

CUMBERLAND MARSH PRESERVE

Volunteer Program Handbook



Protecting nature. Preserving life.

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THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

In 1951, The Nature Conservancy started as a grassroots organization in New York in order to protect a 60-acre hemlock forest. TNC has since grown into an international non-profit, active in all 50 states and 79 countries and territories.

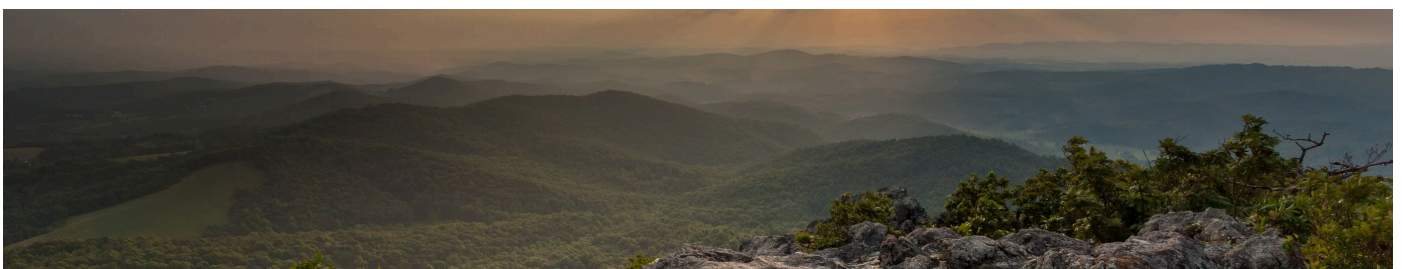
In Virginia, TNC has prioritized the conservation of several key landscapes: Clinch Valley in the southwest, Virginia Pinelands in the southeast, the Chesapeake Bay and Eastern Shore in the east, and the TNC employs scientists across the world in order to make strategic and informed decisions to drive conservation. From finding and protecting migration corridors to using fire to maintain landscapes, TNC is helping lead the way for science-based conservation.



Christmas Eve 1954, TNC is officially launched and making efforts towards land protection.



Mianus River Gorge pledging a deal to protect 60 acres of hemlock forest.



View from Warm Springs Mountain in the Allegheny Highlands.

CUMBERLAND MARSH PRESERVE

Purchased in 1993, Vandell Preserve at Cumberland Marsh is a mixture of freshwater tidal marsh and wooded upland. Located on the southern bank of the Pamunkey River and situated along the Atlantic Flyway, the preserve provides important migratory and wintering habitat for waterfowl. It also has the world's largest population of the rare sensitive joint-vetch (*Aeschynomene virginica*), a member of the pea family listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The nearest launch site for paddle craft is four miles downstream at the Whites Landing (Lestor Manor) ramp, just downstream of the Pamunkey reservation.

Paddlers are encouraged to plan trips in accordance with tidal currents, which can be very strong along this section of the river.

A set of river maps can be ordered from the Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers Association at mpra.org.

Common birds include bald eagles, ospreys, great blue herons, and egrets. There are wintering populations of black ducks, wood ducks, mallards and Canada geese.



STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

TNC Virginia has 15 public access preserves. Not all of these preserves host the Preserve Stewardship program and have volunteer trail monitors. There are a total of 9 volunteer stewardship preserves across the state:

- Bottom Creek Gorge
- Cumberland Marsh
- Falls Ridge
- Fernbrook
- Fortune's Cove
- Fraser
- Piney Grove
- Voorhees
- Warm Springs Mountain

Volunteer stewardship preserves are shown in blue, and those that are open to the public but do not host this program are shown in yellow.

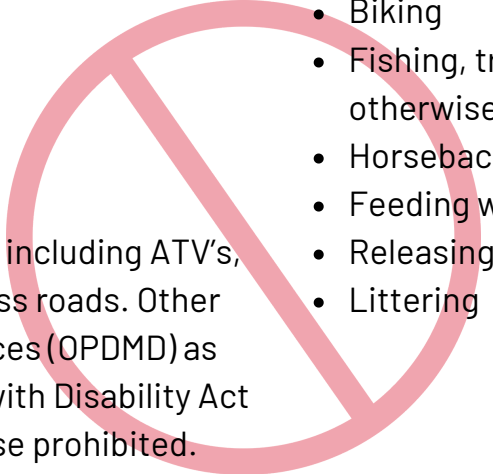


PRESERVE GUIDELINES


Cumberland Marsh is open to the public.

The following are the guidelines for TNC preserves. As a general rule, do not confront rule-breakers while on a stewardship hike, especially if the situation does not feel safe. Depending on the situation and comfort level of the Preserve Steward, you can kindly remind visitors of rules (e.g. gently reminding visitors to not pick flowers). If you observe illegal activity (i.e. more serious than just breaking guidelines), you may call local law enforcement and report to TNC staff. Please report any evidence or observations of rule breaking in your inspection report.

The Following Activities Are Not Permitted:

- 
- Picking flora
 - Removing rocks
 - Dog walking
 - Smoking
 - Camping/fires/cookouts
 - Driving motorized vehicles, including ATV's, except on designated access roads. Other Power Driven Mobility Devices (OPDMD) as defined by the Americans with Disability Act are allowed unless otherwise prohibited.
 - Biking
 - Fishing, trapping or hunting, except as otherwise posted
 - Horseback riding
 - Feeding wildlife
 - Releasing animals or introducing plants
 - Littering

To Minimize Your Impact, We Ask That You Please Observe the Following:

- 
- Stay on trails
 - Avoid walking in wet, boggy areas.
 - Inspect pant legs and shoes to remove seeds before entering and when leaving the preserve. Failure to do so could introduce invasive weeds to new locations.
 - Please do not trespass on private property adjacent to preserves.
 - If you flush a ground nesting bird, stop and avoid walking near the nest area.
 - Observe all posted signs.
 - Please do not remove stakes, signs, flagging, tape or similar objects. These may be markers for a research project.

PRESERVE VOLUNTEER OVERVIEW

With many preserves to manage around the commonwealth, it is not always possible for the staff of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to visit each preserve as often as we would like. This is why it is vital to have a community of volunteers at our preserves to help maintain and monitor their condition. TNC is dedicated to providing authentic and inspiring examples of natural Virginian habitats, and maintaining our preserves and natural areas is one of the best ways to accomplish this goal.



The Cumberland Marsh Preserve Volunteer Community is organized into three tiers based on the amount of time you would like to dedicate to the preserve. Preserve Leaders take on additional responsibilities for the preserve (e.g. manage schedule, lead 1-2 workdays a year). Preserve Stewards commit to 4-6 stewardship hikes a year to maintain trails and monitor the condition of the preserve. The Preserve Volunteer Community, receives quarterly updates regarding the preserve and are promptly informed about workdays, guided hikes, and other events.

PRESERVE LEADERS

Preserve Leaders are instrumental to the success of the Preserve Volunteer Program. Leaders are people who have demonstrated their commitment to the preserve and are willing to take on additional responsibilities. There are several preserve leadership positions including the Schedule Manager, Workday Leaders, and Preserve Naturalists. Anyone interested in becoming a Preserve Leader should contact Brynna Strand at brynna.strand@tnc.org in order to receive additional information about the positions.



The Preserve Leader Schedule Manager is responsible for maintaining the Preserve Steward schedules. Most stewardship preserves have schedule managers, but a few do not. The monitoring schedule is created and maintained on a regular basis, typically using Google Docs. The schedule manager will assist new Preserve Stewards on first hikes, if they wish, as they are a wealth of knowledge and history regarding the preserve. The Preserve Leader Schedule Managers typically have been a steward at a preserve for more than one year, possess excellent communication and organizational skills, and have the ability to use basic computer software.

As a steward, you will receive access to the schedule where you can add your name to the week that you wish to monitor.



Photo by Preserve Steward Brooke Runnion

PRESERVE LEADERS

As a Preserve Leader, you may also choose to lead large workdays (up to 10 volunteers) at the preserve as needed. Larger workdays could include trail infrastructure projects, invasive species removal, nature hikes, etc. Working with TNC staff, Workday Leaders will organize workdays, determine objectives and safety requirements, and supervise volunteers. If interested in becoming a workday leader, TNC staff can work with you to get the required first aid and youth certifications.



Those that would be a great fit for a Preserve Leader have been a steward for at least 1 year, possess excellent communication skills, and possess great organization skills. Preserve Leaders must have a First Aid Certificate and be TNC Youth Safety Qualified. An additional skill, that is not required, is to be a part of Master Naturalist and be familiar with iNaturalist. These skills are transferable into teaching and informing other stewards about the geology, ecology, flora and fauna of the preserve.



(Top Right): Chicken of the Woods, Sabine Scholes ©
 (Top Left): Trout Lily, Don Coram ©
 (Bottom Left): Volunteer Workday, Brynna Strand ©
 (Bottom Right): Monarch Butterfly, Keith Navia ©

PRESERVE STEWARDS

Preserve Stewards visit the preserve and perform a monitoring hike approximately 4-6 times a year on a regular, rotating calendar schedule. When performing a monitoring hike, stewards should look for and report any of the following items: maintenance needs, downed trees, fallen branches, kiosk needs, broken signage, overgrowth of plants, noting condition of parking area, erosion on trails, trespassing, or any general preserve needs - don't forget to listen for bird song and take in the flora, fungi and fauna!



Stewards are an integral part of the TNC stewardship program acting as the eyes and ears at our stewardship preserves. Preserve stewards will work with the Schedule Manager to sign up for weeks during which they are available to hike. Our goal is to have the preserve visited at least once a week.

It is not required, however stewards may bring with them on their monitoring hike hand tools such as: loppers, weed whacker, string trimmer, leaf blower, chainsaw, or clippers to perform basic trail maintenance. If hand tools are used, safety is our number one concern and using proper body mechanics and proper PPE is highly suggested.

Once a monitoring hike has been completed, steward should complete the monitoring report form. All forms should be sent to: vapreservestewards@tnc.org and CC your preserve leader/schedule manager (not applicable to all preserves). In your report list any maintenance needs, as previously mentioned, as well as general items to be noted at the preserve.

Being a Preserve Steward gives you the opportunity to help protect habitat for plants and animals that is quickly disappearing. Stewards will gain valuable experience in the field and have the opportunity to increase skills through potential trainings. It is also an opportunity to network with conservation-minded individuals from the community.



PRESERVE STEWARDS

To become a steward with TNC Virginia, there are a few checklist items that must be completed.

Logistical Items



Step 1



- Walk the preserve
- Read through the Preserve Steward Handbook
- Paperwork

Step 2



- Review virtual training and onboarding information
- Ask questions

Actions as a Preserve Steward



- Review prior monitoring reports
- Sign up for a monitoring hike 4-6 times per year
- Perform stewardship hikes
- Complete monitoring report and send it to **vapreservestewards@tnc.org**, CC Preserve Leader if applicable
- Communicate ideas, suggestions, questions

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The Preserve Volunteer Community is an easy way to become more involved with a preserve without performing monitoring hikes. Community Members are added to an email list to receive quarterly preserve updates and information regarding future workdays or events. Community Members are also able to learn more about the preserve and become an active volunteer.



Becoming a Community Member is a great way to learn about TNC, the stewardship preserves, and the Preserve Steward program. If you have been a Steward in the past, but do not currently have the time to commit to monitoring hikes, becoming a Community Member is a great way to stay involved with the preserve.



Photos by Community Member Doug Rogers

MONITORING HIKES

Preserve stewards are an integral part of the Stewardship Program and are the eyes and ears on the ground at our stewardship preserves. Each time a monitoring hike is performed, i.e. hiking the preserve, it will be followed with the completion of a monitoring report.

What to Look Out For:

- Condition of preserve signage
- Downed trees
- Broken structures
- Trail issues/erosion
- Kiosk needs
- Parking area conditions
- Conditions of puncheons, bridges, steps
- Overgrowth of vegetation



Preserve stewards are permitted to make repairs, remove trees from trails, weed whack, chainsaw, and perform general maintenance needs only if it is within comfort and skill levels. **It is not required to perform any maintenance needs**, it is only required to report the issues on the monitoring report form. During the summer months as a preserve steward, bringing loppers or trimmers can be useful to combat the summer overgrowth of vegetation on the trails. It is not required, or expected, that preserve stewards cut back the overgrowth, however it is useful. Stewards may also bring weed whackers or string trimmers to cut back the overgrowth.

Safety is our number one concern. If tools are brought on a monitoring hike, please remember proper body mechanics when using. **Personal protective equipment such as gloves, safety glasses, ear protection, helmet, closed toed shoes, and long pants and sleeves are highly suggested** when using any tools. Motorized tools are permitted at the preserve. Using motorized tools, such as chainsaws, in pairs is suggested for safety.

If there are signs of trespassing such as UTV/ATV tracks, please let TNC know by emailing vapreservestewards@tnc.org If there is inappropriate use of the preserve, preserve stewards do not need to confront or resolve the issue. Please let TNC know by emailing **vapreservestewards@tnc.org**.

MONITORING HIKES

There are many helpful applications to aid you in your monitoring visits, including Avenza Maps, iNaturalist, and eBird.



AVENZA MAPS

Avenza Maps is useful in noting the location of downed trees, invasive plant hot spots, or other helpful information noted during your monitoring visits.

Avenza Training



iNaturalist

iNaturalist is a great way to record plants and wildlife identified during your monitoring visits. Don't worry if you aren't sure what something is, other users will help to ID your observations.

iNaturalist Training



eBird

Similar to iNaturalist, eBird is helpful in recording bird observations and informs TNC of different bird species utilizing our preserves.

eBird Training

We encourage you to download and use all of the above apps. They will help provide TNC with valuable data, and may help you hone your plant and animal identification skills! Please explore the linked trainings, or reach out to vapreservestewards@tnc.org if you have any questions.

STEWARDSHIP AND MONITORING HIKES



Preserve Stewards will complete a Survey123 form on their monitoring visits. Survey123 is a free app you can download on your mobile device. Scan the below QR code to access the survey. Please answer the questions provided on the monitoring form, and enter locations for hazards observed such as down trees. For those that may not have a smartphone, the form can be completed after your visit on a web browser, or there is also a fillable PDF form available. **If you complete a PDF monitoring report, please send it and any photos you took to vapreservestewards@tnc.org.**

Virginia Volunteer Preserve Steward Report

Thanks for monitoring and maintaining the preserve and trails. Contact vapreservestewards@tnc.org for questions.

General Visit Information ▼

Preserve Steward Name*

Date of Stewardship Hike*

Preserve Name*

Trail or specific area visited
example: Red Trail, boardwalk only, entire trail system

Volunteer hours*

Access the Survey123 form at this link: <https://arcg.is/1b8nz50>, or by scanning the below QR Code to use it on your mobile device:



SAFETY PRECAUTIONS



In the event of a medical emergency, please call 911 immediately.

If the event does not warrant 911, use best judgement and first aid skills to determine next actions to be taken. If able to make it to the parking lot, the nearest hospital is:

- MedExpress Urgent Care
- 4903 Nine Mile Rd, Richmond, VA 23223
- Phone: 804-222-3549

The Nature Conservancy is dedicated to the protection of youth (individuals under the age of 18). TNC may ask that Preserve Stewards become Youth Certified by completing the online Commitment to Youth Safety Course and background screening. Preserve Stewards who will interact with youth as a Workday Leader more than twice in a year must complete the training.

Preserve Stewards are not permitted to drive other volunteers or visitors while representing The Nature Conservancy unless they have been Auto Safety certified by TNC. This is completed online. One of the most dangerous parts of performing a stewardship hike or helping with a workday is driving to and from the preserve. Please use caution and avoid distractions while driving.





CUMBERLAND MARSH TRAIL MAP



[Cumberland Marsh Trail Map \(link\)](#)

ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION

Cumberland Marsh has one trail and one boardwalk open to visitors. There is a gravel parking area with roughly 5 parking spots and no accessible parking spot. The boardwalk is about 100 feet away from the parking area. The path from the parking area to the boardwalk is made of crushed gravel and is about 3 ft wide with a 0% grade slope.

The boardwalk itself is about 4 ft wide and is made of wood, but has a metal mesh covering parts of the rotting wood to make the boardwalk stable. The boardwalk is in two sections that each have a slope of grade of 8% and 11%. There is a short ramp leading up to the boardwalk and it leads to a viewpoint with a bench that is 21 inches high.

The loop trail is roughly 4 miles long and begins in an open field with a grassy/plant material underfoot for less than a mile before it goes under the tree canopy and is comprised of leaf litter. The loop trail has a typical trail width of 32 inches, with a minimum width of 17 inches. The typical slope of the trail is 2%, with a maximum of 12%, and has a typical cross slope of 2.1% and a maximum cross slope of 28.7%.

Off of the loop trail, there is a scenic overlook that shows a view of the marsh. It is a short spur trail that has a big dip to get to the overlook and has a bench that is 27 inches high.

- Length of trail network: 3.9 miles
- Shortest Distance to Viewpoint: 0.09 miles
- Surface Type: Plants and Leaf Litter
- Typical and Minimum Trail Width: 32 inches, 17 inches
- Typical and Maximum Slope: 2%, 12%
- Typical and Maximum Cross Slope: 2.1%, 28.7%



OTHER WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

Connect with us on social media



Share your other skills and talents

We are always looking for fun and engaging new volunteer opportunities. If you have a special skill like photography, art, species identification, invasive removal, or anything in between, let us know!

Explore more volunteer opportunities

Check out our website to learn more about our other opportunities, like watershed cleanups, eelgrass collection, City Nature Challenge, and more.

www.nature.org/vavolunteer

Thank you for reviewing the Preserve Steward handbook!
We are so grateful for your help and dedication to conservation.
If you have any questions, please contact **vapreservestewards@tnc.org**.