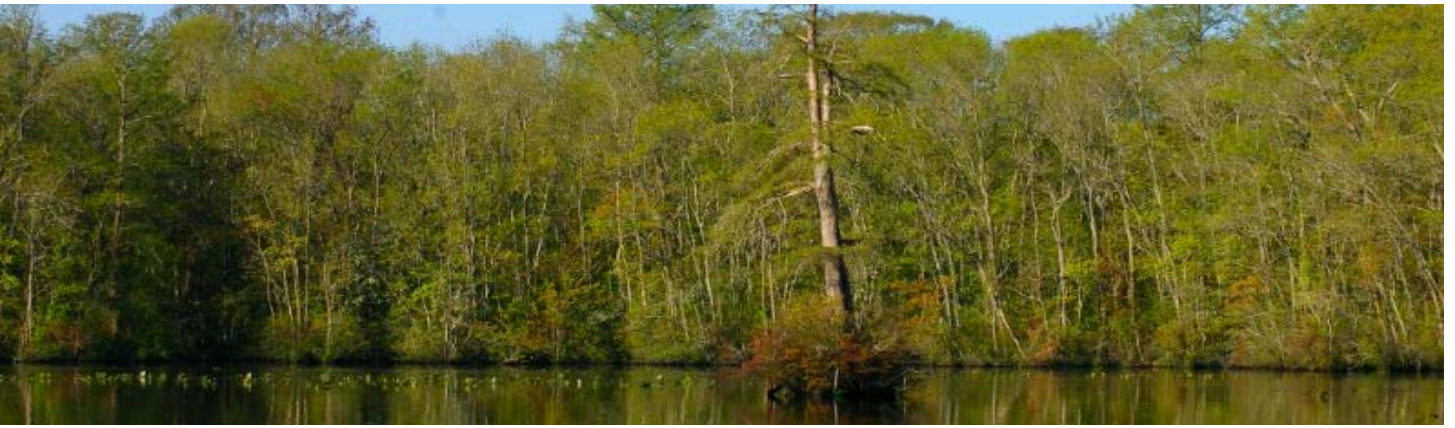


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# **POCOMOKE STATE FOREST** **WILDLANDS**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Established by the Maryland Wildlands Act of 1971, Wildlands are legally protected lands that have numerous benefits for natural resources and the public. As a counterpart to the federal wilderness areas, Wildlands have numerous restrictions and allowances that facilitate natural resource preservation, while simultaneously having opportunities for public uses such as hiking, hunting, and research.

The 5,208-acre Pocomoke River and Cypress Swamp Wildlands were designated for their unique cypress swamp ecosystem, natural heritage, and endangered species populations with the majority of the acreage in 100-year-old bald cypress and bottomland hardwoods. Under the Maryland Wildlands Preservation System, these forests will be preserved in perpetuity.

Public access to the Wildlands is essential to the system, so discovering and creating access gateways into the Wildlands is a high priority for the Forest Service. For more information about Maryland's diverse Wildlands system, click [here](#).

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## INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to provide information about the Wildlands located within Pocomoke State Forest, the current landscape and ecological conditions of the Pocomoke State Forest Wildlands, and how the public can access these lands. The first section of this document contains a brief explanation of what the State Wildlands Preservation System is, the establishment and history of the Wildlands, and prohibited and allowed activities in Wildlands.

## MARYLAND'S WILDLANDS PRESERVATION SYSTEM

The Maryland Wildlands Preservation System is Maryland's counterpart to the federal Wilderness Preservation System, and consists of all those properties owned and managed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, which were designated as State Wildlands by the Maryland General Assembly.

### Definition

Wildlands are "limited areas of land or water which have retained their wilderness character, although not necessarily completely natural and undisturbed, or have rare or vanishing species of plant or animal life or similar features of interest worthy of preservation for use of present and future residents of the State. This may include unique ecological, geological, scenic, and contemplative recreational areas on State lands" ([Natural Resources Article, §5-1201](#)).

## Background

The **Maryland Wildlands Act** established the State Wildlands Preservation System in 1971. The first official Wildland in Maryland, Big Savage Mountain Wildland in Savage River State Forest, was officially designated by an act of the General Assembly in 1973. Since that time, there have been multiple additions to the Wildlands preservation system meeting the statutory definition, incorporating new acquisitions, and creating larger contiguous areas.

In 2022, the passage of [HB882](#) designated an addition of about 82 acres to the Pocomoke River Wildlands in exchange for the transfer of about 2 acres for the creation of a trail that will provide increased access into the Wildlands. As of 2022, thirty-eight separate Wildlands have been designated on over 65,720 acres of State Parks, State Wildlife Management Areas, Natural Environment Areas, and State Forests.

Wildlands in the State of Maryland are classified into three tiers:

**Type 1 Wildlands** are primitive areas which, by their size or location, are in effect untouched by urban civilization and can offer the experience of solitude and self-reliance.

**Type 2 Wildlands** are units of importance for all the natural sciences, especially ecology and with outstanding value for education, research, and appreciation of natural processes. All of the designated State Wildlands along the Pocomoke River are classified as Type 2.

**Type 3 Wildlands** are areas which are not of ecological or primitive stature, but which have

the appearance of being in an untouched state or are capable of attaining that appearance if held and managed for that purpose. Preservation in the natural condition is the prevailing purpose of these holdings where activities are limited to such uses as hiking, hunting, fishing, and nature study. There are currently no Type 3 Wildlands designated in Maryland.

## Permitted Activities

A person may **hunt, fish, or trap** within a Wildland provided it is otherwise permitted under State laws and regulations.

Unless otherwise prohibited under Department regulations, **recreational activities** in keeping with the Wildland character of the area are permitted and include, but are not limited to hiking, canoeing, kayaking, and snow skiing.

Per regulation, Wildlands shall be protected from fire, animals, insects, disease, and erosion in a manner which has minimal adverse effects on the Wildland ecosystem and is subject to conditions the Secretary considers desirable.

Activities related to the maintenance of existing public drainage are permitted provided that all local and State requirements for review, permit, and approval are followed.

## Prohibited Activities

Except when expressly permitted by regulation, there are multiple uses and activities prohibited in a Wildland:

**Permanent roads, structures, or installations** may not be located or constructed within a Wildland unless necessary to meet the minimum requirements for the purposes of the administration of the area.

Following a public notice and hearing, and in accordance with any regulations, the Governor may permit roads, permanent structures and/or installations within a Wildland if they will serve the interests of the State and the State's people.

The Governor may recommend to the General Assembly passage of a bill authorizing the establishment and maintenance of **reservoirs, water conservation works, power projects, transmission lines**, and other facilities needed in the public interest, including road construction and maintenance essential to development and use of specific areas.

An individual may not use the property or resources of a Wildland for **commercial gain**. An individual is prohibited to sell, hire, or lease an object of merchandise, or a vessel or vehicle designed or used for the transportation of passengers or property.

**Surface extraction of minerals** is prohibited except for the exercise of valid mineral rights in existence at the time of a Wildland designation.

**Recovery of subsurface minerals** may not be initiated from any aboveground location within a Wildland.

**Public use of motorboats** within a Wildland shall be eliminated over a 5-year period beginning on the date of designation by law as a Wildland.

**Prospecting for water resources** is prohibited unless authorized by the Governor.

**Non-native wildlife** may not be introduced into a Wildland.

## Restricted & Conditional Activities

Except when expressly permitted, the following uses and activities are restricted:

**Temporary roads** are prohibited, except as necessary to meet the minimum requirements for the purposes of the administration of an area, including (a) measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area; or (b) economic and safety threats to private property.

**Motorized equipment, motor vehicles, motor boats, landing of aircraft, and mechanical transport** are prohibited, except as necessary for the purposes of administration of an area, including (a) measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area; or (b) economic and safety threats to private property.

**Native wildlife** may not be removed from or released onto a Wildland unless the removal or release perpetuates or assists the recovery of a threatened or endangered species or a species in need of conservation; or assists in the restoration of an indigenous species eliminated or reduced by human activity.

**Forest management activities** are restricted or conditional based on various factors. Cutting of trees or shrubs is prohibited except when public

safety is threatened; there is an economic or safety threat to private property; there is a maintenance need associated with the continued provision of electric utility service; or there is a threat to unique species or unique natural communities which is most appropriately addressed through cutting or removal of trees or shrubs.

**Reforestation** is prohibited except when human influence has led to substantial deterioration of a Wildland; there is a reasonable expectation that natural regeneration will only occur after a prolonged length of time; or there is a significant erosion and sedimentation hazard to living aquatic resources that can be addressed by riparian forest buffers, critical area plantings, or soil bioengineering.

**Camping** within a Wildland is by permit only. Primitive camping is allowed in Wildland areas if it is otherwise permitted under Department policies and regulations. Campers are required to collect and remove trash from the area and camp at least 50 feet from any trail or water body. Open fires are prohibited.

**Nonstructural shore erosion control** is prohibited except when public safety is threatened or there is a significant hazard to living aquatic resources.

**Temporary structures, installations, or equipment** are prohibited, except when the Secretary determines that they contribute to the long-term research and maintenance of the Wildland or nearby natural resources. The placement of the structures, installations, or equipment shall be subject to the terms and conditions required by the Department.

The Department may elect to close or restrict areas of a Wildland to public access to protect the Wildland values of the area. This may include, but is not limited to, restrictions on party size, campsite location, or length of stay.

State personnel conducting official business may post appropriate warning signs on any unsafe structures within a Wildland or post appropriate information and regulation signs along the perimeter of a Wildland.

The sign content can include, but is not limited to, information that identifies significant natural or cultural features within the Wildland or is intended for public safety purposes, such as the identification of trail routes, distances, and areas of trail closures.

## **WILDLANDS AT POCOMOKE STATE FOREST**

Presently there are two designated Wildlands within Pocomoke State Forest: the 3,063 acre **Pocomoke River Wildland** and the 2,145 acre **Cypress Swamp Wildland**. The Wildland boundaries also overlap Natural Heritage Areas, which are described below.

The Pocomoke River Wildland has three distinct management areas:

**Area 1** extends from Pocomoke River Wildlife Management Area to the Shad Landing area of Pocomoke River State Park on the south/east side of the Pocomoke River, and further north/east including portions of the Evelyn Jones and Summerfield tracts of Pocomoke State Forest;

**Area 2** extends from the Milburn Landing area of Pocomoke River State Park to the former Nassawango Country Club on the north/west side of the Pocomoke River; and

**Area 3** includes the James Onley and Quillen tracts near Porter's Crossing north of Snow Hill.

The Wildlands contain a combination of cypress swamp and mixed upland pine/hardwood forest. The area also contains a portion of the Mattaponi Natural Heritage Area. The Cypress Swamp Wildland is located southwest of Pocomoke City north and east of Hickory Point Road, containing a substantial portion of the Hickory Point Natural Heritage Area.

Both the Pocomoke River and Cypress Swamp Wildlands contain portions of Pocomoke Swamp, which is an isolated northern extension of the Great Dismal Swamp ecosystem. Historical occurrences of State endangered species occur at both locations. Discounting the Wildland areas within Pocomoke River State Park and Pocomoke River Wildlife Management Area, Pocomoke State Forest has 4,326 acres of Wildlands within its boundaries.

## **Forest Types and Age Distribution**

For the purposes of this report, forest types and ages of stands in the Wildlands are only within Pocomoke State Forest. Future reports may include forest typing and age analysis for the areas of the Wildlands located in Pocomoke River Wildlife Management Area and Pocomoke River State Park.



## Forest and Cover Types

The following are brief descriptions of the different forest and cover types found in the Pocomoke State Forest Wildlands, and the approximate acreage of each within the Wildlands:

### *Bottomland Hardwoods & Cypress*

This forest type has a component of over 75% of various hardwood species, including oaks (*Quercus* spp.), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), sweet gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), and gum/tupelo (*Nyssa* spp.), as well as bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*). These stands tend to retain surface water seasonally or perennially. 3,182 acres (73.6%) of Pocomoke State Forest's Wildlands are bottomland hardwood or bottomland hardwood-cypress.

### *Mixed Pine-Hardwood and Hardwood-Pine*

Stands with a loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) component of 50-75% are classified as pine-hardwood, and a hardwood component of at least 50% are classified as hardwood-pine. Stands of this type have been naturally regenerated. Mixed pine-hardwood and hardwood-pine stands make up 481 acres (11.1%) of Pocomoke State Forest's Wildlands.

### *Loblolly Pine and Mixed Pine Stands*

These are pine forests or plantations of at least 75% loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), or naturally occurring stands of mixed pine forest, which can contain pond pine (*Pinus serotina*), shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*), and pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*). Other tree species mixed in this forest type are a variety of gums, maples, oaks, and

Virginia pine (*Pinus virginiana*). Historically, loblolly pine plantations were managed to maintain an annual flow of forest products, but intensive management of that type is not allowed in Wildlands. There is approximately 157 acres (3.6%) of Pocomoke State Forest's Wildlands in the loblolly pine and mixed pine forest type.

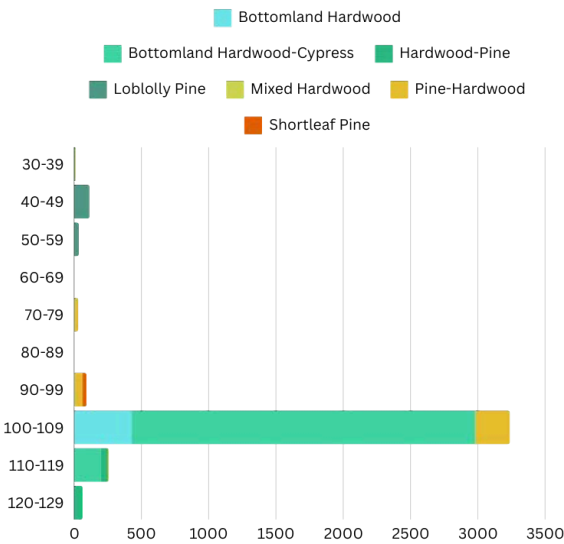
### *Shortleaf Pine*

This unique forest type occurs on dry, sandy dunes and ridges of the coastal plain. These landforms developed during the late Pleistocene when colder climate processes associated with Wisconsin glaciation influenced much of the region. At the time, prevailing northwest winds transported surficial sands across the Delmarva, deposited them on the east sides of the Nanticoke, Wicomico, and Pocomoke rivers, and formed "dune fields" on uplands in the central part of the peninsula. Today, these landforms support woodland vegetation of pine and oak, as well as a variety of rare and threatened plant and animal species.

This forest type has many associate species such as pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*), post oak (*Quercus stellata*), sand hickory (*Carya pallida*), and a variety of ericaceous shrubs. In general, the herbaceous layer is sparse and consists primarily of light-demanding species tolerant of dry, sandy conditions. Examples of these species include yellow false indigo (*Baptisia tinctoria*) and the State threatened sundial lupine (*Lupinus perennis*). 30 acres (0.7%) of Pocomoke State Forest's Wildland is made up of this forest type.

*Marsh (non-forested)*

475 acres (11.0%) of Pocomoke State Forest’s Wildland is designated as marsh, primarily located in the Cypress Swamp Wildland at Hickory Point. There may be individual or small groups of trees on hummocks or mounds, but the most common species are various grasses, reeds, and invasive phragmites.



**Table 1.** Age distribution of forested stands on Pocomoke State Forest’s Wildlands, by acreage.

**Age Distribution**

The majority (85%) of Pocomoke State Forest’s Wildlands are over 90 years old (3,656 acres) (Table 1). Forest types over 100 years old include bottomland hardwood, bottomland hardwood-cypress, pine-hardwood, and hardwood-pine.

About 163 acres (4%) of the Wildlands are in younger age groups, which are loblolly pine plantations recently incorporated into the

Wildlands. Pine species will continue to grow for at least another 50-100 years, hardwood species for another 100-300 years into old growth, while the relatively young bald cypress can be estimated to live for multiple centuries into the future.

The remaining 11% of the acreage is marsh that is categorized as “0” years old since most marsh plant species are perennial.

**Public Access**

Although the Wildlands on Pocomoke State Forest are in relatively isolated areas, there are many opportunities for access. By land, there are designated parking areas located in or adjacent to every Wildland. Established road and trail networks facilitate deeper access into the Wildlands. To access the remote swamp forests and marshlands, boat launches at these locations along the Pocomoke River can be used:

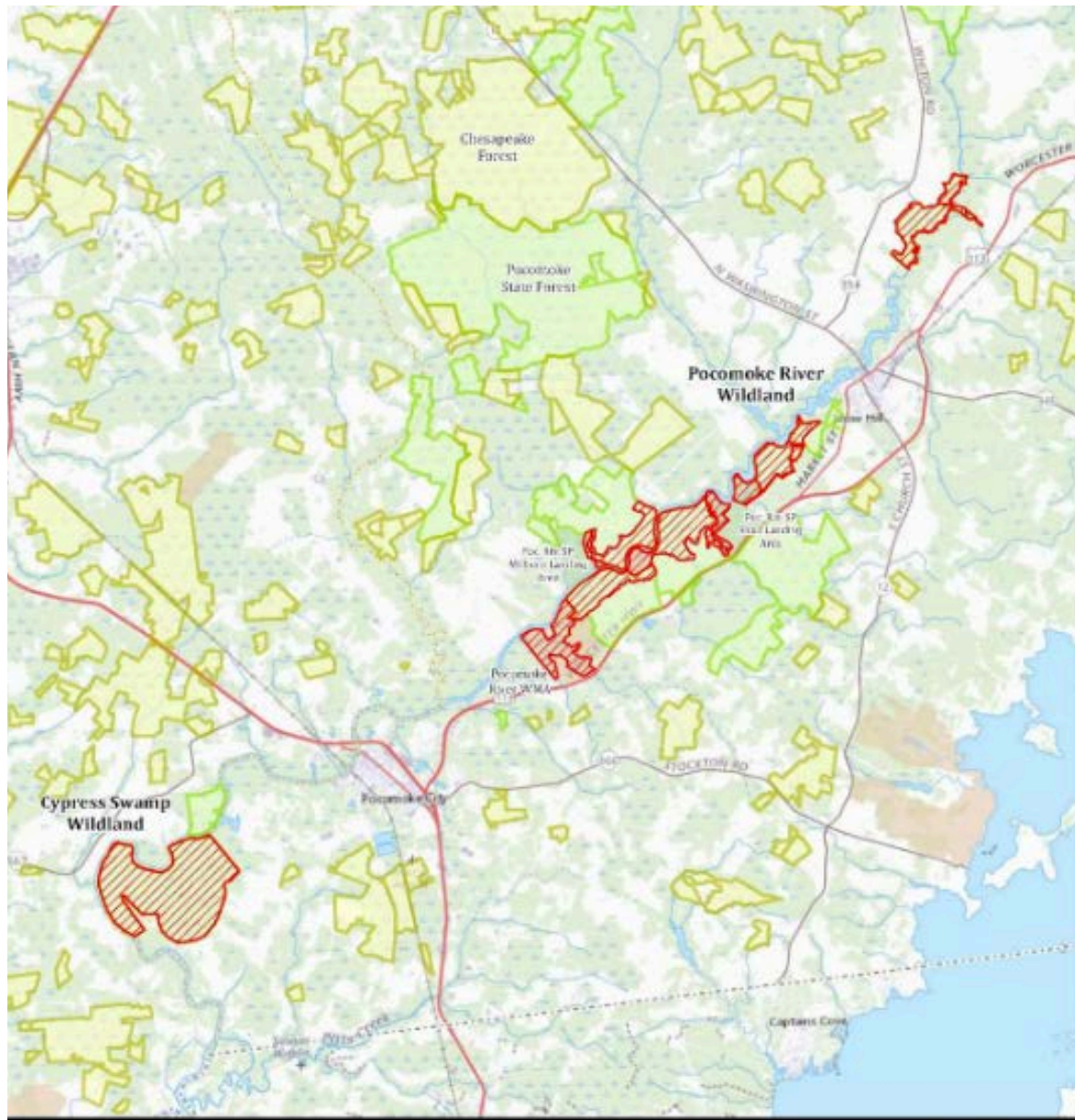
- Porter’s Crossing
- Snow Hill (Byrd Park)
- Nassawango Creek
- Pocomoke River State Park – Shad Landing
- Mattaponi Soft Launch (Blades Road)
- Pocomoke River State Park – Milburn Landing
- Rehoboth Boat Ramp (Somerset County)

**ADDITIONAL LINKS**

- [Complete List of Wildlands](#)
- [Wildlands - Interactive Map](#)

# FIGURE A

## Locations of the Cypress Swamp and Pocomoke River Wildlands



### Legend

- Pocomoke State Forest
- Chesapeake Forest
- Wildlands

Scale: 1 in. = 2.5 mi.  
Prepared by: ASC  
Date: 6/2022

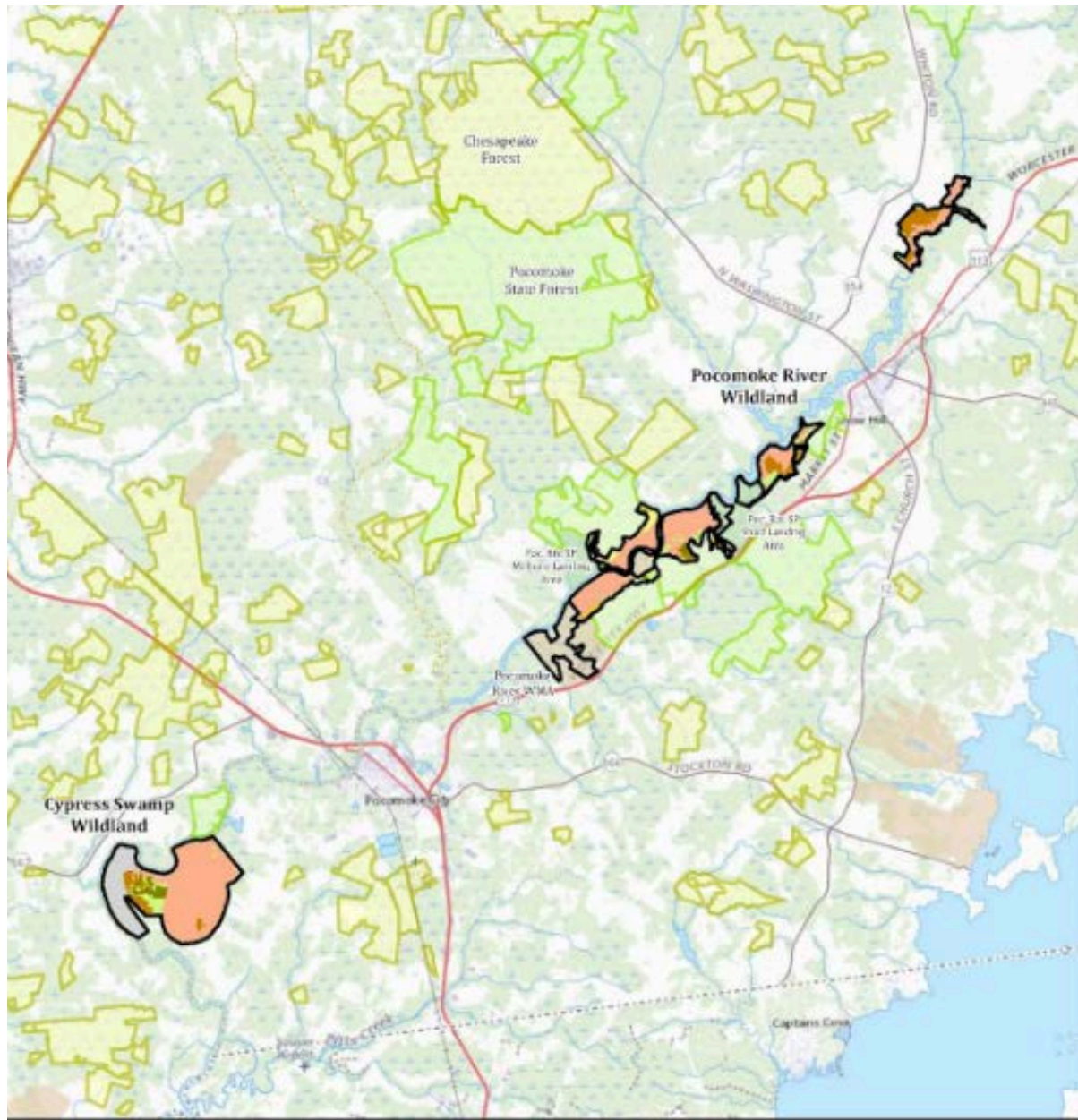


This map is for planning purposes only.  
This map is not a boundary survey



# FIGURE B

## Forest types in Pocomoke State Forest's Wildlands



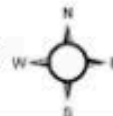
### Legend

- |                       |                             |               |                |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Pocomoke State Forest | <b>COVER</b>                | Hardwood-Pine | Mixed Hardwood |
| Chesapeake Forest     | Bottomland Hardwood         | Loblolly Pine | Pine-Hardwood  |
| Wildlands             | Bottomland Hardwood-Cypress | Marsh         | Shortleaf Pine |

Scale: 1 in. = 2.5 mi.  
 Prepared by: ASC  
 Date: 6/2022

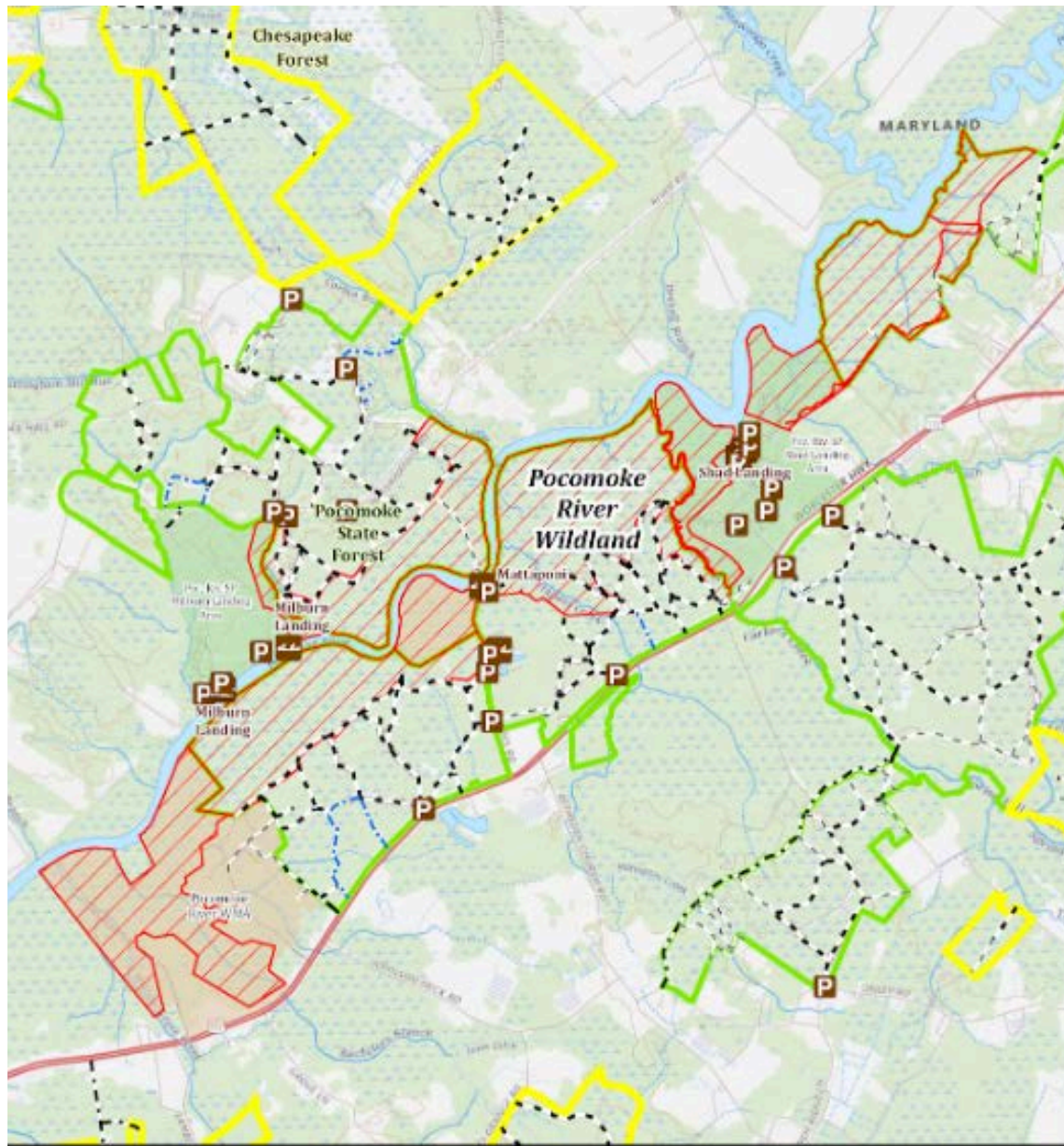


This map is for planning purposes only.  
 This map is not a boundary survey



# FIGURE C

## Access points to the Pocomoke River Wildland



### Legend

- Boat Ramp
- Marina
- Parking Area
- Soft Launch
- Wildlands
- Pocomoke State Forest
- Chesapeake Forest



This map is for planning purposes only.  
This map is not a boundary survey

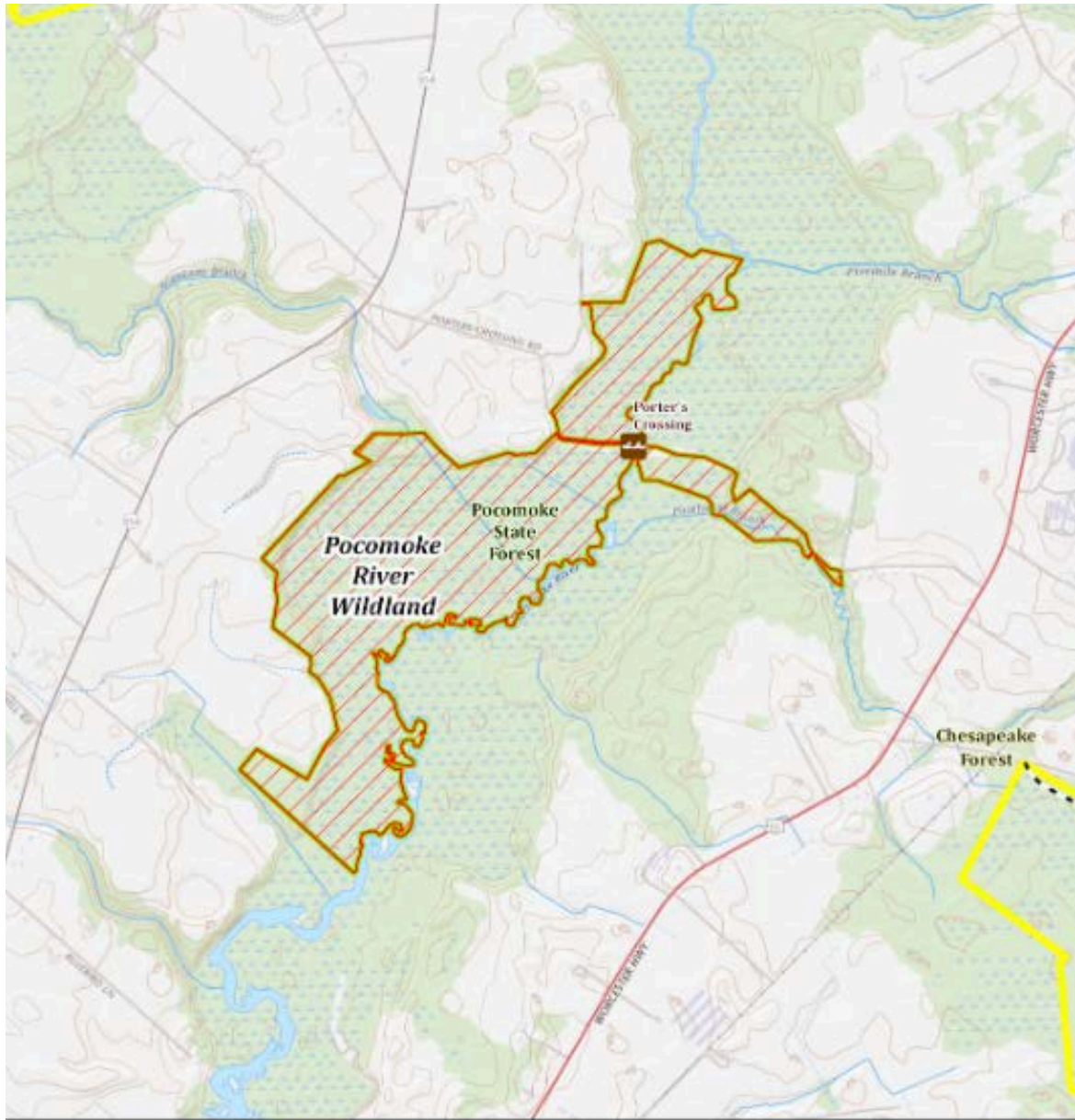


Scale: 1 in. = 0.8 mi.  
Prepared by: ASC  
Date: 6/2022



# FIGURE D

## Access point to the Pocomoke River Wildland



**Legend**

- Soft Launch
- Wildlands
- Pocomoke State Forest
- Chesapeake Forest

Scale: 1 in. = 0.4 mi.  
Prepared by: ASC  
Date: 6/2022

0 1 Miles

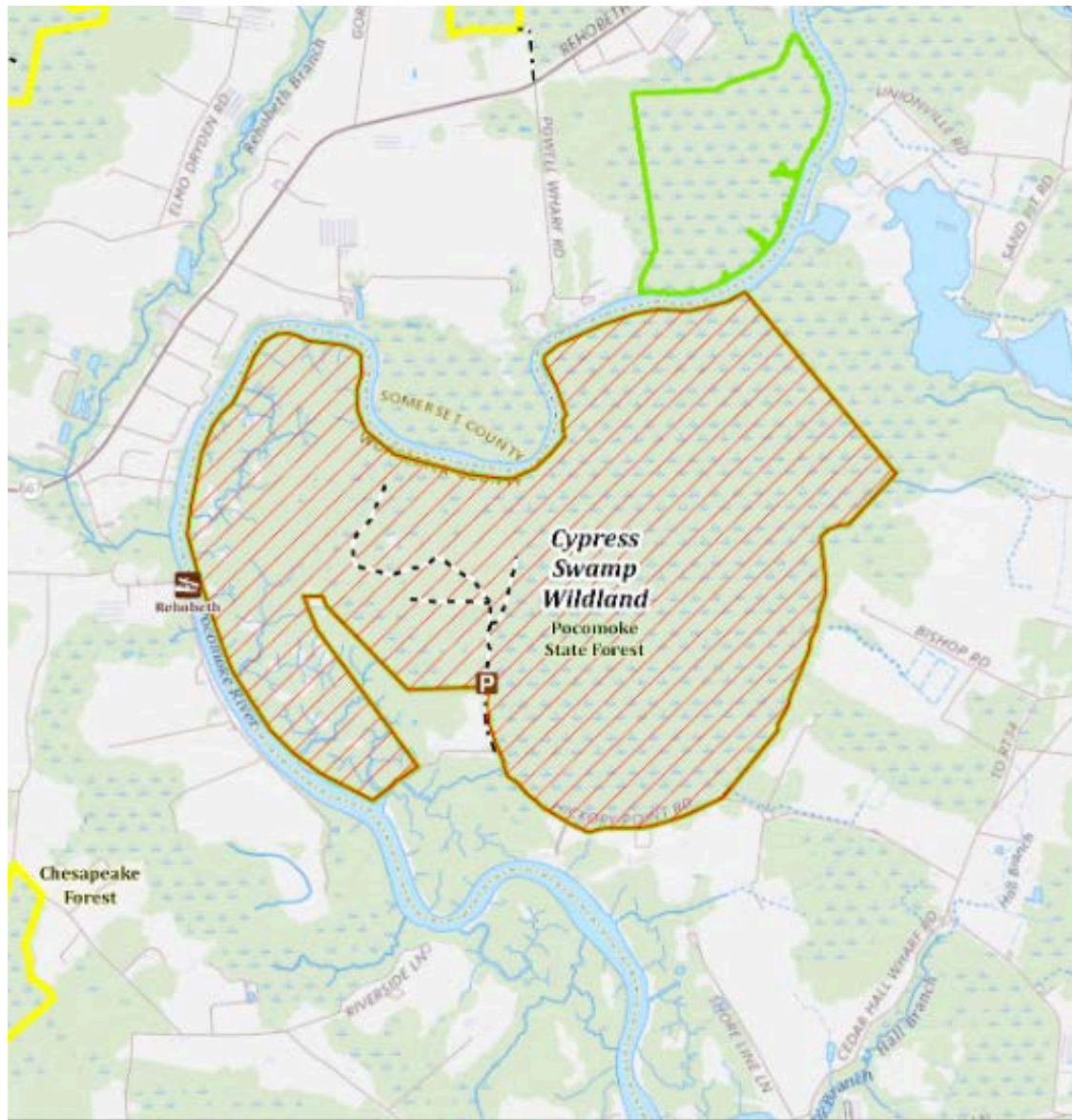
This map is for planning purposes only.  
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N E S W

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# FIGURE E

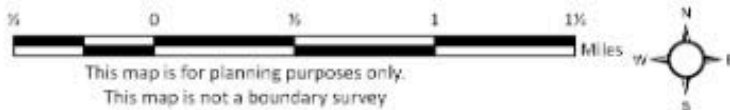
## Access points to the Cypress Swamp Wildland at Hickory Point



### Legend

- Boat Ramp
- Wildlands
- Parking Area
- Pocomoke State Forest
- Chesapeake Forest

Scale: 1 in. = 0.5 mi.  
Prepared by: ASC  
Date: 6/2022



This map is for planning purposes only.  
This map is not a boundary survey

