forestry remain the predominant land uses and sources for the area's economy, as they have for centuries. Some still make their living on the river, crabbing and fishing, while wildlife recreation and tourism are becoming increasingly important economic engines for the region. As the refuge grows, it will make increasing contributions to the local culture and economy as we work with partners to conserve natural resources, improve water quality, and provide compatible, wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

Gray fox

John Fox

Headquarters Wilna House

USFWS

Visitor Services

While wildlife and habitat conservation come first on refuges, excellent wildlife observation, photography, fishing, environmental education, interpretation, and hunting opportunities can be enjoyed on several units of the refuge.

The refuge is honored to host three sites on the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail, the Wilna Unit (CNN20), Tayloe Unit (CNN19), and Port Royal Unit (CFB06). The Wilna Unit, located in Richmond County, is open to the public for visitation, seven days a week, sunrise to sunset. Also the location of the refuge headquarters, this site offers accessible fishing, excellent wildlife observation opportunities, and accessible nature trails.

Other refuge units are open for visitation on a reservation basis. Visit or contact the refuge headquarters for more information.

Volunteering
Volunteers and refuge friends play a critical role on national wildlife refuges and this refuge is no exception. Opportunities exist year-round for people to lend a helping hand in numerous areas of refuge management.

For more information on volunteering or the friends group, contact the refuge headquarters.

Guidelines
Help preserve the Rappahannock River and make your visit safe and enjoyable by following these guidelines.

Enjoy wildlife observation, photography, and hiking throughout the year on marked trails at the Wilna Unit and by reservation at other units.

Fishing

Permitted year-round on Wilna Pond. (Seasonal restrictions may be in place; consult Refuge Manager for details.) All Virginia boating laws and fishing regulations apply. Largemouth bass are catch-and-release only. Use of lead sinkers or live minnows as bait is prohibited. In the interest of angler safety, fishing is not permitted from the aluminum catwalk.

Environmental Education

Encouraged year-round at the Wilna Unit by reservation. Contact the refuge headquarters for details about educator-led activities, available supplies, and scheduling visits.

Hunting

Free roam/still hunting is available for archery and firearm hunters on designated refuge units. Contact the refuge headquarters for more information and to apply for a permit.

Firearms and other weapons

Prohibited on the refuge except during designated hunts.

Environmental Education Program

Diane Wheeler

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Newly hatched wood ducks

Pets	Must be kept on a leash.
Plants, Animals, and Artifacts	Disturbing or collecting is prohibited.
Swimming, Camping, or Fires	Prohibited on the refuge.

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Northern watersnake

Stephanie Day

Getting There

From Tappahannock, Virginia, take US-360 E (across the Rappahannock River, toward Warsaw). Follow US-360 E for 4.1 miles, then turn LEFT onto Route 624/Newland Rd. Follow Newland Rd. for 4.2 miles, then turn LEFT onto Strangeway/ Route 636. Follow Strangeway for 1/4 mile, and then turn RIGHT onto Sandy Lane/Route 640. Follow Sandy Lane for 1.1 miles, and then turn LEFT into Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

Below: White-spotted Slimy salamander

David VanGelder