

Hughlett Point Natural Area Preserve

204 acres - Northumberland County, Virginia

The Site: Located on Virginia's Northern Neck, Hughlett Point Natural Area Preserve is situated on a small peninsula on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay. The preserve contains tidal and non-tidal wetlands, an exemplary undeveloped beach and low dunes, and upland forest communities. It is home to a federally protected insect species and contains important habitats for waterfowl, songbirds and birds of prey. The property was acquired with funds from the Virginia Parks and Natural Areas Bond and from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Natural History: Like much of the landscape around the Chesapeake Bay, Hughlett Point Natural Area Preserve is relatively low and flat. The high ground, which nowhere is more than 10 feet above sea level, is mostly forested with a mix of loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) and various hardwoods. A small portion of the high ground is currently an old field in an early stage of succession, dominated by weeds, grasses and young pines.

About half the preserve consists of marsh communities that are periodically flooded by high tides. In some cases these communities have distinct boundaries that are determined by small differences in the frequency and duration of inundation. The inland marsh fringes are marked by a shrub zone dominated by wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*). On slightly lower areas grow bands of cattail (*Typha angustifolia*) and eastern rose mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*). Marshes contain scattered patches of saltmeadow hay (*Spartina patens*), Olney's bulrush (*Schoenoplectus americanus*) and black needlerush (*Juncus roemerianus*). Scattered low depressions, called salt ponds, are occupied by widgeon grass (*Ruppia maritima*). The lower marsh margins are dominated by smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*).

Most of Hughlett Point's shoreline consists of a sandy beach that provides habitat for the threatened northeastern beach tiger beetle (*Cicindela dorsalis dorsalis*). This rare, agile, little insect (about 2/3 of an inch long) has a white to cream-colored back with dark markings and long dark legs. To exist, these animals require undisturbed beach habitat where they spend their entire 2-year life cycle. Females lay their eggs in the sand and the larvae live in burrows 4 to 10 inches deep from which they capture small prey. Adult tiger beetles are also predatory. They can sometimes be seen skittering or making short flights just beyond the stride of a person walking along the beach.

Other animals that inhabit the preserve include many common eastern Virginia mammals, such as river otters (*Lontra canadensis*) and gray foxes (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) and a great variety of birds. Several species of herons, egrets, rails and shorebirds feed in marshes and along the shoreline. Waterfowl,

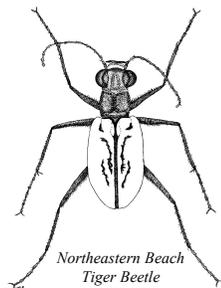
including tundra swans (*Cygnus columbianus*) and American black ducks (*Anas rubripes*), flock to the area in winter. Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and ospreys (*Pandion haliaeetus*) hunt over nearby waters and perch in trees near the shoreline. Forest communities at Hughlett Point also are important nesting areas for songbirds and provide cover and food for spring and fall migrants. The marshes are a vital nursery for many of the bay's fishes and crustaceans.

Resource Management: Management activities at the preserve focus on monitoring the tiger beetle population, tracking changes in shoreline morphology, determining the composition of natural communities, holding invasive exotic plants in check and monitoring visitor use patterns. The site provides public access for education, nature study and passive recreation.

Public Access: A small parking area, walking trails, observation platforms and interpretive signs provide visitors opportunities to explore and learn about this preserve.

Compatible Uses: Low-impact activities, such as bird watching, hiking and nature photography, are available along a trail system that includes a boardwalk and two observation platforms. Off-road vehicles, bicycles, horseback riding, and unrestrained pets would seriously damage the preserve's fragile resources and are not permitted. Fishing and crabbing are allowed, but visitors may not use the beach for swimming and sunbathing because of the high potential for harming the population of protected tiger beetles.

Location: The preserve can be reached from Kilmarnock, Va., by traveling north on US Route 200 about 4 miles to Route 606. Turn right (east) onto Route 606 and go about 2 miles to Route 605. Turn right (south) on Route 605 and go about 2 miles to the preserve parking area on the left.



Natural Heritage Resources

Animals

- Northeastern beach tiger beetle (*Cicindela dorsalis dorsalis*) G4T2/S2
- Tidewater amphipod (*Stygobromus indentatus*) G2G3/S2

For more information please contact:

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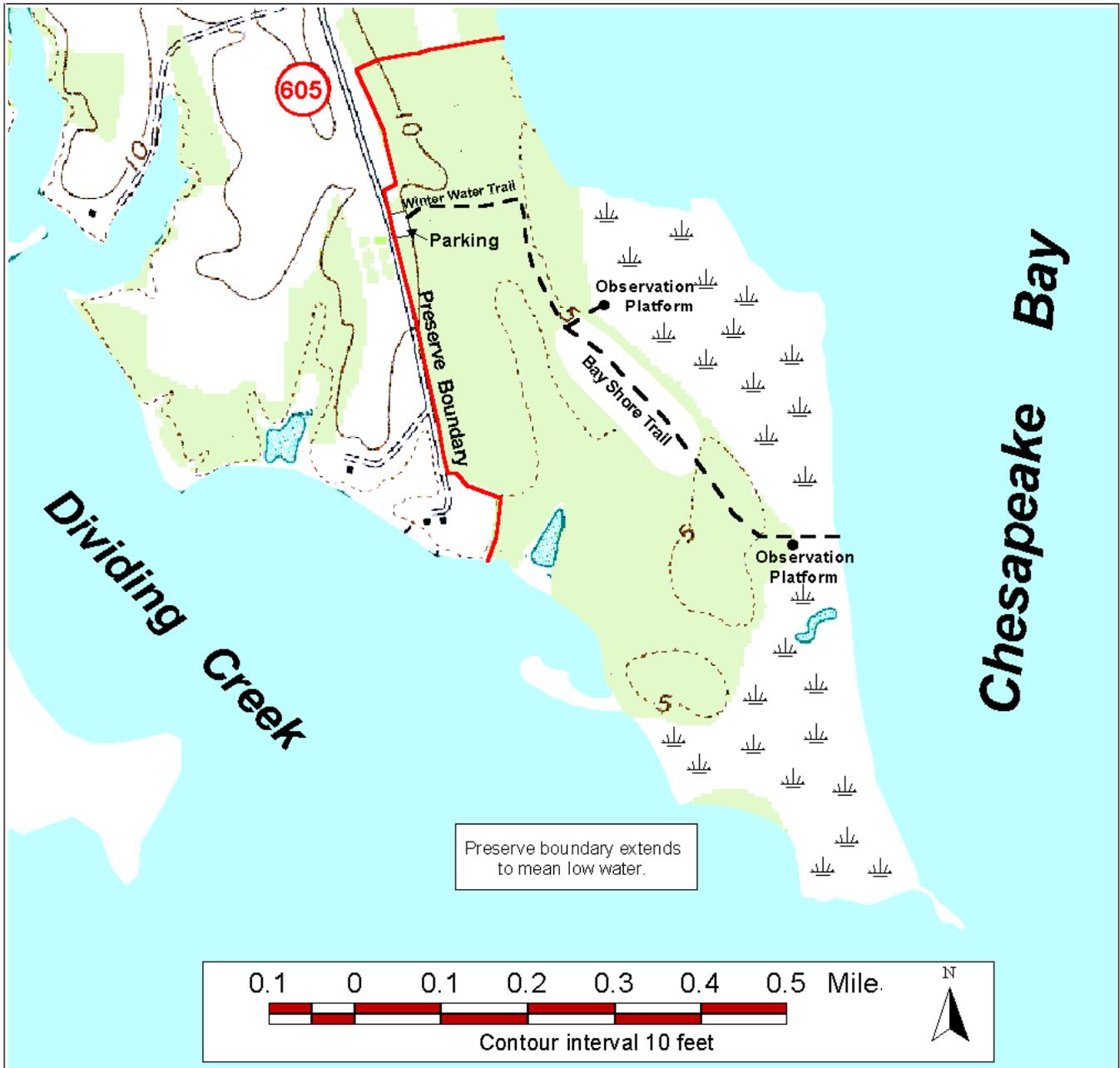
Mark R. Warner, Governor

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