



## FISHING BAY MARSHES, DORCHESTER COUNTY

Affectionately known as the "Everglades of Maryland", the tidal wetlands of lower Dorchester County are some of our largest and most intact natural systems. At the heart of this system is Fishing Bay Marshes Natural Area, a mosaic of brackish marshes and wooded swamps. The expansive wetland system is home to many marshbirds including the secretive, Endangered black rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis*). A nine-mile road provides access through the marshes, and adventurers can continue their explorations on designated water trails in canoes, kayaks or other small watercraft. Visitors can also enjoy excellent opportunities for crabbing or birding within the wetland.

Of critical importance to the wetland system are the "high marsh" areas that are only occasionally flooded by extreme high tides or storm surges. This habitat is formed of salt marsh hay and sea-shore saltgrass which provide important habitat for ground-nesting birds like the rare northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), willet and saltmarsh sparrow. Only a decade ago, these vast marshes were in danger of being ruined by nutria, an aquatic rodent introduced from South America. Thanks to extensive trapping by the Chesapeake Nutria Partnership, the rodents are absent today and the marsh is thriving. Fishing Bay Marshes Natural

### THE BASICS

- Water Trails
- No Facilities
- 3 Boat Launch Areas
- Multiple Canoe/Kayak Access Areas
- Multiple Parking Areas

Area is mostly contained within Fishing Bay Wildlife Management Area managed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.



### KEY ELEMENTS

- Black Rail
- Perched Pools
- Birding Hotspot
- Tidal Brackish Marsh
- Loblolly Pine Woodlands



### WATCH OUT FOR!

- Mosquitoes
- Getting Lost
- Flooded Roadway
- Soft Road Shoulders



LYNN DAVIDSON



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Northern harriers soar gracefully over the marshes as they hunt for small birds and rodents.



USGS / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The elusive, sparrow-sized black rail stays very well hidden.

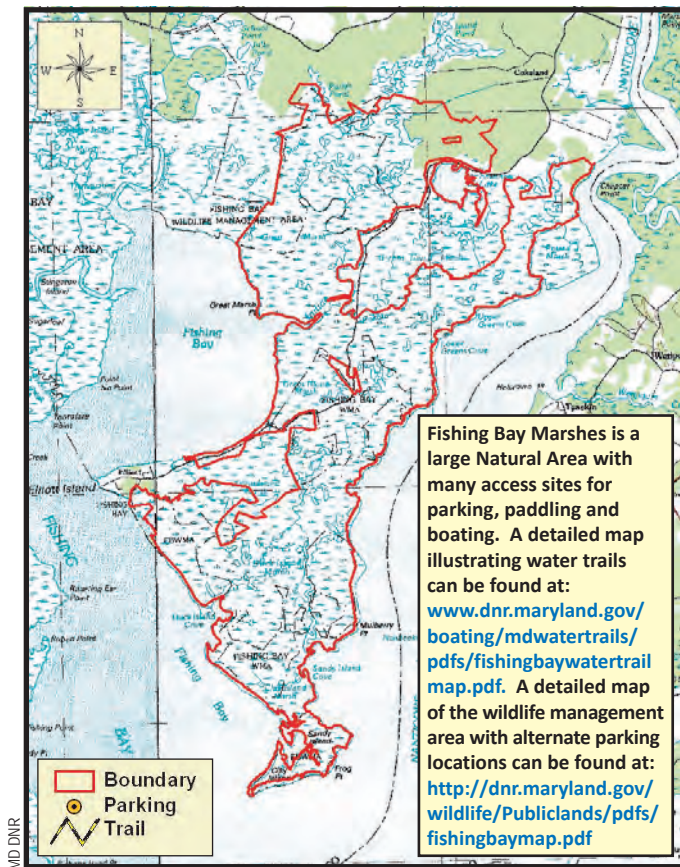


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Salt marsh hay blankets much of Fishing Bay's wetlands. These densely packed grasses serve as pollution filters and protect the Bay's shoreline from flooding and erosion. In addition, the grasses provide food, shelter and hunting grounds for many animal and bird species.



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Fishing Bay Marshes Natural Area



Some of Fishing Bay's marshes are slowly giving way to open water.

### Water On The Rise

A combination of sea-level rise and land subduction are causing some marshes in Maryland to convert to open water. Additionally, Fishing Bay's undeveloped uplands are expected to take the place of these wetlands as water levels continue to increase over the next 100 years.

### Directions

**From the Chesapeake Bay Bridge:** Head east on US 50 and south about 43 miles to Cambridge. Continue east another 15 miles and take the MD 331 (Rhodesdale Vienna Road) exit south to Vienna. Continue straight across Old Route 50 one block and turn left onto Race Street. Go one block and turn right on Market Street, which later becomes Elliott Island Road. Continue south on Elliott Island Road about 9 miles, where forests open into marshlands.

There are three boat launch areas with small parking lots at each site. Otherwise, there are no established hiking trails or boardwalks, restroom facilities or paved parking areas.

**Special Note:** *Fishing Bay Wildlife Management Area is used seasonally by hunters (for waterfowl and deer) and trappers (primarily for muskrat), as well as by fishermen and crabbers, in addition to nature enthusiasts.*

### Calling All Birders

Fishing Bay is a haven for birders. Its many habitats, ranging from forests to expansive marshes, allow for a variety of birds to make their home within the Natural Area. Notable species include rare marshbirds such as the American bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*), least bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*), common gallinule (*Gallinula galeata*), and sora (*Porzana carolina*). Other rarities like the Coastal Plain swamp sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana nigrescens*) and sedge wren (*Cistothorus platensis*) can also be seen here.



### CONTACT

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**For more information:**  
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publiclands/eastern/fishingbay.asp](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/publiclands/eastern/fishingbay.asp)