

## Nassawango Creek, Worcester and Wicomico Counties



Visit Nassawango Creek swamp and discover preservation at work. This 9,953 acre preserve is one of the northernmost remaining examples of a bald cypress swamp. At the Johnson Tract, visitors can learn about the use of prescribed fire and observe the effects of clear-cutting and mass replanting. At the Paul Liefer Trail, one can walk through quaint and historic Furnace Town to learn about life in the area in the 1800s, and then go walking along a pleasant trail that showcases a healthy Bald Cypress forest (*Taxodium distichum*). There are many rare plants at Nassawango, such as 14 different species of orchids, wild azalea, spotted wintergreen, fringe tree and seaside alder (*Alnus maritima*), which is abundant locally but rare nationally. There are roughly 50 unique plant and animal species here. River otters play in the creek, and there are more than 14 species of warbler, including the golden prothonotary. In both spring and fall one can see many species of migrating songbirds. Trees that grow alongside the bald cypress include black gum, red maple, and green ash. At the Johnson Tract, visitors are greeted with the smell of pine needles under Atlantic White Cedars, which make up an evergreen canopy. These trees are generally uncommon due to draining of the wetlands and because they have highly sought-after durable wood.

Alan Eckert Photography



A Spatterdock blossom, one of the numerous unique plant species here.

Throughout the Johnson Tract there are different levels of thinning and signs of the controlled burns done for restoration. On

the Paul Liefer Trail, one can observe a more intact, older forest abundant with Bald Cypress. The cypress swamp is descended from the cypress that spread north following the Ice Age some 15,000 years ago. The area has unfortunately been affected by logging, mining, and other natural resource extraction. The Conservancy has worked diligently to protect it, but these impacts will be felt for a long time.

### A Modern Forest

Some of the forest stands at Nassawango were replanted in pure loblolly pine when the Conservancy purchased them. The species is native to Maryland, but would not have been found in such abundance in upland areas without being planted. Over time, a more natural mix of shortleaf pine, oak and hickory should naturally replace the loblolly pine.

Some management work the Conservancy has done includes planting 120 native saplings, a mixture of persimmon and pin oak trees, and about 16,000 Atlantic white cedars on a former farm field at Nassawango Creek. The trees were donated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,

and are good food sources for migratory birds.

Erika Nortemann/TNC



Canoeing is one of the many activities available at Nassawango Creek.

### Visiting

- Entrance to Paul Liefer Trail is through Furnace Town Village, and can only be reached when the village is open (11am-5pm from April 1 to October 31. Entrance is free for Conservancy members and \$1.50 for nonmembers. The Johnson Tract and Prothonotary Warbler Trail are open to the public at all times free of charge.
- Canoeing and kayaking is possible at Lower Nassawango Creek.

The trees will also help reduce the instance of noxious weeds and provide better connected forests in the preserve. Another project involved stewardship staff and volunteers who worked tirelessly to thin encroaching hardwoods to make room for native vegetation deep within the preserve. There has already been a resurgence of pitcher plants, rare grasses and rare sedges growing in the bogs. Local knowledge, aerial imagery, ancillary GIS layers, and extensive field tracts have been used to gather information about the tracts and determine the appropriate locations for restoration projects. An extensive bird and vegetation survey was completed to guide further restoration work and to aid conservation partners in habitat classification efforts. Other management practices include hydrological restoration, Atlantic white cedar planting, invasive plant control, and maintenance of visitor facilities including the Liefer Trail and a canoe put-in on the creek.

### Key Elements

- Bald cypress swamp
- 14 species of orchids
- Historic Furnace Town
- Prescribed burn areas/regrowth
- 14+ species of warblers

Since 1979, the Nassawango Stewardship Committee has maintained the frontlines of the preserve and is one of the oldest volunteer committees in all Conservancy properties throughout the world. The Maryland Chapter of the Conservancy benefits from a rich array of partnerships in this area, including the the Furnace Town Foundation, the National Aquarium in Baltimore, and Salisbury University. There is also an audio tour available to enhance a visit to the preserve.

**Directions** (GPS Coordinates: 38°10'15.5"N 75°26'33.6"W)

#### From Baltimore/Washington:

Take Route 50 east across the Bay Bridge to Salisbury. From Salisbury, go south on Route 12 towards Snow Hill; run right onto Old Furnace road. Travel about a mile and Furnace Town will be on the left. Park and check in at the visitor center if it is open. The Paul Liefer Trail begins just beyond the old brick furnace at the south end of the village.



Harold E. Maide

#### Directions to the Johnson Tract:

From Baltimore/Washington, follow directions above to Route 12. After 3.8 miles, turn left onto Spearin Road and follow for 2.9 miles. Turn right onto Mount Olive Church Road and follow for 0.2 miles. Watch on the left for a pipe gate. Park outside the gate and walk along the unpaved road.

The picturesque Bald Cypress Swamp, a rarity in Maryland.

#### Directions for Canoeists and Kayakers:

From Baltimore/Washington, follow directions above to Snow Hill. Instead of turning onto Old Furnace Road, continue on Route 12 for one mile farther south and turn right onto Red House Road. After about one mile, park along the road shoulder near the designated parking sign and just before a small bridge. *If you reach a point where the road splits, you have gone too far!* Park along the side of the road where the creek goes under the bridge. Boats can be launched from this side of the creek, right by the green Nature Conservancy Nassawango Creek Preserve sign.



A Turkey Vulture, one of many types of birds found at Nassawango.

Alan Eckert Photography

### Contact

If you have any questions about visiting the preserve, please call Joe Fehr, Preserve Manager, at (410) 632-4761.