



photo by Chris Cerino

# The Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail

The Sassafas River Water Trail follows a portion of the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, which is managed by the National Park Service.



The Star-Spangled Banner Trail traces the War of 1812 in the Chesapeake. From 1812 to 1815 Americans fought to protect their rights and economic independence, facing superior enemy forces on the homefront and the high seas. The strategically important Chesapeake region felt the brunt of the war. Along the trail you will encounter tangible evidence of the war and stories that bring people and events to life. Find out more at:

[www.starspangledtrail.net](http://www.starspangledtrail.net)

## The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail

The Sassafas River Water Trail is part of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, America's first national water trail. The 3,000 mile John Smith Trail, managed by the National Park Service in collaboration with many partners, traces the exploratory voyages Smith conducted of the Chesapeake Bay and many major rivers between 1607 and 1609. Along the John Smith Trail are parks, museums, historic sites, and water trails offering opportunities for recreation and discovery. Explore Smith's voyages, American Indian cultures, and the 17th century Chesapeake. Find out more at:



[www.smithtrail.net](http://www.smithtrail.net)



**Image Above:** A section of John Smith's 1612 map of the Chesapeake showing the oldest known depiction of the Sassafas River. The map is oriented with North to the right and the headwaters of the Sassafas are marked with a red cross (the cross is black on Smith's original map but has been highlighted here for clarity). On this map the Sassafas River is referred to as the "Tockwogh flu." The term "flu" is an older abbreviation for "river," and "Tockwogh" is the name of the American Indian tribe that Smith encountered on the river (also noted separately). The small boat on the map is the only rendering of the 30-foot open-boat in which Smith and his crew explored more than 3,000 miles of the Chesapeake and its tributaries between 1607 and 1609.



photo by John Mann



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# Along the Sassafas River . . .

## About the River

Over 20 miles long, the Sassafas River traces the shores of Maryland's Cecil and Kent counties before reaching its confluence with the Chesapeake Bay between Howell Point and Grove Point. The tributary begins near the town of Sassafas, where the heavily wooded corridor features shallow water and the average width is only around 20 feet. After passing under the Route 301 Bridge, the river widens and the landscape transitions from woodland to farmland with a few residential communities interspersed along the way.

The twin ports of Georgetown and Fredericktown dominate the scenery downriver of the Route 213 Bridge, with both communities serving as busy centers for recreational boating. Between Turner's Creek and the mouth of the Sassafas, dramatic cliffs line both sides of the river. The forested cliffs provide ideal habitat for nesting bald eagles, and the birds can often be spotted soaring overhead.

Despite its relatively small size, the Sassafas is a popular destination for powerboats, paddle craft, and workboats. As such, it can be especially busy on weekends from May through October. For paddlers seeking peace and quiet, the Sassafas offers numerous creeks whose shallow waters are accessible by only the smallest vessels.

## American Indians on the Sassafas

Prior to the arrival of European settlers, American Indians lived along the waters of the Sassafas River for over 10,000 years. The river's tidal fresh waters provided rich food sources for the indigenous peoples, including emergent wetland plants such as arrow arum (Tuckahoe), yellow pond lily, American lotus, and pickerel weed. Spring spawning runs of shad, herring, striped bass, and perch served as an important source of protein, while woodland game such as whitetail deer, wild turkeys, and black bear were hunted for their meat and furs. Indian settlements were typically located along the water's edge at the heads of creeks or springs, with populations in each community ranging from a few families to a few hundred residents.



## John Smith Visits the Sassafas



On August 1, 1608, Captain John Smith encountered a fleet of canoes filled with Tockwogh warriors at the mouth of the Sassafas River during his legendary exploration of the Chesapeake Bay. The Tockwogh escorted Smith and his men to their fortified village seven miles upriver, possibly near present-day Kentmore Park on Shrewsbury Neck. According to Smith's journals, the Englishmen received a favorable reception: "Their men, women, and children with dances, songs, fruits, furs, and what they had, kindly welcomed us, spreading mats for us to sit on, stretching their best abilities to express their loves." After exploring the Sassafas River and the upper Bay for several days, Smith and his men departed for Jamestown on August 8th, never to return.

## The War of 1812

On May 6, 1813, British Rear Admiral Sir George Cockburn led his naval forces up the Sassafas River to raid the twin ports of Georgetown and Fredericktown. After quickly defeating the local militia, troops torched local homes, food stores, and boats. As legend has it, a brick home at the top of the hill in Georgetown was saved by local heroine Kitty Knight, who pleaded with the British officers for mercy while repeatedly putting out the flames with her broom. Today that home is known as the Kitty Knight House (shown above), a popular inn and restaurant. In May 1813 and again in July 1814, homes and residents up and down the Sassafas and neighboring creeks were subjected to raids and the whims of British forces.



## American Lotus



photo by Chris Cerino

The beautiful American lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*) produces the largest flower of any plant in North America, with a peak blooming season of mid-July through mid-August. This plant was once a favored food source for American Indians, who ate the starch-rich roots and large seeds. Today, American lotus is found in only three locations on the Chesapeake Bay: the Elk/Bohemia River system, Mattawoman Creek on the Potomac River, and the Sassafas River.

## Puritan Tiger Beetle

Of the 5,000 Puritan tiger beetles left on Earth, 4,500 reside in the state of Maryland. In the Chesapeake, these beetles can only be found along Calvert Cliffs and the high, sandy bluffs of the Sassafas River. Puritan tiger beetles lay their eggs in these naturally eroding cliffs, while adults spend their lives on the sandy beaches below.

## Bald Eagles

The high, forested cliffs of the Sassafas River provide ideal habitat for the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). Bald eagles can be seen throughout the river, with the heaviest concentrations found on the lower section between Turner's Creek Park and Betterton. Look for these majestic raptors as they soar above the river in search of prey.

## Knock's Folly

Knock's Folly is a meticulously preserved 18th century, federal-style brick home with commanding views of Turner's Creek and the Sassafas River. The home is open to the public on weekends from May through October and contains interpretive displays about American Indians, the 1608 expeditions of Captain John Smith, and agricultural practices in the surrounding countryside. For more information about Knock's Folly visit: [www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/eastern/sassafas.asp](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/eastern/sassafas.asp)



## Sassafas Natural Resources Management Area

Sassafas Natural Resources Management Area contains nearly 1,000 acres of wetlands, woodlands, and agricultural fields. The site is managed by the State Forest and Maryland Park Service and provides public recreational opportunities including hiking, biking, equestrian trail riding, and hunting. The Management Area also contains nearly three miles of shoreline along the Sassafas River and Turner's Creek, creating one of the most pristine view-sheds on the entire river. For more information about the Sassafas Natural Resources Management Area visit: [www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/eastern/sassafas.asp](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/eastern/sassafas.asp)



photo by Chris Cerino

## Turner's Creek County Park

In addition to being one of the premier launch sites on the lower Sassafas River for paddlers and recreational boaters, Turner's Creek County Park contains 143 acres of land featuring hiking trails, bathroom facilities, and a picnic pavilion. The site was once a thriving local shipping port where local agricultural products were disbursed throughout the region. Today, a granary still stands on the original site where an earlier commissary shipped supplies to George Washington's Army during the American Revolution. Kent Museum is located just up the hill from the park, containing antique agricultural implements from Kent County's farming past. For Museum hours, visit: [www.kentcounty.com/farmmuseum](http://www.kentcounty.com/farmmuseum)

## Mount Harmon Plantation



Located on the Cecil County side of the Sassafas River on a gorgeous peninsula bordered by Back and McGill Creeks, Mount Harmon Plantation traces its rich history back to a 1651 land grant from Caecilius

Calvert, the second Lord Baltimore, to Godfrey Harmon. The plantation became a thriving center for tobacco shipping and was recorded on early maps of the area as "World's End." Today, Mount Harmon Plantation is a premiere heritage destination and nature preserve and features a beautifully restored manor house, colonial kitchen, prize house, formal garden, and nature trails. For information about tours, educational programs, and special events, visit: [www.mountharmon.org](http://www.mountharmon.org)

## Watermen

The lower Sassafas River contains a healthy population of working watermen who make their living fishing and crabbing on the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries. Several watermen fish the river with pound nets, catching catfish, white perch, yellow perch, and striped bass. Other watermen arrive in late summer to follow the yearly migration of Atlantic blue crabs up the Chesapeake. Many of these watermen spend the fall operating out of Turner's Creek, where they have quick access to their pots in the Bay proper.



photo by John Mann

## Water Safety

Safety is your responsibility. However, if you choose to explore the Sassafas River, make sure you have the appropriate boating skills before setting out and always use good judgement. Here are a few tips to remember:

- Always carry and wear your life jacket.
- Research your route and leave an itinerary with a friend or loved one.
- Avoid boating or paddling alone.
- Check the weather and tide before you leave and make sure you are prepared for inclement weather.
- Paddle/boat on bodies of water that are appropriate for your skill level.

For a full listing of Maryland boating regulations visit: [www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/regulations/](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/regulations/)

## Suggested Paddling Gear

Life Jacket	First Aid Kit
Whistle	Extra Paddle
Ample Drinking Water	Bailer/Bilge Pump
Chart, Compass & GPS	Cell Phone
Dry Bag w/ Extra Clothes	Sunscreen & Hat
Tow Rope	Water Shoes

## Leave No Trace

When paddling or boating on the Sassafas River it might not seem like one person's actions could have a meaningful impact on the environment. However, when your actions are combined with those of thousands of others, they can ultimately do great harm to the river's ecosystem.

Individuals voyaging on the Sassafas River are encouraged to follow Leave No Trace ideals and practices. Here are a few suggestions for how you can help preserve the Sassafas:

- Dispose of waste properly and make sure to carry out all of your waste with you.
- Leave the natural environment as you found it. Do not disturb rocks, plants, trees, or artifacts.
- Respect all wildlife by enjoying it from a distance and not disturbing it.
- Be considerate of others by respecting people's privacy and minimizing noise.
- Always respect private property. Unless you know otherwise, assume that all land is privately owned.

For more information on Leave No Trace visit: [www.lnt.org](http://www.lnt.org)

**Credits:** This map was designed and produced by Sultana Projects, Inc. with the assistance of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network and the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority. Basemap was provided by the Washington College GIS office and refined by Locust Grove Studios. Content was developed in partnership with Kent County, Maryland, and the Sassafas River Association.

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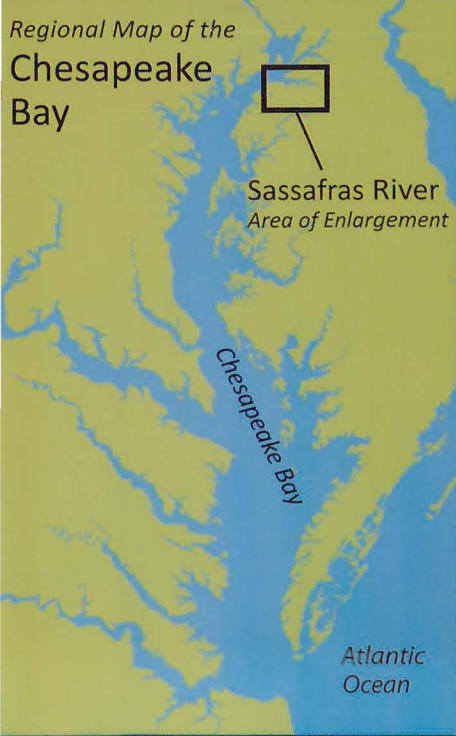
For more detailed information visit [www.srwt.org](http://www.srwt.org)



# Sassafras River Water Trail

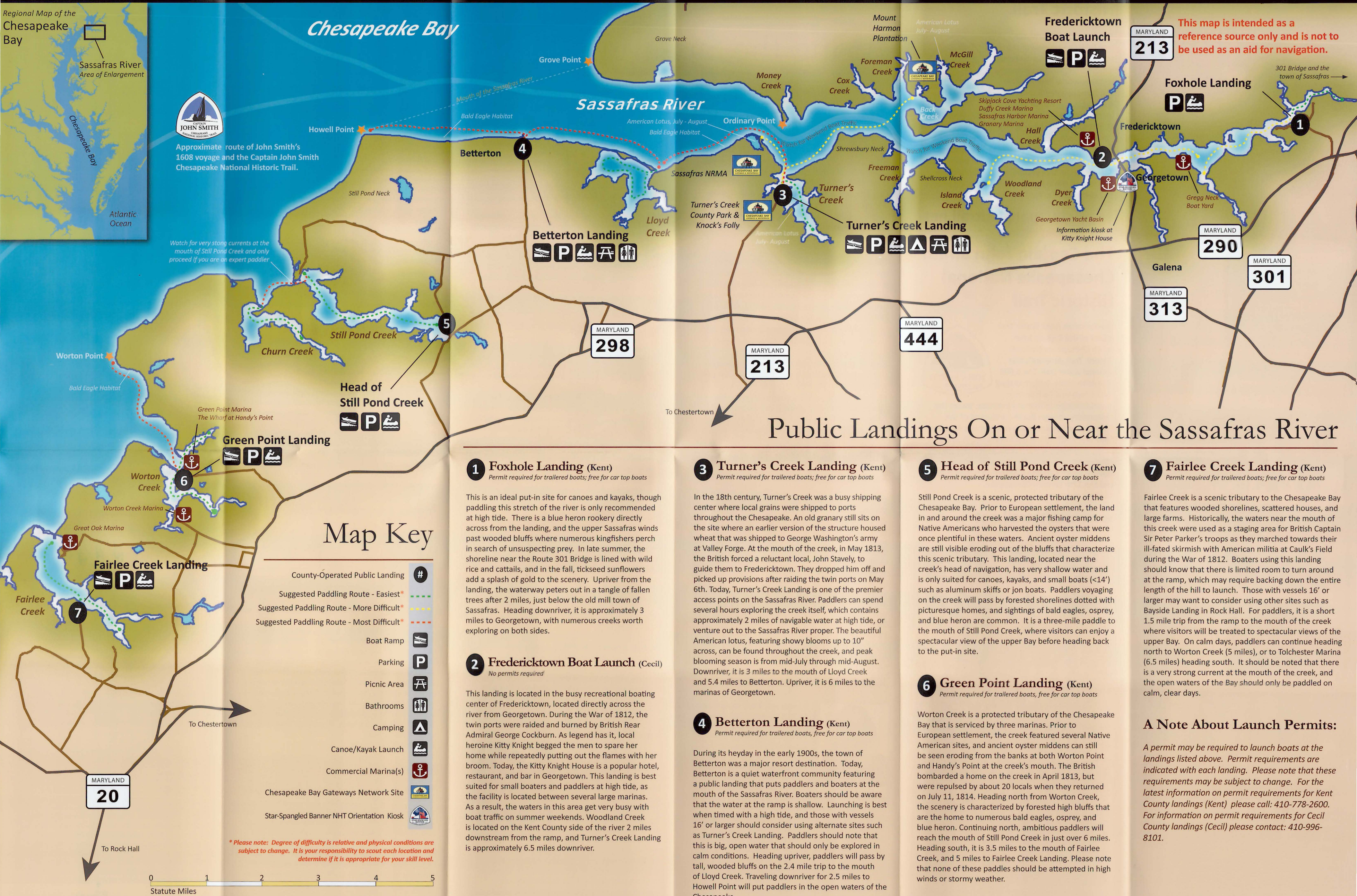
## And the Associated Creeks of Northern Kent County, Maryland

A Component of the  
 Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail  
 Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail



Approximate route of John Smith's 1608 voyage and the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

Watch for very strong currents at the mouth of Still Pond Creek and only proceed if you are an expert paddler.



This map is intended as a reference source only and is not to be used as an aid for navigation.

### Public Landings On or Near the Sassafras River

- 1 Foxhole Landing (Kent)**  
 Permit required for trailered boats; free for car top boats  
 This is an ideal put-in site for canoes and kayaks, though paddling this stretch of the river is only recommended at high tide. There is a blue heron rookery directly across from the landing, and the upper Sassafras winds past wooded bluffs where numerous kingfishers perch in search of unsuspecting prey. In late summer, the shoreline near the Route 301 Bridge is lined with wild rice and cattails, and in the fall, tickseed sunflowers add a splash of gold to the scenery. Upriver from the landing, the waterway peters out in a tangle of fallen trees after 2 miles, just below the old mill town of Sassafras. Heading downriver, it is approximately 3 miles to Georgetown, with numerous creeks worth exploring on both sides.
- 2 Fredericktown Boat Launch (Cecil)**  
 No permits required  
 This landing is located in the busy recreational boating center of Fredericktown, located directly across the river from Georgetown. During the War of 1812, the twin ports were raided and burned by British Rear Admiral George Cockburn. As legend has it, local heroine Kitty Knight begged the men to spare her home while repeatedly putting out the flames with her broom. Today, the Kitty Knight House is a popular hotel, restaurant, and bar in Georgetown. This landing is best suited for small boaters and paddlers at high tide, as the facility is located between several large marinas. As a result, the waters in this area get very busy with boat traffic on summer weekends. Woodland Creek is located on the Kent County side of the river 2 miles downstream from the ramp, and Turner's Creek Landing is approximately 6.5 miles downriver.
- 3 Turner's Creek Landing (Kent)**  
 Permit required for trailered boats; free for car top boats  
 In the 18th century, Turner's Creek was a busy shipping center where local grains were shipped to ports throughout the Chesapeake. An old granary still sits on the site where an earlier version of the structure housed wheat that was shipped to George Washington's army at Valley Forge. At the mouth of the creek, in May 1813, the British forced a reluctant local, John Stavelly, to guide them to Fredericktown. They dropped him off and picked up provisions after raiding the twin ports on May 6th. Today, Turner's Creek Landing is one of the premier access points on the Sassafras River. Paddlers can spend several hours exploring the creek itself, which contains approximately 2 miles of navigable water at high tide, or venture out to the Sassafras River proper. The beautiful American lotus, featuring showy blooms up to 10" across, can be found throughout the creek, and peak blooming season is from mid-July through mid-August. Downriver, it is 3 miles to the mouth of Lloyd Creek and 5.4 miles to Betterton. Upriver, it is 6 miles to the marinas of Georgetown.
- 4 Betterton Landing (Kent)**  
 Permit required for trailered boats, free for car top boats  
 During its heyday in the early 1900s, the town of Betterton was a major resort destination. Today, Betterton is a quiet waterfront community featuring a public landing that puts paddlers and boaters at the mouth of the Sassafras River. Boaters should be aware that the water at the ramp is shallow. Launching is best when timed with a high tide, and those with vessels 16' or larger should consider using alternate sites such as Turner's Creek Landing. Paddlers should note that this is big, open water that should only be explored in calm conditions. Heading upriver, paddlers will pass by tall, wooded bluffs on the 2.4 mile trip to the mouth of Lloyd Creek. Traveling downriver for 2.5 miles to Howell Point will put paddlers in the open waters of the Chesapeake.
- 5 Head of Still Pond Creek (Kent)**  
 Permit required for trailered boats; free for car top boats  
 Still Pond Creek is a scenic, protected tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. Prior to European settlement, the land in and around the creek was a major fishing camp for Native Americans who harvested the oysters that were once plentiful in these waters. Ancient oyster middens are still visible eroding out of the bluffs that characterize this scenic tributary. This landing, located near the creek's head of navigation, has very shallow water and is only suited for canoes, kayaks, and small boats (<14') such as aluminum skiffs or jon boats. Paddlers voyaging on the creek will pass by forested shorelines dotted with picturesque homes, and sightings of bald eagles, osprey, and blue heron are common. It is a three-mile paddle to the mouth of Still Pond Creek, where visitors can enjoy a spectacular view of the upper Bay before heading back to the put-in site.
- 6 Green Point Landing (Kent)**  
 Permit required for trailered boats, free for car top boats  
 Worton Creek is a protected tributary of the Chesapeake Bay that is serviced by three marinas. Prior to European settlement, the creek featured several Native American sites, and ancient oyster middens can still be seen eroding from the banks at both Worton Point and Handy's Point at the creek's mouth. The British bombarded a home on the creek in April 1813, but were repulsed by about 20 locals when they returned on July 11, 1814. Heading north from Worton Creek, the scenery is characterized by forested high bluffs that are the home to numerous bald eagles, osprey, and blue heron. Continuing north, ambitious paddlers will reach the mouth of Still Pond Creek in just over 6 miles. Heading south, it is 3.5 miles to the mouth of Fairlee Creek, and 5 miles to Fairlee Creek Landing. Please note that none of these paddles should be attempted in high winds or stormy weather.
- 7 Fairlee Creek Landing (Kent)**  
 Permit required for trailered boats; free for car top boats  
 Fairlee Creek is a scenic tributary to the Chesapeake Bay that features wooded shorelines, scattered houses, and large farms. Historically, the waters near the mouth of this creek were used as a staging area for British Captain Sir Peter Parker's troops as they marched towards their ill-fated skirmish with American militia at Caulk's Field during the War of 1812. Boaters using this landing should know that there is limited room to turn around at the ramp, which may require backing down the entire length of the hill to launch. Those with vessels 16' or larger may want to consider using other sites such as Bayside Landing in Rock Hall. For paddlers, it is a short 1.5 mile trip from the ramp to the mouth of the creek where visitors will be treated to spectacular views of the upper Bay. On calm days, paddlers can continue heading north to Worton Creek (5 miles), or to Tolchester Marina (6.5 miles) heading south. It should be noted that there is a very strong current at the mouth of the creek, and the open waters of the Bay should only be paddled on calm, clear days.

### Map Key

- County-Operated Public Landing #
- Suggested Paddling Route - Easiest\*
- Suggested Paddling Route - More Difficult\*
- Suggested Paddling Route - Most Difficult\*
- Boat Ramp
- Parking P
- Picnic Area
- Bathrooms
- Camping
- Canoe/Kayak Launch
- Commercial Marina(s)
- Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network Site
- Star-Spangled Banner NHT Orientation Kiosk

\* Please note: Degree of difficulty is relative and physical conditions are subject to change. It is your responsibility to scout each location and determine if it is appropriate for your skill level.

