

# Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge

## *Developing a Conservation Plan for the Future*

USFWS/Donna Dewhurst



*Bald Eagle in flight*

### Refuge Information

Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge (Mason Neck) is one of three refuges comprising the Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex (refuge complex), located in Prince William and Fairfax counties, Virginia with headquarters in Woodbridge, Virginia. The other two refuges are Occoquan Bay NWR, established in 1972 to protect migratory birds, and Featherstone NWR, established in 1970, to protect the wetlands along the western shoreline of Occoquan Bay.

On August 14, 2006, the refuge name was officially changed to “Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck” to honor the significant contributions to conservation by Elizabeth Hartwell. Ms. Hartwell, a resident of Mason Neck and a conservation activist, spearheaded the movement to protect habitat on the Mason Neck peninsula.

The 2,277-acre Mason Neck NWR lies in Fairfax County, Virginia. It was established in 1969 and was the first national wildlife refuge specifically set aside to protect the Federal-listed bald eagle. Its other purposes are to protect natural resources, conserve fish and wildlife, and provide for incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreational development.

Refuge habitats include oak-hickory forest, freshwater marsh, and 4.4 miles of Potomac River shoreline. Bald eagles use the mature forests for shelter and nesting sites and the marshes, bays, and river for foraging and hunting. Seven bald eagle nests occur on or adjacent to the refuge, along with an eagle roost and a wintering population of 50-60 birds. The refuge was listed by USA Today as one of the top ten sites in the country for viewing bald eagles.

Other significant resources on the refuge include the largest freshwater marsh in Northern Virginia, and one of the largest great blue heron rookeries in Virginia (over 1,400 nests). Over 200 species of birds, 31 species of mammals, and 44 species of reptiles and amphibians occur on the refuge. The refuge is also designated as part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed “Wetland of International Importance” under the RAMSAR Convention.

We estimate that 16,137 refuge visitors annually engage in hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and/or interpretation. Two hiking trails provide an outstanding opportunity to watch and photograph wildlife. Special events, environmental education, interpretive programs, self-guided interpretive trails, and observation platforms enhance visitor experiences.

### A Conservation Plan for the Future

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, we, our) has begun developing a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP), that includes both Featherstone and Mason Neck Refuges. The CCP will establish management goals and objectives for each refuge’s wildlife management, habitat protection, and public use programs for the next 15 years.

The CCP process provides an opportunity for State agencies, conservation and local organizations, communities, and concerned citizens to participate in the development of this far-reaching plan. As the first step in the planning process, we plan to host two open houses near the refuges (see page 2 for details). Participants will have the opportunity at these meetings to learn about existing refuge programs, help our planning team identify key issues, share ideas and concerns, and make recommendations on how the refuge should be managed in the future.



*Mason Neck NWR*

USFWS/Lelaina Marin

The March 27th open house will focus on Featherstone Refuge; the March 28th open house will focus on Mason Neck Refuge. However, we will be prepared to discuss both refuges at either open house date.

Information from the open houses and other public involvement opportunities will guide the planning team as it develops proposed management alternatives. These alternatives will be included in a draft CCP, which we expect to release for public review in April 2008.

Please access our Northeast planning website, [http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/MasonNeck\\_Featherstone/ccphome.html](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/MasonNeck_Featherstone/ccphome.html), for additional information on our planning process.

**Vision and Goals for the Refuge**

Our planning team has developed the following draft vision statement and goals for the refuge. We would appreciate your comments.

**Vision Statement**

*Part of the Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex, the Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge, founded to protect the bald eagle, exemplifies the significant contributions and successes of conservationists. We will continue to protect or enhance refuge habitats for bald eagles, migratory birds, and native species of wildlife and plants. In cooperation with other agencies in the area, we will continue to resolve resource issues on the Mason Neck peninsula and provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation and education.*

**Refuge Goals**

**Goal 1.** Maintain, restore, and enhance forest and wetland habitats to support a diversity of plants and animals with priority given to bald eagles and other Federal trust resources.

**Goal 2.** Provide quality, compatible wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities with particular emphasis on interpretation and wildlife observation.

**Goal 3.** Promote awareness, understanding and support of the values of the refuge and the resources of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.



**Public Open Houses**

*Date:* March 27, 2007, 6:00 - 8:30 pm  
Presentation - 6:30 - 7:00 pm

*Location:*  
Potomac Community Library  
2201 Opitz Boulevard  
Woodbridge, VA 22191

*Focus on Featherstone Refuge*

*Date:* March 28, 2007, 6:00 - 8:30 pm  
Presentation - 6:30 - 7:00 pm

*Location:*  
Gunston Elementary School  
10100 Gunston Rd.  
Lorton, VA 22079

*Focus on Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck Refuge*

***These locations are fully accessible.***

**For more information on the refuge:**

Potomac River NWR Complex  
Greg Weiler, Refuge Manager  
14344 Jefferson Davis Highway  
Woodbridge, VA 22191  
Phone: 703-490-4979  
Email: [fw5rw\\_msnnr@fws.gov](mailto:fw5rw_msnnr@fws.gov)  
Website: <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/profiles/index.cfm?id=51612>

**For more information on the CCP process or to submit comments:**

Nancy McGarigal, Refuge Planner  
Northeast Regional Office  
300 Westgate Center Drive  
Hadley, MA, 01035  
Phone: 413-253-8562  
Fax: 413-253-8468  
Email: [northeastplanning@fws.gov](mailto:northeastplanning@fws.gov)  
Website: <http://www.fws.gov/northeastplanning>

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
<http://www.fws.gov>  
**March 2007**



Federal Relay Service for the deaf or hard-of-hearing: 1 800/877 8339