U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck

National Wildlife Refuge

Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck, Occoquan Bay, and Featherstone National Wildlife Refuges are all managed under the Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

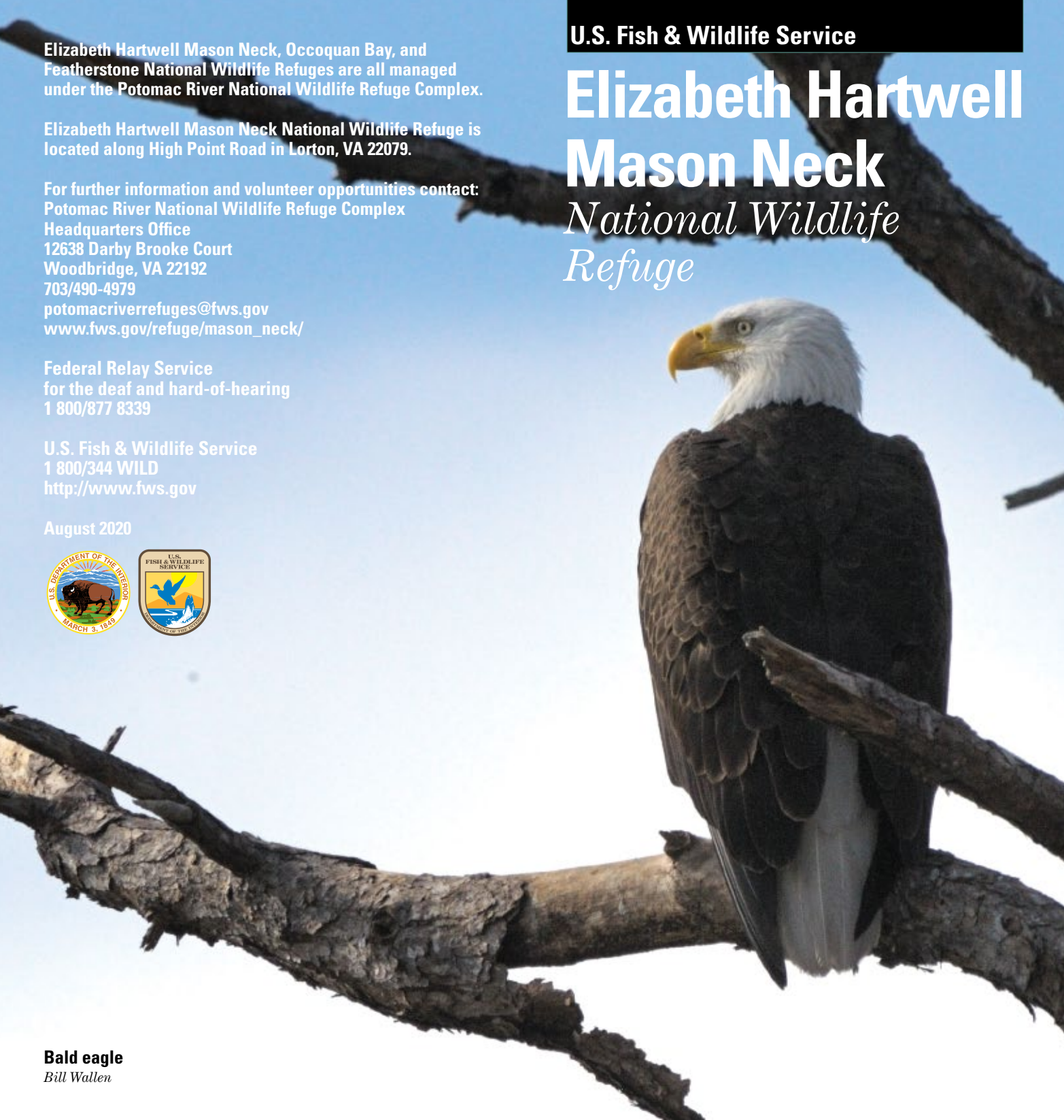
Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge is located along High Point Road in Lorton, VA 22079.

For further information and volunteer opportunities contact:
Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Headquarters Office
12638 Darby Brooke Court
Woodbridge, VA 22192
703/490-4979
potomacriverrefuges@fws.gov
www.fws.gov/refuge/mason_neck/

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

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD
http://www.fws.gov

August 2020



Bald eagle
Bill Wallen

Eighteen miles south of Washington D.C., on the banks of the Potomac River, lies a peninsula known as Mason Neck. Here the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service created the first national wildlife refuge established specifically for the protection of our nation's symbol, the bald eagle. Once on the brink of extinction, the bald eagle enjoys the safety of the refuge's forests and shoreline for nesting and foraging along the upper portions of the Potomac River and its tributaries.

Welcome

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

Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge is adjacent to a rapidly growing metropolitan area where habitat is constantly altered. The 2,227 acre refuge provides upland forest and freshwater marsh habitat to hundreds of species of birds, mammals, and other wildlife. Walking along any of our three trails and stopping at our two observation platforms you may see bald eagle, tundra swan, white-tailed deer, red fox, and wood duck.

The primary focus of the refuge is to maintain a healthy, mature mixed-hardwood forest for breeding and wintering populations of bald eagles. Though no longer considered endangered, the bald eagle continues to be protected under federal law and remains a priority to the refuge. Protecting mature forest habitat for bald eagles benefits many other species including Northern flicker, barred owl, Eastern box turtle, and tree-roosting bats.

The extensive wetlands and marshes throughout the refuge allow waterbird species to thrive as well. Great Marsh, is home to one of Virginia's largest breeding great blue heron colonies, and serves as a rest stop for migrating ducks, raptors, and songbirds on their long journey. Many visitors look forward to the arrival of wintering waterfowl, geese, and swans during the colder months.

USFWS

Black duck banding

Retrieved from the Library of Congress

Pre-Written Record – The peninsula is home to the Dogue Indian village of Tauxenent.

1608- Captain John Smith arrives in the Potomac and documents the abundance of game and fish.

1754 – George Mason builds Gunston Hall, eventually comes to own all of Mason Neck. Land is farmed and later sold.

Courtesy of the Hartwell family

Elizabeth Hartwell

1800s-early 1900s – Logging of mature hardwoods causes decline in eagle population.

1960s – Forest growth returns, but planned neighborhood and highway development on Mason Neck poses a new threat.

1965 – Elizabeth Hartwell organizes the Conservation Committee for Mason Neck, partnering with residents and local government to preserve “the Neck”.

1969 – Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge is established for the protection of bald eagles.

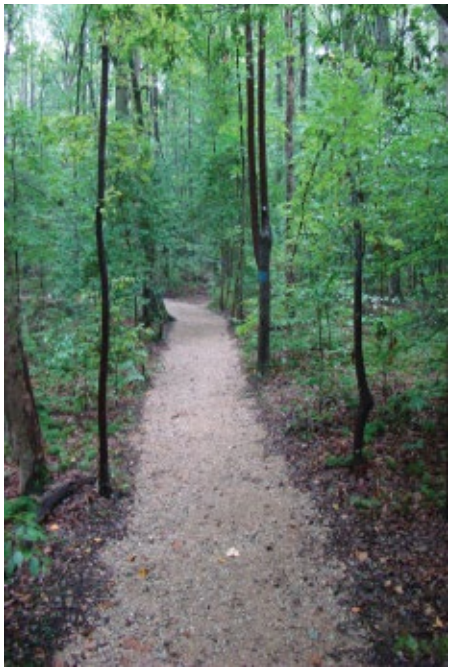
2006 – Congress approves the name change to Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge

Visitor Opportunities

High Point Trail — The 3 mile ADA compliant paved trail parallels High Point Road and connects the refuge with Mason Neck State Park managed trails and facilities. This trail is open to hiking, and biking.

Joseph V. Gartlan, Jr. Great Marsh Trail — This 0.75 mile paved trail is ADA compliant and follows a forested peninsula, ending at an observation platform overlooking the Great Marsh. The trail honors Joseph V. Gartlan, Jr. who served in the Virginia State Senate for 28 years as an environmental protector and champion for disability rights. The trail is open to foot traffic only.

Woodmarsh Trail — The 3 mile trail loops through a hardwood forest, over small streams, and along a marsh. The unpaved trail features an observation platform with a telescope overlooking the marsh habitat. The trail is open to foot traffic only.



USFWS

Wood Marsh Trail

Great Marsh
Bill Wallen/USFWS

Fort Belvoir
Military Reservation
Accotink Bay
Pohick Cove
Pohick Bay
Regional Park
Meadwood
Special
Recreation
Management
Area
Old Colchester Road
Belmont Blvd.
1
242
Gunston Cove
Gunston Hall
Gunston Road
600
Kanes Creek
Belmont Bay
High Point Road
Mason Neck
State Park
Great
Marsh
Elizabeth Hartwell
Mason Neck
N.W.R.
Potomac River
Occoquan
Bay
WASHINGTON
VIRGINIA
MARYLAND
MASON
NECK
66
495
95
5
301
Legend
0
5
10
15
20
Scale in Miles
N
0
2000
4000
6000
8000
Feet
0
600
1200
1800
2400
Meters
Legend
Environmental Ed. Pavillion
(Permit Only)
Environmental Ed. Trail
(Permit Only)
Great Marsh Trail
Woodmarsh Trail
High Point Trail
Refuge Boundary
Acess by Permit Only
Parking Lot
Observation Platform

Bill Wallen

Northern flicker

Hunting

The refuge uses hunting as a tool to manage white-tailed deer populations at a healthy level compatible with planned habitat goals and objectives. Deer hunting is available by permit during designated days in November and December. Refuge trails are closed during hunt days.

Hours of Operation

Refuge trails and parking lots are open year-round, from 7am-5pm October 1-March 31 and 7am-7pm from April 1-September 30. The refuge is closed on hunt days in November and December. For more information contact refuge headquarters or visit the website.

Permits for Groups and Special Use

Groups of 10 or more may use the refuge for education, research, or other activities, so long as the intended use or activity is wildlife-dependent and the group first obtains a permit. Permit applications must be mailed to the Potomac River National Wildlife Refuge Complex Headquarters Office at least three weeks in advance. Visit the following site for information on permit applications: www.fws.gov/refuge/Mason_Neck/visit/permits.html

USFWS

Bullfrog

Regulations

Help staff ensure that wildlife has a place to grow and survive for future generations by respecting refuge rules and obeying posted signs.

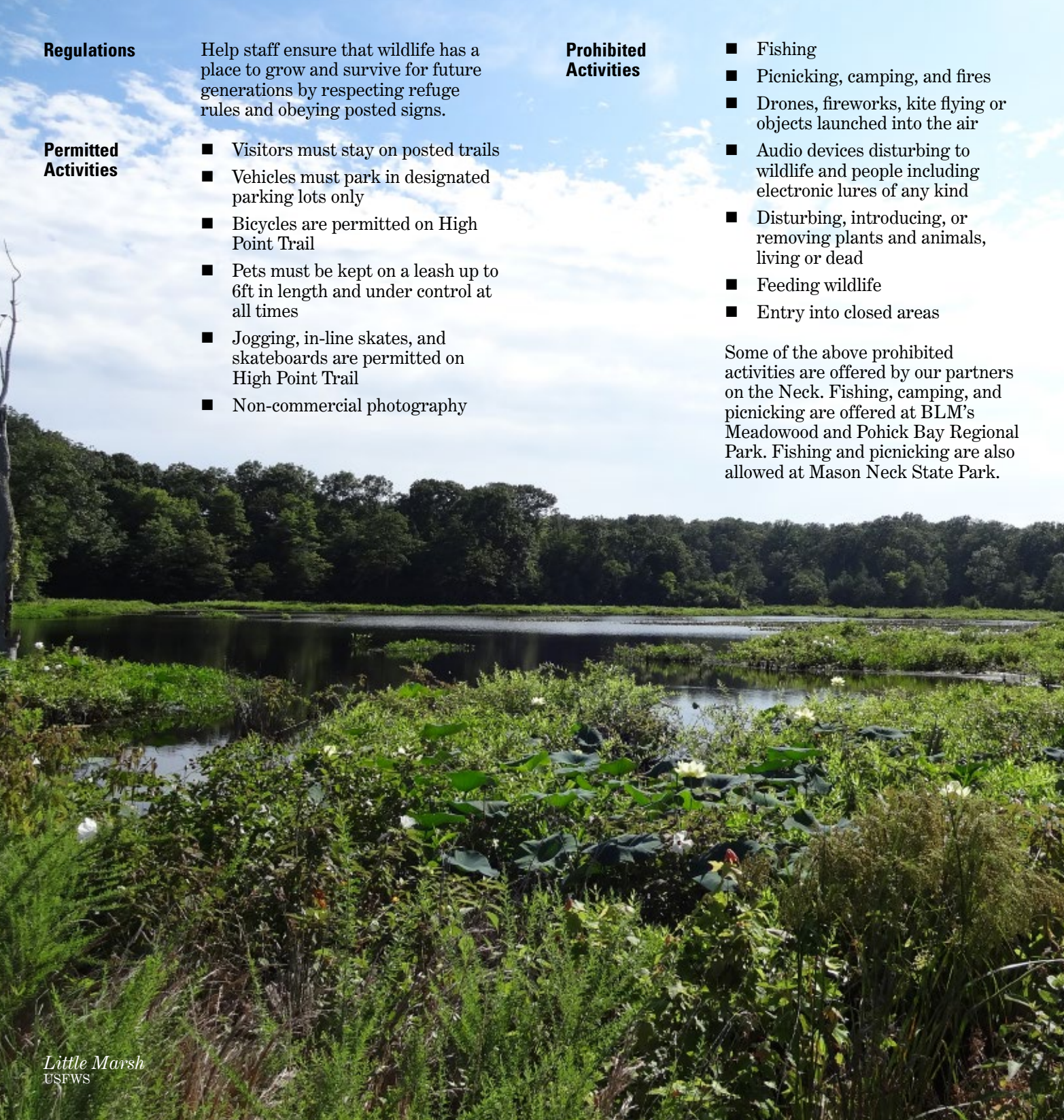
Permitted Activities

- Visitors must stay on posted trails
- Vehicles must park in designated parking lots only
- Bicycles are permitted on High Point Trail
- Pets must be kept on a leash up to 6ft in length and under control at all times
- Jogging, in-line skates, and skateboards are permitted on High Point Trail
- Non-commercial photography

Prohibited Activities

- Fishing
- Picnicking, camping, and fires
- Drones, fireworks, kite flying or objects launched into the air
- Audio devices disturbing to wildlife and people including electronic lures of any kind
- Disturbing, introducing, or removing plants and animals, living or dead
- Feeding wildlife
- Entry into closed areas

Some of the above prohibited activities are offered by our partners on the Neck. Fishing, camping, and picnicking are offered at BLM's Meadowood and Pohick Bay Regional Park. Fishing and picnicking are also allowed at Mason Neck State Park.



Little Marsh
USFWS

Bill Wallen/USFWS

Woodmarsh Platform

Bill Whallen/USFWS

Great Marsh Trail Platform