

Prince William Forest Park

Prince William Forest Park
Virginia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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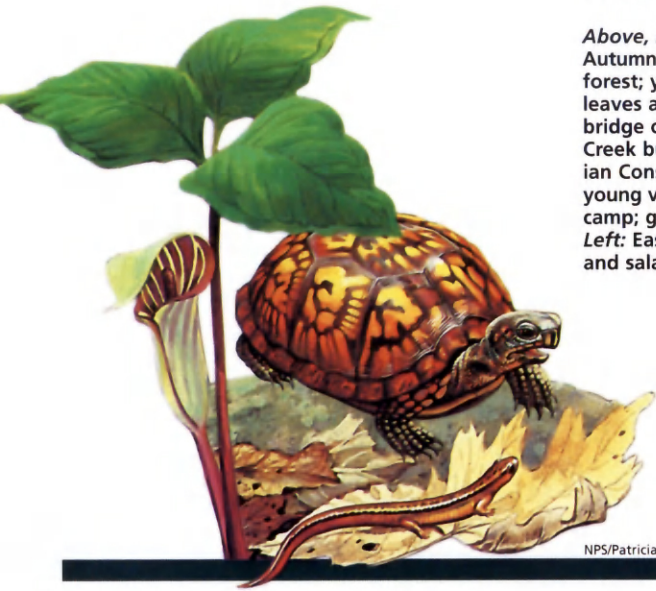
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A Woodland Watershed

Above, left to right: Autumn in the Piedmont forest; yellow poplar leaves and blossoms; bridge over Quantico Creek built by the Civilian Conservation Corps; young visitors at a cabin camp; gray tree frog. *Left:* Eastern box turtle and salamander.



NPS/Patricia Topper

Get to know a part of Northern Virginia that has all but disappeared. Hike a gentle trail to an old pyrite mine, watch birds and listen to their calls, scan the ground for wildflowers, spend the night in a historic cabin—all within Prince William Forest Park's 17,000-plus acres of woodland.

This park protects four-fifths of the Quantico Creek watershed. Quantico Creek and South Fork Quantico Creek flow through the park collecting water from rain, springs, and small tributaries. Together they drain more than 20 square miles of woodland within the park. About midway through their courses, both forks of the creek cut deep valleys and cascade over steep erosion-resistant rocks as they drop from the Piedmont Plateau to the Atlantic Coastal Plain. Near the park's eastern edge the two branches join, and the creek flows with greater force across the Catoclin greenstone. A few miles downstream of the confluence, Quantico Creek meets the tidewater of the Potomac River, which in turn drains into Chesapeake Bay. As you sit by one of the creeks and watch the waters flow past, keep in mind that all natural and human

activities within this watershed affect the quality and quantity of water that ends up in the bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

The transition between the rolling Piedmont Plateau and the low-lying Atlantic Coastal Plain, marked by waterfalls and rock outcroppings, creates a varied habitat. This region also lies within the transition zone between northern and southern climates and supports plants and animals from both climates.

Prince William Forest Park preserves the largest example of a Piedmont forest in the National Park System. This forest serves as a sanctuary for plants and animals that are threatened by increasing development in Northern Virginia. White and red oaks, Virginia pine, American holly, and mountain laurel are found on ridges and in hollows. Beech and yellow poplar grow in the rich, damp soils of the creek valleys. White-tailed deer and wild turkey are common along the grassy edges of the forest, and beaver dams can be seen in the streams throughout the park. Listening quietly will allow you to hear the songs of birds and

the calls of frogs and toads during their breeding seasons. Colorful wildflowers and interesting mushrooms can be found throughout the park along trails and roadways. What you observe here will depend upon the season, the time of day, and, to a certain extent, luck!

Prince William Forest Park is a place of continual discovery, but it is also a very fragile place. The watershed has suffered from past farming and mining activities, and now the park faces threats from external development. The park provides an opportunity for you to experience nature and learn about all of the creatures that inhabit this watershed. Whether you're hiking a trail, biking along the roads, or sitting by the water, there is always something new. We ask that you not disturb the wildlife or vegetation. Wherever you are, it's somebody's home! We all face an ongoing challenge to protect this forest ecosystem so that future generations of plants, wildlife, and our fellow human beings can enjoy this forested oasis.



The Great Depression and Land Use

The story of Prince William Forest Park begins in the 1930s with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, a nationwide effort aimed at fighting the ravages of the Great Depression. Part of this effort included finding new uses for marginally productive lands. The human history of the land itself, however, is much, much older. Algonquin-speaking American Indians lived in the region for thousands of years making a living from the land and waters of the heavily wooded region.

In 1607 the first Europeans settled in Virginia. The English colonists, in search of a cash crop, soon adopted the cultivation of tobacco. By the late 1600s tobacco use swept Europe, and Virginia landholders met the demand by clear-cutting forests to create large tobacco plantations. In the 1720s Scottish merchants established the port of Dumfries at the mouth of Quantico Creek to warehouse and export the crop. Intensive tobacco cultivation proved hard on the land. Exposed topsoil washed from plantations and eventually silted in Dumfries harbor. By the 1750s most plantations were abandoned or divided up. For most of the 18th and

Mine photos: Weems-Botts Museum



The Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine, left, operated from 1889 to 1920 and supported a small company town. The photo below, from a 1950s album, shows young urban visitors enjoying an outing at a cabin camp.



19th centuries, a succession of small farmers cleared, planted, and deserted the land.

In 1781 George Washington led his army along Telegraph Road, then called Potomac Path, to Yorktown, where they won the culminating battle of the American Revolution. From 1861 to 1865 the Civil War took its toll on the area. In 1889 the local economy, based for the most part on subsistence farming, received a boost with the opening of the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine. The enterprise employed 200 to 300 workers in the mining of pyrite ("fool's gold"). Sulfuric acid extracted from the pyrite was used to make soap, fertilizer, and gunpowder. The mine prospered through World War I, but falling prices and labor troubles closed it in 1920.

By 1930 only small farms remained, and much of the land was gradually reverting to forest. Reforestation became a deliberate goal in 1933 with the creation of the Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Area. The area was one of 46 New Deal land-use projects to reclaim marginal farmlands for recreational activities. In 1936 the area became part of the National Park System, and the restoration and preservation of the woodland watershed

were ensured. By 1941 the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) had constructed roads, bridges, dams, and five rustic cabin camps for inner-city children.

During World War II the park served the nation as a top-secret military installation. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), forerunner of the CIA, operated training schools here known as Areas A and C. In Area A recruits learned to gather intelligence, and the trainees practiced spying in nearby communities. Area C was devoted to the teaching of codes, covert radio transmission, and weapons skills.

In 1946 the park was returned to public use under the National Park Service. It was renamed Prince William Forest Park in 1948 after the Virginia county in which it is located. With more than 17,000 acres, it is the greatest expanse of Piedmont forest in the National Park System and the largest natural parkland in the Washington, D.C., area. The park is home to native plants, wildlife, and a rich cultural story and offers visitors an opportunity for outdoor solitude, recreation, and to learn about its history.

Planning Your Visit

The visitor center is open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. The park closes at dark to all but registered campers. The entrance pass is valid for three days. Annual park passes are available.

The visitor center has exhibits, information, and a sales outlet with publications and maps that will help you make the most of your visit. Rangers conduct evening programs in summer and lead interpretive walks throughout the year. Check the *Turkey Caller*, park bulletin boards, or the visitor center for schedules. For information on educational and volunteer programs and on permits, or to schedule group activities, contact the park staff or check the park website.

Hiking Trails wind 37 miles through the park. Major trails are marked with color blazes. Pine Grove Forest and Farms to Forest trails have self-guiding signs or brochures. Pine Grove Forest trail is paved with gentle slopes. For trail locations, check the park map and watch signs along park roads.

Wildlife Watching Dawn and dusk are best for seeing deer, wild turkey, and beaver. Watch for migratory birds in the spring and fall and for a variety of songbirds throughout the year. A checklist of bird species found in the park is available at the visitor center.

Winter Activities Hiking, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing are popular. Open views



Robert Brooks

along ridges and into ravines provide opportunities to see animals as they move through the winter landscape.

Picnicking Pine Grove and Telegraph Road picnic areas are located near the visitor center and within a mile of I-95. Each area has tables,

cooking grills, water, and restrooms. Pine Grove has a first-come, first-served picnic shelter. Telegraph Road picnic pavilion may be reserved for a fee.

Bicycling The park has miles of scenic roads through the Piedmont forest. Ask at the visitor center for a free bicycling guide to paved and unpaved routes, restrooms, water, and parking.

Fishing Bass, bluegill, perch, pickerel, crappie, and catfish are found in the park's streams and lakes. A Virginia fishing license is required. Federal regulations are available at the visitor center. The park does not sell fishing licenses. Access to park lakes is limited; please check at the visitor center first.

Education Center The Turkey Run Education Center offers classroom space. Rangers and teachers use the center to teach visitors and students about the park's nature and history and its place in the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. Call for information.

Camping Oak Ridge Campground has 100 sites for tents, RVs, and vehicle/trailer lengths to a maximum of 32 feet. Each site has paved parking, a campfire grill, picnic table, and lantern hanger. The campground has water, restrooms, and showers. There are no hookups or dump station.

Travel Trailer Village, concessioner-operated, has sites for RVs and trailers. Facilities include

showers, a coin laundry, dump station, and swimming pool. For reservations, call 703-221-2474.

Backcountry camping, by permit only, is allowed south of Va. 619 in the Chopawamsic Backcountry Area. The sites, open March 1 to October 15, are located 0.2 to 1.0 mile from the trailhead. All supplies, including drinking water, must be packed in; trash must be carried out. Cooking is allowed on portable cookstoves only. Campfires are prohibited. Phone reservations are not accepted; write or call for an application, or fill one out in person. Permit applications are available at the visitor center.

Group Camping Five cabin camps built by the CCC in the 1930s accommodate groups of 60 to 211 persons. They offer primitive sleeping cabins, restrooms, showers, and a modern, central kitchen with dining hall. Groups must bring cooking utensils and linens. Reservations for spring and summer are due December 1; for fall, by May 1. For information, call 703-221-5843.

Turkey Run Ridge campground offers six group tent sites for 20 to 40 people. Sites have picnic tables and fire grills. The campground has drinking water and restrooms. There are no hookups or showers. Pets and alcohol are prohibited. Write or call for a permit application; advance reservations are required.

More Information Prince William Forest Park is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. Visit www.nps.gov to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities.

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Getting Here The park is in Virginia, 32 miles south of Washington, D.C., and 22 miles north of Fredericksburg. From I-95, take exit 150 and follow signs to the park entrance. To reach Travel Trailer Village from I-95, take exit 152 onto Va. 234 north toward Manassas for 2.5 miles to entrance.

Playing It Safe To protect the park and to make the visiting experience more enjoyable for all, please follow these regulations: • Campground quiet hours are 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Generators may not operate during quiet hours and are subject to additional regulations. • Campfires may not be

left unattended. Ground fires outside of grills are prohibited. • To prevent damage to trees, hammocks, clotheslines, and tentlines may not be tied to trees. • Federal law prohibits the feeding, frightening, or disturbing of wildlife. • All vehicles must stay on the pavement. Parking is not permitted in unoccupied campsites, along roads, or on the grass. Bicycles and motorized vehicles are prohibited on park trails. • Pets must be crated or on a leash no longer than six feet; they are prohibited in Turkey Run Ridge Campground, in cabin camps, and in Chopawamsic Backcountry Area. • For sanitary reasons, washing vehicles, dishes, and clothes and brushing teeth at water outlets is prohibited. • Campgrounds and the

dump station at Travel Trailer Village have gray water sinks; disposing of gray water elsewhere is prohibited. • The park closes at sunset, and trails are closed to all visitors after sunset. Registered campers may enter and exit the park at any time during their stay. • Skateboards, roller-skates, fireworks, and weapons are prohibited in the park.

Emergencies The nearest hospital is Potomac Hospital in Woodbridge, 703-670-1313; take U.S. 1 north about seven miles to 2300 Opitz Blvd. To report accidents, injuries, lost persons, wildfires, law violations, or suspicious activities, call 1-866-677-6677. In case of life-threatening emergency, call 911

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