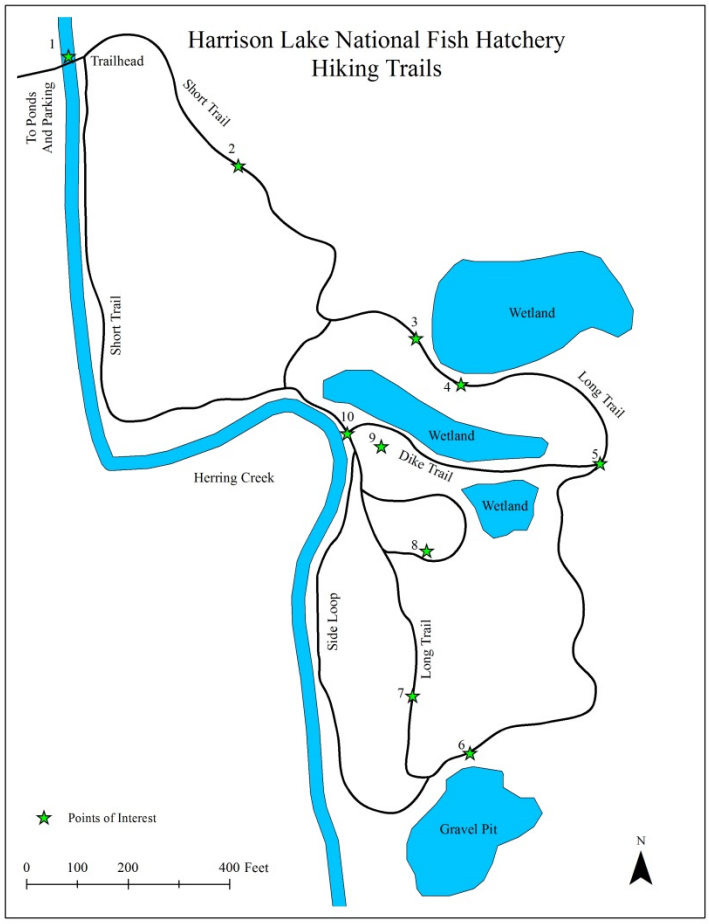
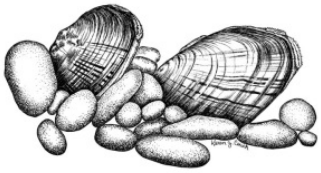
Welcome to Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery

Please stay on the marked trail and leave the trail better than you found it (leave no trace).

Insect repellent and protective clothing are suggested during warm weather due to the presence of biting insects and poison ivy.



As you use the trail, be aware that the clean stream and its adjacent thick forest provide habitat for a variety of animals. Common mammals here include whitetail deer, gray squirrel, beaver, raccoon, opossum, beaver, river otter, mink, muskrat, striped skunk and gray fox. A variety of songbirds use this habitat, as well as larger species such as wild turkey, kingfisher, wood duck, and great blue heron. The stream is home to a variety of fish, frogs, snakes, and turtles, and even freshwater mussels.



In addition to American shad, this hatchery produces and releases freshwater mussels for conservation. Freshwater mussels are an important resource for streams because they filter the water just like oysters in the Chesapeake Bay. They have declined in recent years and only live in healthy streams.

Look carefully and you may find animal tracks in the loose soil, a turkey feather, mussel shells or maybe a snake skin. The following points of interest can be found at corresponding numbered wooden posts along the trail:

1. Herring Creek

The creek's namesake is river herring which historically used this stream in great numbers to reproduce. In the 1920's so many were being harvested in coastal rivers it was Virginia's number 1 seafood resource. Now, with declines this species is only a fraction as abundant. The river herring is an anadromous fish with a life cycle like salmon. The adults live in the ocean and return in high numbers to their natal stream in April to lay their eggs. Their offspring will hatch and use this stream as a nursery before swimming to the ocean in the fall of the year.

2. Loblolly Pine

These immense loblolly pine trees and the surrounding mature hardwood trees are natural air conditioners. The shade created by the forest canopy keeps the forest floor and the adjacent stream several degrees cooler on hot days, benefiting the local animals.

3. Wetlands Overlook

These wetlands were created when gravel was dug out of these areas to construct Route 5 in the early 20th century. The wet areas and ponds are home to many insects, which provide food for small fish, frogs, and snakes. Larger animals like herons, raccoons, and otters, visit this area and eat the fish, frogs, and snakes, creating a small food chain within these wetlands.

4. Sawdust pile

This sawdust pile is all that remains of a commercial logging operation and sawmill that was once located here. Logging is still an important industry in Charles City County.

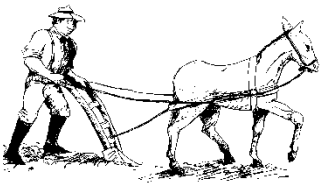
5. Pre-Civil War Dike

This dike was constructed prior to the Civil War. Its purpose remains unclear, but it may have been built to carry a narrow-gauge railroad across Herring Creek, or to create a millpond for grinding grain. The eastern end of the dike was removed in the early 19th century to use in the construction of Route 5. While the construction of dams can benefit humans by diverting water and controlling flooding, they can result in adverse impacts to native fish and wildlife, such as the loss of spawning habitat for the river herring that use this stream. To reduce the impact to spawning fish, the dam for Harrison Lake, located further upstream, includes a fishway (fish ladder) to allow migrating fish to ascend the dam and move upstream.

6. Gravel pit overlook

This wet depression is an artifact of additional gravel mining for the construction of Route 5. During wet times of the year, this wetland can be attractive habitat for the colorful wood duck.

7. Overgrown cornfield



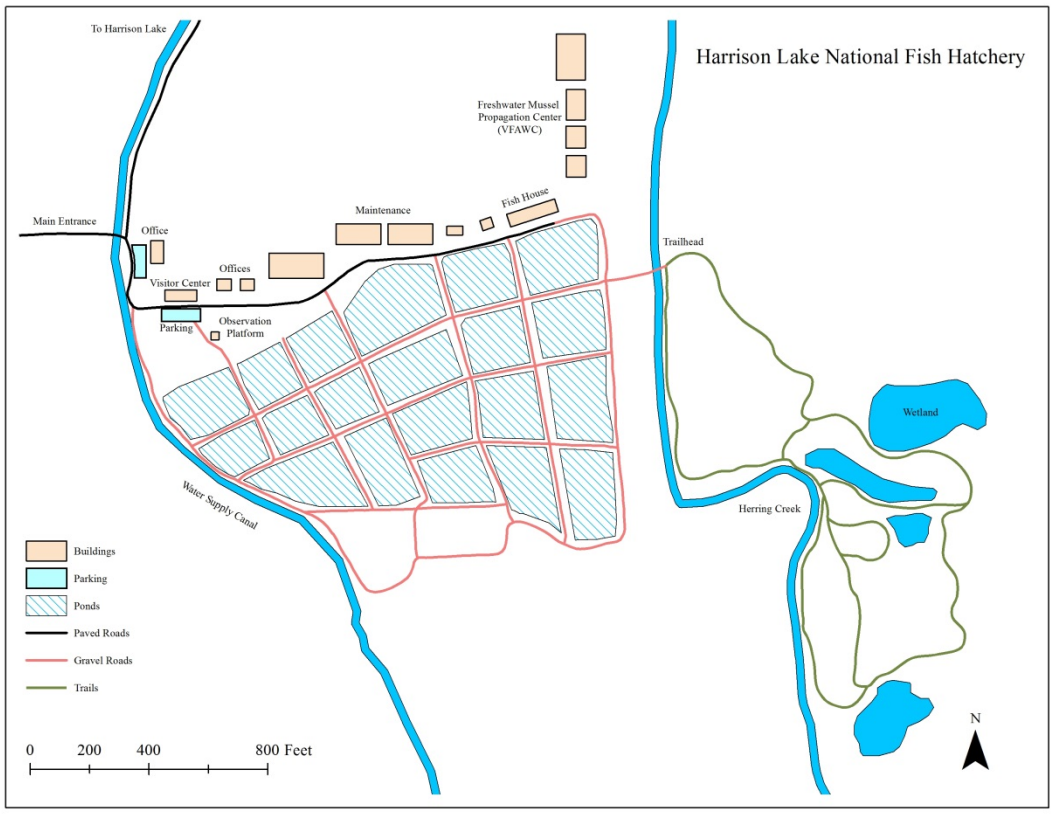
If you look closely at the ground, you can see the remains of straight plow furrows that date back to when this area was once a cornfield. After the field was abandoned, the site was colonized by trees and has now developed into a mature forest.

8. Still

This is the site of an old moonshine still that was destroyed in 1965. You may be able to see some old rusting barrel bands. Bootlegging was a common illegal industry in Charles City County and the south in previous centuries.

9. Civil War Graves

In the summer of 1862, Union forces under General McClellan were driven away from the edge of Richmond and encamped in this area for months. The depressions here are the temporary grave sites of some of the Union soldiers that died. After the war, their bodies were removed and interred in National Cemeteries.

10. Erosion

At this site, you can see where the dike has been worn away by Herring Creek. During flood events, the force of the water has cut away at the dike and deposited the soil materials downstream, causing sedimentation issues and reducing the amount of usable land.