

Religious Freedom Byway



The Dove, Historic St. Mary's City

Winding through Charles and St. Mary's Counties, the Religious Freedom Byway guides travelers through some of Maryland's richest history and most beautiful landscapes. The area's intrinsic qualities, evident in the abundant historic sites, natural resources, scenic beauty and recreational opportunities along the Byway, contribute to a visitor experience and regional character unique to Southern Maryland's Western Shore. Here Native American, European, and African American histories are intertwined. Stories of differing ways of life and of establishment, displacement, bondage, political rivalry, religious conflict, cultural differences, and change are told through the region's historic sites and landscapes.

The natural resources that supported the early peoples of Southern Maryland in times of conflict and peace remain, in many cases, intact: fertile soils for farming, waterways for fishing and transport, and forests for hunting and lumber. The landscape, a mosaic of bucolic farmland, dense woodland, rolling hills, rural villages and vast waterways, possesses a scenic beauty unlike any other in the country, reinforcing the unique character of Southern Maryland.

Throughout this landscape, visitors are encouraged to engage: recreational and educational opportunities enable children and adults to learn about the nation's beginnings, experience the outdoors and appreciate the region's natural beauty. Each of these intrinsic qualities – the history, the natural resources, scenic beauty and recreational opportunities – supports the Byway themes and contributes to the Byway experience. This chapter examines the intrinsic qualities that define the Religious Freedom Byway.

3.1 Historical Context and Qualities

The western shore of the peninsula that forms Southern Maryland was the location of one of the nation's earliest colonial settlements. The region's story of early settlement over a period of 150 years in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is about the transformation of a continent. It is a story of national significance, and it is a story that is unique to Southern Maryland. Because of its significance, the historic quality is the primary intrinsic quality of the Religious Freedom Byway.

The east coast of North America was a place of human occupation for over 10,000 years before European settlers arrived on its shores. By the early seventeenth century, the Piscattaway Indians were dominant along the western shores of the Potomac River. Like other Native American tribes within the region, the Piscattaway had a well established way of life in which they carefully managed the landscape and its resources. Most Native Americans lived in temporary villages near the riverfront, where soils were fertile and wetlands provided a variety of wild foodstuffs. Fields were cleared for an agriculture of mixed crops of corn, squash, and beans. When yields fell, fields were left to revert to forest and new fields were cleared, periodically moving villages in the process. The Native Americans had established a way of life and an ecological balance radically different from that of the European settlers who arrived in the region.

George Calvert was a talented and ambitious man who served as secretary of state to King James I of England. For his services, Calvert was named Baron of Baltimore in Ireland and, with his son Cecil, he undertook a series of colonial enterprises that led to his establishment of a colony in Southern Maryland. George Calvert died before his charter to establish the Maryland colony was granted, but the project was implemented vigorously by his son Cecil, the new Lord Baltimore, in accordance with his vision.

The project was economically motivated, intended to further the family's financial interests while extending their king's dominions. The Calverts



St. Thomas Manor was acquired in 1649 under Lord Baltimore's "Conditions of Plantation." Much of the landscape still retains the patterns associated with the Manor that can be seen from this vantage point at St. Ignatius Church.

were Catholic, and in Episcopal England they, along with other Catholic aristocracy, trod a fine line in avoiding persecution. In creating a colony, they faced extraordinary political and practical difficulties. Their vision was a colony comprised of a system of manors, similar to those that existed in England, where lords (primary investors) ruled over a land area and the colonists they imported to work their land. Through the worker's loyalty to their lords, and the lord's loyalty to their proprietor, a stable and economically profitable social system would be created.

The Calverts looked to their wealthy Catholic peers to invest in the new endeavor, seeking to attract the younger sons who would not inherit family lands in England. Because they were led by Catholics, they took every measure to demonstrate that they and their colony were fervently loyal to the king and to England, not to the Pope. To this end, they recruited the Jesuits, independent and controversial in the eyes of Rome, to participate in their effort.

Most significant to the advance of western ideas, the Calverts introduced the concept of the division of church and state into the new world and into western political discourse. In their colony, all Christians would be free to exercise their freedom of belief, and government would be free of religious influence. This practical measure was intended to help prevent religious rivalry in the colony and fear at court that Catholicism would be promoted as the religion of the colony.

In implementing their vision, things did not go so smoothly. Recruitment was difficult. Fewer investors were signed-on than were sought. Fewer common colonists were found than were hoped for. Lord Baltimore's initial colonists landed on the shores of Southern Maryland in 1634. Over the next fifty years, the colony became established and slowly expanded. Grants for numerous manors were issued, averaging approximately 3,000 acres each, concentrated upon the western shores of the Potomac River in the landscape traversed by the Religious Freedom Byway. Initially, manors were granted to individuals who would invest in the enterprise and import settlers to work their lands. Later, grants were awarded to relatives, friends, officials, and those who had performed services for the colony.

The Piscattaway peoples at first may have welcomed the new colonists as a military balance to the threats of harassment by tribes further west. In any case, the degree of conflict between Native Americans and colonists that occurred elsewhere along the east coast did not occur in Maryland. Soon, however, the new diseases brought by the colonists decimated the Piscattaway population.

The colonists, however, were also subject to new diseases to which they had not been exposed. The wetlands and swamps of the river lowlands were unhealthy to the Europeans, a problem not experienced in upland colonies, such as those in New England. Called "seasoning," new colonists were subject to a period of exposure to disease to which many succumbed, severely slowing the expansion of their population. Manor lords recruited young males to work their lands as indentured servants, usually for a set period of five years, after which time they would be free to leave. War, economic decline, and disease at home during the mid-1600s drove many to risk the venture.

It was not easy. Hard manual work, isolation, and early death were common. Stable family groups were slow to develop in early Maryland. The period of servitude, exposure to "seasoning," the small number of women, and risk of early death inhibited population growth and the development of a stable society as compared to other colonies. The death of one or both parents led to many mixed families and a dearth of stable family lines. It was not until the early 1700s that a second generation, resistant to the local diseases, was able to establish stable family groups.



Tobacco, once the foundation of the economy of Southern Maryland, now is seen as an endangered cultural resource. A more concerted effort is being made to preserve its legacy.

By the 1690s, circumstances had changed for English males. Prospects in England were less dire, and for those deciding to immigrate to America, the opening of Pennsylvania provided opportunities for land that did not require a period of indentured servitude. As a consequence, the flow of young males to work on the plantations in Southern Maryland slowed and dried up. In its place, landowners began to purchase African slaves to satisfy their need for laborers. For a period, indentured servants and slaves worked side-by-side. By about 1700, however, slavery had become a necessity of the plantation economy.

Tobacco was the economic foundation of life in Southern Maryland. The prospects and fortunes of landowners and workers ebbed and flowed with the stability of the tobacco markets in Europe. When the markets were strong, they prospered, or at least survived. When markets were weak or disrupted by war, growth slowed, and many had to find other ways to make ends meet.

The landscape that was created by the colonial tobacco economy was one of modest, dispersed plantations. Sites close to the river, and therefore accessible to ships, were preferred. The best land for growing tobacco was selected for cultivation, leaving areas in between uncultivated and untended. Fields were relatively small and separated from each other and the plantation center. Servants or slaves frequently lived in small groups in the vicinity of their fields, away from the plantation house. The landowners' houses were small, ephemeral, and little better than those of their servants. The classic brick

plantation homes would not appear until the mid-1700s. Towns did not develop; the plantation was the center of economic and social life. The company of friends required a ride on horseback.

If the realities of economic life were hard, so were the realities of political and religious rivalry. In England, Lord Baltimore, was under constant pressure to protect his proprietorship from political challenges at court. His entire fortune was invested in the success of the colony, and he supported his family by serving as secretary to his father-in-law. In Maryland, his colonial assembly had a will of its own and resisted his directions. Anti-Catholic sentiment flared despite the assembly's passage of the Act Concerning Religion of 1649, legislating the separation of church and state. The growing population of Protestant workers and indentured servants in the colony did not bode well for a leadership of largely Catholic landowners. Rebellion ensued with political changes in England, and in the 1650's Lord Baltimore lost control of his colony for several years. In 1689, Protestants took over the colonial government for good, and the colonial capital was moved to Annapolis. Lord Baltimore's policy of religious tolerance was ended, and the Episcopal Church was established as the government supported church.

By the early 1700s, the early settlement period was over. Second generation residents were acclimated to the local diseases, family groups were stabilized, the population was growing, and agriculture was diversifying. A workforce of slave labor remained the underpinning of the agricultural economy. The early manors did not survive as the centers of powerful families; land changed hands. Some manors were sold off immediately; some were sold in pieces over a generation; others were divided by inheritance. Maryland became a stable colony, and the citizens of Southern Maryland became active participants in the affairs of the colony and the emerging nation.

The story of the settlement of Southern Maryland is the story of the Potomac River landscape. Manors, plantation sites, tobacco fields, wharfs, and other features of the early landscape were selected based upon desirable landscape characteristics. Very little of the built environment remains from the early settlement period, but many early settlement sites are well known, and many early sites developed into established eighteenth century plantations with built resources that survive today. Historic St. Mary's City has undertaken significant archeological



Historic St. Mary's City, Chapel reconstruction

investigations of its seventeenth century settlement and reconstructed period buildings for interpretation and education. But there are many other places where the stories can be told. Each early manor has a story that traces the changes that occurred in the colony over the 150 years of its development. Publicly accessible sites within former manors can be used to tell these stories. Plantation sites are found all along the Byway.

Established interpretive sites such as Thomas Stone National Historic Site, Sotterley Plantation, and Smallwood's Retreat House tell the story of successive generations and their occupation of the land. Churches are particularly significant, both as places to tell the stories of manors and plantations, and as places to interpret the religious tensions and conflict that threatened and overwhelmed the early settlement. The stories of individuals buried in historic cemeteries can be used to relate the experiences of their families. Natural areas along the Byway can tell the story of the natural landscape and the occupation and management of the landscape by Native Americans. Specific recommendations for interpreting the Byway are included in the Interpretation and Education chapter of this Byway Management Plan.

The historic and cultural landscape along the Byway continue to reflect the values that shaped it from the Colonial settlement period. In addition to these broad landscapes, a number of historic sites have been recognized for their significance. These sites are identified on Map 4, [St. Mary's County Cultural Resources](#), and Map 5, [Charles County Cultural Resources](#) located in Appendix 1, Inventory Maps.

3.2: Cultural Quality

The cultural intrinsic quality of the Religious Freedom Byway is closely related to and supportive of the historic quality. The transformation of the landscape from Native American occupation to English European tobacco plantations draws contrasts and distinctions between three radically different cultural groups and traditions: the Native American Piscattaway and related tribes, the English colonists, and the African slaves that were eventually imported to work the plantations.

Like most of eastern North America, the western shores of the peninsula that comprises Southern Maryland have a long history of Native American occupation spanning over 10,000 years. The evolution of Native American peoples through the Paleoindian, Archaic, and Woodland periods traces their cultural and social responses to changing environmental conditions within the region. In the centuries before European colonization, the Native Americans in the Chesapeake region developed agriculture, permanent year-round settlements, and complex social structures. Tribes interacted with other regional populations in trade and in conflict, and a blending of Native American cultures evolved within the Chesapeake area.

The contrast with English European cultural systems could not have been more marked. Land ownership, intensive agricultural production for export, religious systems, governance, and technology are just a few of the many dramatic differences that mark the distinction between the Native American and European cultures as they clashed along the shores of the Potomac. Decimation by disease and the overwhelming influx of new settlers occupying land in the Maryland colony resulted in the inevitable and relatively quick domination of European culture over Native American culture. The introduction of African slaves into the English plantation system added a critical new cultural element that proved extremely important to evolving American history and culture. These contrasting cultural systems are evident today in the history of the region, in remaining built and archeological sites, and in the remaining social groups and institutions in Southern Maryland today.

3.3 Archeological Quality

Archeological sites are of great importance to the understanding and interpretation of the Religious Freedom Byway. The Byway's period of interpretation extends from prehistoric occupation, through initial English settlement in 1633, to the end of the colonial period as marked by the American Revolution. The subjects of interpretation are the changes that occurred over successive generations as colonization was established. Native American occupation diminished and all but disappeared, and an English tobacco plantation system developed on the land. Over the period of the seventeenth century, colonial settlement was an arduous endeavor yet was persistently pursued. In the eighteenth century, the colony blossomed into an established, successful community that was fully engaged in national affairs.

Historic resources from the early settlement period exist today primarily as landscape and archeological sites. The ephemeral nature of early construction and the shifting circumstances that occurred in ownership and occupation of the land resulted in the disappearance of early built resources. Nonetheless, sites related to both Native American occupation and colonial settlement exist throughout the Byway landscape, from Point Lookout at the southeastern tip of the peninsula to Smallwood's Retreat at the northwest end of the Nanjemoy loop. St. Mary's City is widely recognized for its archeological significance. Sites such as Friendship Farm Park and Port Tobacco are less well known but are also rich in their potential to tell the story of Maryland's colonial history. Archeological sites will be instrumental in the interpretation of the Religious Freedom Byway.

The archaeological richness of this landscape is portrayed on Map 4, [St. Mary's County Cultural Resources](#), and Map 5, [Charles County Cultural Resources](#) located in Appendix 1, Inventory Maps. The large grids shown on the map indicate the presence of archaeological sites (exact locations not shown). From a regional perspective, there are tremendous opportunities to learn more about this rich archaeological heritage. Two sites in particular are nationally significant in this regard, Historic St. Mary's City, recognized as a National Historic Landmark, and Port Tobacco.

Historic St. Mary's City broadly interprets the rich archaeological heritage of Southern Maryland through a range of programs that are accessible to the

public, as well as researchers from around the world through a program originally established in 1971. According to the National Park Service St. Mary's City is "probably the most intact 17th-century English town surviving in our nation...represented entirely by archaeological resources" (<http://www.stmaryscity.org/arcaeology.htm>). Archaeological research at HSMC has resulted in the following interpretive sites now open (or soon to be open) to the public.

- The Chapel is being reconstructed on its original foundations, and adjacent exhibits will help tell the significant story of early Maryland, the birthplace of religious freedom in America.
- The Print House re-construction, furnished as a living history exhibit, opened in 2007.
- Archaeological excavation of St. John's Freehold, one of the state's most important historical sites, was recently concluded in preparation for the construction of a major new exhibit.
- Visitors are invited to watch some archaeological excavations, such as took place at the location of Garrett Van Sweringen's 17th-century inn. Van Sweringen, a Dutch-born settler, was a remarkable entrepreneur and a leader in the development of St. Mary's City. A new exhibit opened at this site opened in mid-2007.
- Activities on Tidewater Archaeology Weekend (the last weekend of July) visitors are invited to work side by side with archaeologists and are given an insider's look at the museum's collections in the archaeology lab.
- Historic St. Mary's City and St. Mary's College of Maryland host a rigorous ten-week Field School in historical archaeology, one of the premier field schools in the country.

Another very significant resource, but one perhaps less known, is the Port Tobacco Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. According to the National Register listing:

"In the context of lower Southern Maryland, Port Tobacco is a singularly unique cultural resource. Believed to be the region's oldest continuously occupied site, it was Charles County's largest and most important town from the late 17th century through to the end of the 19th century, and from 1727 until 1895, its seat of government."

Also from the listing:

"Port Tobacco's history and physical development is



Reconstructed Courthouse at Port Tobacco

remarkably well documented in the county's archives and other historic documents. This information, in combination with its large number of known building sites, supports the conclusion that it is an archeological resource of inestimable value whose continued study will greatly advance our knowledge of the material culture of the Chesapeake region.”

Although, according to the NR listing, “little now remains to recall the town's former existence,” two architecturally significant 18th century buildings survive. The 1819/21-1892 courthouse was reconstructed on its original site in 1972, and is open as a museum for school groups and others. The Port Tobacco Archaeological Project, sponsored by the Archeological Society of Maryland, Maryland Historical Trust, the Society for the Restoration of Port Tobacco, the Southern Maryland Heritage Area Consortium, and Preservation Maryland, is leading the efforts for its preservation and interpretation.

3.4 Scenic Quality

The Religious Freedom Byway guides visitors through the scenic landscape of Southern Maryland. Although predominantly rural, Southern Maryland also features mature forests, waterways, historic sites and period architecture, all of which contribute to a rich visual experience along the Byway. Though much of this experience occurs while driving along the roadway, points of interest along the Byway route contribute to the region's scenic quality and enhance the traveler's visual experience.

The roadways that compose the Religious Freedom Byway are primarily two-lane rural roads. Despite the relatively consistent traffic patterns and road widths, the roadway experience varies greatly. Along the Nanjemoy Loop, the viewshed is narrow due to the mature forests that line the roadway. At times, travelers can see far ahead within this narrow viewshed, while at other times, gently rolling topography or a curve in the road limits the sight distance. At Pope's Creek, travelers heading south come around a curve and out of a wooded stretch to face open views of the Potomac River. As the Byway skirts the shore, travelers can see Virginia on the other side of the river, but as the Byway abruptly turns inland, the river view disappears.

As is the case at Pope's Creek, further down the Byway the open vistas come and go. From Allen's Fresh to Point Lookout, the roadway often seems expansive, because of the wide open vistas on either side. Yet this sense of openness is frequently interrupted by stands of mature forest and hedgerows dividing the rural landscape. Along these stretches the views are very narrow and focused but equally beautiful.

While the drive along the roadway itself offers scenic views and a stimulating visual experience, several specific sites along the Byway contribute to the region's scenic quality:

- Friendship Farm Park offers tranquil views of the marshlands along Nanjemoy Creek, and the Bald Eagles soaring down to their nests evoke a sense of serenity.



View from Friendship Farm Park

- The Thomas Stone National Historic Site has preserved the beauty of a colonial plantation. From the entry drive, visitors can look across the open field at Thomas Stone’s house standing in front of a backdrop of mature forest.



Manor House at Thomas Stone National Historic Site

- MD 234 at Allens Fresh teases travelers with views of Zekiah Swamp that extend for miles to the north and south of the Byway.



Open view of Zekiah Swamp from Budds Creek Road

- Further south, St. Ignatius Church, standing atop a 120-foot bluff in Chapel Point State Park, offers picturesque views of the Potomac and Port Tobacco Rivers.



View from Cemetery at St. Ignatius, St. Thomas Manor

- Driving along the Byway visitors are welcomed to St. Mary’s City by views of the College and St. Mary’s River.



Approaching St. Mary’s College



Each byway branch, including Cobb Island (below left), St. Clement’s Island (see page 7), Piney Point, St. George’s Island (below center) and Point Lookout State Park (below right) offers exquisite views of the Potomac River and in some cases, Chesapeake Bay.

3.5 Recreational Qualities

As it winds along Southern Maryland's Western Shore, the Religious Freedom Byway provides access to a wide variety of recreational opportunities. From hiking quiet woodland trails, to boating or paddling on the numerous creeks and rivers, Charles and St. Mary's Counties offer activities to suit just about everyone. These activities are closely tied to the region's natural resources; consequently, they play a significant role in creating a visitor experience unique to Southern Maryland and enhancing the quality of life in local communities.

Recreational Opportunities

The Religious Freedom Byway provides direct access to the following significant recreational opportunities:

- recreational resources directly related to Western Shore Maritime, including sea kayaking, sailing, paddling, and motorboating;
- recreational resources directly related to hunting and fishing in the mid-Atlantic region;
- bicycling along trails within Southern Maryland that serve as a destination for the greater mid-Atlantic region.

Each of these is described in greater detail in the following section.

Bicycling

For those interested in leaving their cars behind and exploring the Byway at a slower pace, gently rolling topography and lightly traveled two-lane roads provide ideal bicycling opportunities. Along the more heavily traveled stretches of the Byway, wide shoulders provide room for cyclists to ride safely in most places. Six of the twelve Southern Maryland Bicycle Routes – published loops varying in length from 7 to 58 miles, each guiding cyclists to different natural and historic sites – are located either directly on or adjacent to the Religious Freedom Byway. Among these, the Naturally Historic Route follows the Byway route almost exactly, along shady, narrow, tree-lined roads with a few challenging hills to make things interesting. At the other end of the Byway the very flat To the Point Route also mirrors the Byway from St. Mary's City to Point Lookout, the southernmost tip of St. Mary's County, and then turns off at Ridge, returning to St. Mary's City along Three Notch Road. Each year in May, for those interested in a different type and speed of cycling, the Patuxent Velo Cycling Club hosts the Leonardtown Criterium,

a competitive circuit race in the heart of historic Leonardtown. This event offers advanced as well as entry level categories for beginning racers to try their hand (and legs) at the sport.



Point Lookout State Park

Water Sports

The unique geography of Southern Maryland provides water enthusiasts with a wide variety of places and ways to enjoy and interact with the many creeks, rivers, and bays along the Byway. Some of the many marine activities people enjoy in this area include

- kayaking,
- sea kayaking,
- canoeing,
- sailing,
- motor boating,
- bass fishing,
- marine fishing, and
- scuba diving.

Paddling, whether in a kayak or canoe, is perhaps the best way to experience some of the area's natural, historical and cultural resources. Gliding through the marshlands of the Nanjemoy Natural Resources Management Area (NRMA) in a kayak



St. Mary's River

or hugging the Breton Bay shoreline by canoe, birdwatchers can get a close look at bald eagles, great blue herons and several other species native to this region. Paddlers interested in maritime history can explore the World War I-era wooden steam ships jutting out from beneath the surface of Mallows Bay. Sea kayakers looking for adventure have easy access

to the Chesapeake Bay from Point Lookout State Park. Finally, those looking for an established path can follow water trails, such as the Potomac River Water Trail, accessible from multiple launch sites in Charles and St. Mary's Counties, or the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, equipped interpretive buoys and landings at several gateway sites.

Sailing and motor boating offer additional opportunities for recreating in and exploring the waterways along the Religious Freedom Byway. Looking downstream on the Potomac River, boaters can enjoy open views of the Chesapeake, and those who want to fish can take advantage of the Potomac's national reputation as a "world class fishery."³ Numerous marinas in both counties provide services including boat repairs, supplies, and overnight slips, and several public launches allow for easy access to the water from the Byway.



Windsurfing, St. Mary's River



Cobb Island



Parasurfing at St. George Island

For those who prefer not to man their own vessels, the Byway offers several opportunities to be a passenger on a water excursion. Visitors can explore Smith Island – Maryland's only inhabited island reachable only by boat – on Smith Island Cruises leaving from Point Lookout, or they can head out to St. Clement's Island – the first landing in Maryland by British colonists – on the St. Clement's Island Water Taxi. For a more interactive experience, visitors can spend an afternoon in the life of a Maryland waterman on *The Dee of St. Mary's*, one of the last working skipjacks in the world.

Hiking

The Byway offers a variety of hiking opportunities at several locations. While canoeing or kayaking

facilitates the exploration of the area's creeks and marshes, hiking trails enable visitors to delve into the mixed hardwood and coniferous forests along the Byway. Purse State Park, St. Mary's River State Park, the Myrtle Grove Wildlife Management Area (WMA) are among several public lands along the Byway with such trails. These hiking trails allow visitors to get close to the area's wildlife and enjoy being outdoors.

Hunting

Both upland game and waterfowl hunting are popular activities in Southern Maryland. Regulated hunting areas are designated at some of the state parks and all of the WMAs in the region. First-come permanent blinds are located at certain parks, including Purse and Chapel Point State Parks, and a practice shooting and archery range is available at Myrtle Grove Wildlife Management Area.

Recreational Facilities

The following publicly accessible facilities are available to support recreational opportunities throughout the Byway region.

State Parks

Smallwood State Park

Smallwood State Park is located in Charles County along the Byway between MD 224 and Mattawoman Creek. The park was home to the Revolutionary War officer General William Smallwood. His plantation house on the park grounds, known as Smallwood's Retreat, has been restored and is open to visitors. Also available to visitors at the 628-acre park is a marina (Sweden Point Marina), fishing pier, boat launch, picnic area, camping area, pavilions, a recycled tire playground and nature trails. Occasionally the park features craft demonstrations, military exhibitions and other special events.⁴

Purse State Park

The southern-most entity in the Nanjemoy Natural Resource Management Area (NRMA), Purse State Park is approximately eleven miles south of Smallwood State Park along the Byway, between MD 224 and Wades Bay on the Potomac River. The park is primarily hardwood forest and marshland. A

few unmarked trails that depart from a parking lot off of MD 224 wind through the forest. Forged by hunters, these trails also are enjoyed by birdwatchers and hikers. On the other side of the park, along the shore of the Potomac, a different kind of hunter can search for fossilized sharks' teeth, bones and shell fragments. This has become a popular activity at Purse State Park.

Chapel Point State Park

Situated on the Port Tobacco River, just south of Port Tobacco, Chapel Point State Park offers a variety of recreational opportunities, all amidst beautiful river views. The waterfront area has a small beach with a small boat (i.e. kayaks, canoes, etc.) launch and paddle-in campsite (available by permit only), making it an ideal fishing spot. Along the river, hunters can take advantage of four permanent blinds, and further inland, the 600-acre park is an ideal hunting ground for squirrels, rabbits, white-tailed deer and wild turkey. In addition, the park has three hunter parking areas and a small universally accessible hunting area.

St. Clement's Island State Park

On November 23, 1633, a small group of colonists set sail from England on two ships, *The Ark* and *The Dove*. On March 25, 1634, they reached the Potomac River, landing on a small island they named St. Clement's Island in honor of the patron saint of mariners. Today the island is a state park, distinguishing itself from the other parks in Charles and St. Mary's Counties as the only park accessible only by boat. A water taxi transports visitors to and from the island, while more extensive boat tours are offered by the Potomac River Museum on weekends. Once on the island visitors can hunt, fish, hike any of the numerous trails on the island, or enjoy the water views over a picnic in one of the pavilions.

St. Mary's River State Park

St. Mary's River State Park covers two sites at the northern end of the St. Mary's River watershed. Between the two sites, the park contains a wide range of habitats, including woodlands, swamps, streams and a lake. The 250-acre lake, St. Mary's Lake, is the natural focal point of Site 1. Encircled by a 7.5 mile trail, the lake is not only a popular freshwater fishing site, but a popular hiking, biking and horseback riding destination as well. Site 1 also offers a comfort station, picnic tables, playground,



St. Mary's Lake

boat launch ramp and parking lot. In contrast, Site 2 is relatively undisturbed. At 2,200 acres, this site is a management hunting area containing white-tailed deer as well as a variety of small game.

Point Lookout State Park

Jutting out into the Chesapeake Bay at the southern tip of St. Mary's County, Point Lookout State Park offers recreation amidst the county's most beautiful bay views. Here visitors can swim, fish, boat and hike. The park offers amenities including camp sites and cabins, a camp store, picnic area, playground, hiking trails, the Marshland Nature Center, and the Point Lookout Lighthouse, erected in 1830. In addition, the Civil War Museum commemorates the park's history as the site of a prison that held at least 52,264 Confederate soldiers during the Civil War.

State Forests, WMAs and NEAs

Myrtle Grove Wildlife Management Area

Situated at the northern end of the Byway, the 1,723-acre Myrtle Grove Wildlife Management Area is composed primarily of hardwood forest. Oaks, hickories, maples, sycamores, poplars and beech provide habitat to a variety of woodland wildlife. Likewise, a few wetlands provide habitat to fish, turtles and a variety of waterfowl. While some of these wetlands are natural, waterfowl also flock to man-made wetland areas, called "greentree" reservoirs: areas that are deliberately flooded in the fall and winter. In addition to bottomland forest and wetland, approximately 15 acres are "kept in wildlife

plantings and early succession to provide habitat and food for upland wildlife.”⁵ Such diverse habitats provide great opportunities for birdwatching, nature photography and hunting. In addition, visitors can take advantage of the firearm shooting range, trap range, and three-station archery range with a permit.

Chicamuxen Wildlife Management Area

Just west of the Myrtle Grove Wildlife Management Area, the Chicamuxen Watchable Wildlife Center is composed of 381 acres of prime marshlands, upland forested areas and agricultural fields. Once the site of a Civil War encampment, today the Wildlife Center is home to a variety of waterfowl, including black ducks, gadwall, mallards, bufflehead, wood ducks and bald eagles. Birdwatchers and hikers can enjoy the diverse wildlife while walking the many trails that traverse the site. Hunters, too, find recreational opportunities here, hunting white-tailed deer or ducks from the waterfowl blinds.

Doncaster Demonstration Forest

Centrally located in the middle of the Nanjemoy Loop, the Doncaster Demonstration Forest covers 1,477 acres, straddling MD 6, 13 miles west of La Plata. Visitors to the forest find yellow poplars, sweet gums, red and white oaks and pine trees. Home to a diverse wildlife population, the forest attracts hunters. With several miles of trails, the forest also appeals to hikers, horseback riders, bikers and cross country skiers.

Mattawoman Natural Environment Area

Just south of Indian Head in Charles County, at the mouth of Mattawoman Creek, the Mattawoman Natural Environment Area occupies 1,916 acres of forest and wetland. Host to bald eagles, red-headed woodpeckers, warblers, butterflies and dragonflies, the NEA attracts bird watchers and nature lovers. Currently railroad tracks traverse a portion of the site; however, an October 2000 study by Fermata Inc. recommends that the railroad bed be converted to a hiking and biking trail, and where the railroad abuts the edge of waterbodies or wetlands, boardwalks or viewing platforms be constructed to accommodate bird watchers.⁶



Nanjemoy Natural Resource Management Area

Zekiah Swamp Natural Environment Area

At 20 miles long and 3.4 miles wide, Zekiah Swamp is a significant natural resource in Charles County.⁷ The Natural Environment Area is a 434-acre site located at the confluence of Zekiah Swamp Run with the Wicomico River. Nationally recognized and protected, the swamp provides habitat to a variety of wildlife and plant species. Consequently, it is a popular destination for anglers, kayakers, canoeists and birdwatchers hoping to catch a glimpse of the least bittern, king rail, short-eared owl, and seaside sparrow that reside here.⁸

Nanjemoy Natural Resource Management Area

In addition to Purse State Park, the Nanjemoy Natural Resource Management Area (NRMA) includes several sites north of Purse: the Ben Doane Area, the Mallows Bay Area, the Wilson Farm Area, the Douglas Point SRMA and the Douglas Point Area. Situated along six miles of MD Route 224 and totaling 1,921 acres, these sites offer a variety of natural, historical and recreational resources.⁹ Like Purse State Park, Douglas Point is rich with wildlife and diverse plant species. Hiking and multi-use trails wind through the Douglas Point Area and SRMA, a portion of which is part of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail. In addition, the Douglas Point SRMA contains the Chiles Homesite built in 1798 by Francis Shepard and home to the Reverend William J. Chiles from 1841 through 1874.¹⁰

Similarly, the Mallows Bay Area contains both natural and historical resources. The Bay is home to at least 152 wooden EFC steamships built between 1817



Piney Point Lighthouse Museum and Park

and 1820 and abandoned off the shores of Charles County between 1924 and 1929. Today, the aquatic plants and animals of the Bay have claimed the steamship remains, and unique ecosystems thrive in the sunken hulls. Portions of the ships protrude out of the water, creating islands that have been overrun with vegetation and offer sanctuary to the region's birds, including herons, osprey and bald eagles. Kayakers and canoeists can weave in and out of the wreckage, exploring the natural and man-made elements of this environment.

Museums and Educational Centers

The byway hosts a number of small museums and education centers that also offer passive recreational opportunities, such as a nature trail or non-motorized access to water.

Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Center

The Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Center is a outdoor learning facility serving the Charles County school system. Located on a 10-acre site on Nanjemoy Creek, the facility offers educational programming for school groups in a natural environment. The site features an aquatics lab, observatory, apiary, nature trails, 100-foot pier and boardwalk through Gut Marsh, as well as cabins and an enclosed dining pavilion for overnight stays.

Piney Point Lighthouse Museum and Historic Park

Fourteen miles upstream from the mouth of the Potomac River, the Piney Point Lighthouse was built in 1836 and retired by the United States Coast Guard in 1964. It was known as the 'Lighthouse of

Presidents' because several American presidents, beginning with James Madison, spent their summers on Piney Point. Today the lighthouse, a bell tower constructed in 1880, the lighthouse keeper's dwelling and several outbuildings built in the 1950s still occupy the site. One of these outbuildings, a chief petty officer's garage, has been converted into the Piney Point Lighthouse Museum. Exhibits in the museum chronicle the construction and operation of the lighthouse and document the role of the United States Coast Guard. The six-acre county park is open seven days a week from dawn until dusk, and the museum is open six days a week (closed on Wednesdays) from noon until 5:00 PM, May through October.¹¹

St. Clement's Island Museum

Situated on Coltons Point, across from St. Clement's Island, the St. Clement's Island Museum tells the story of the English colonists who reached the Potomac River in their two small ships, *The Ark* and *The Dove*. Exhibits in the museum document Maryland's beginnings as a colony founded in the spirit of religious toleration. Additional exhibits trace the region's rich river heritage, featuring the crabbing, fishing and oystering industries. The museum is open seven days a week from April through September and Wednesday through Sunday October through March.

Regional, County and City Parks

In addition to the numerous state parks, wildlife management areas, and educational facilities, Charles and St. Mary's Counties boast just as many regional, county and local recreational resources.

For nature enthusiasts, Friendship Farm Park offers a variety of recreational opportunities. Located in Charles County along Nanjemoy Creek, the park includes marshland rich with wildlife. These marshes are popular nesting sites for Bald Eagles, and consequently, are popular among birdwatchers as well. A county-owned boat ramp provides easy access to the creek for canoeists and kayakers to enjoy scenic views and the area's rich wildlife from the water, while a fishing pier provides access to the water for those who prefer to stay grounded.



Friendship Farm Park

Like Friendship Farm Park, Gilbert Run Park offers scenic views, trails and water activities. Located in Charlotte Hall in Charles County, the park features woodlands laced with hiking and nature trails. A 60-acre freshwater lake – equipped with a boat ramp – provides opportunities for canoeing, kayaking or rowing, and fisherman can catch bass, bluegill, trout and catfish from the fishing piers or small boats (electric motors only).¹²

In addition to enjoying the natural environment, visitors to the Byway can take advantage of numerous athletic facilities and other opportunities for active recreation. In southern Charles County, Southern Park features ball fields, a playground and tennis courts. In La Plata, Laurel Springs Regional Park offers baseball, softball, football and soccer fields, as well as a running/walking trail that follows the perimeter of the park. In St. Mary's County, numerous parks along the Byway offer soccer fields, basketball and tennis courts, and baseball diamonds. These include Chancellor's Run Regional Park (Great Mills, MD), Seventh District Park (Bushwood, MD), Miedzinski Park (Leonardtown, MD) and Cecil Park (Valley Lee, MD). Along MD Route 235, which roughly parallels the Byway, several other parks offer additional athletic and recreational facilities: Fifth District Park in Charlotte Hall; Chaptico Park in Mechanicsville; Dorsey Park in Hollywood; St. Andrews Estates Park, Myrtle Point Park and Town Creek Park in California; and Nicolet Park and Jarboesville Park in Lexington Park.

3.6 Natural Quality

Stretching nearly 190 miles, it is not surprising that the Religious Freedom Byway takes travelers through a variety of natural environments containing numerous unique natural resources. These environments include natural forests, marshes and wetlands, coastal bays, and streams, each of which supports diverse plant and animal populations. At times, the Byway cuts through woodlands or marshes, where trees and dense undergrowth creep up to the edge of the roadway. Immediately adjacent to the roadway, these forests and bogs become part of the Byway driving experience. At other times, these natural resources are more secluded and not immediately visible from the roadway. In each situation, visitors are encouraged to explore these more remote areas in a canoe, on a bike ride, or on a hike, discovering the Byway's natural resources and engaging with its diverse wildlife, plant species and habitats.

Rivers and Streams

Numerous stops along the Religious Freedom Byway offer views of and opportunities to interact with the natural resources that make this area unique: the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Running along the last stretch of the Potomac River before it enters the Bay, the Byway provides access to several aquatic environments within this network of waterways. The most prominent, the Potomac River, is home to more than 160 fish species, some of which remain in the brackish Potomac waters year-round and some of which are migratory.¹³ Striped bass, spot, croaker, gray trout and white perch are among those that spawn in the Potomac while several anadromous fish species such as shad and herring migrate to the fresh waters of the Potomac's tributaries to spawn.¹⁴

Given the ecological importance of these tributaries, several have been designated Natural Heritage Areas by the State of Maryland. In Charles County these include Allen's Fresh, Popes Creek, Chicamuxen Creek and Upper Nanjemoy.¹⁵ In St. Mary's County, McIntosh Run, the largest tributary to Breton Bay, has been designated a Natural Heritage Area as well as a significant forest block by the Nature Conservancy. Here, a federally endangered



Bird nesting off the Cobb Island branch

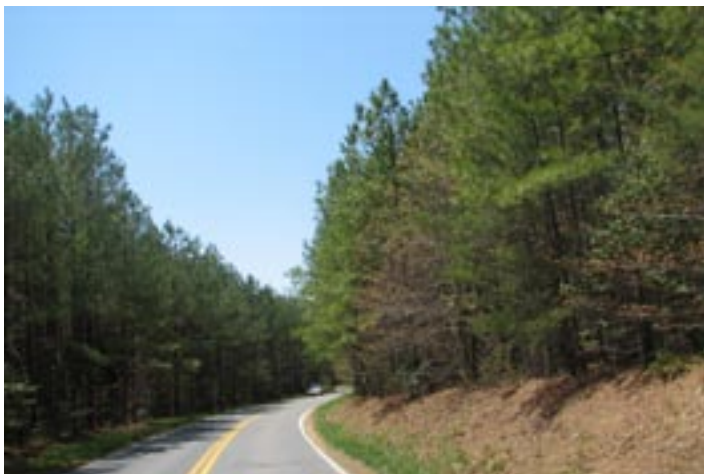
species, the dwarf wedge mussel, has developed a healthy population, and seven plants growing in the Breton Bay watershed are on the state's list of rare, threatened or endangered species. In addition to the Natural Heritage Area designation, several programs, including Tributary Strategies, Habitat Protection Areas and recovery programs focusing on specific species, aim to protect these waterways and the ecosystems they support.

Forests

The old growth forests that line the Byway host numerous bird and other woodland species. Prior to European settlement, most of Charles County was covered with forest made up "primarily of hardwoods, including oaks, chestnuts, sweetgum, yellow poplar and beech."¹⁶ Many of these woodlands were cleared for agricultural purposes during the mid-nineteenth century. Today, however, along the Nanjemoy Loop, undisturbed forest still extends out to the Potomac River shoreline. Here in the riparian forests of the Potomac River and Mattawoman Creek, bald eagles nest, making the eagle population of Charles County the second largest in Maryland.¹⁷

This woodland habitat is also home to ospreys, great blue herons, barred owls and 321 other species, including forest interior nesting birds.¹⁸ Further inland on the forest floor, white-tailed deer, squirrels, rabbits, wild turkeys and other game species make their home.¹⁹

In addition providing a habitat to a number of animal species, these woodlands are instrumental in maintaining the health of the region's waterways. These forest buffers filter pollutants, reduce erosion and slow runoff from entering streams and creeks.



Pine forest along the Nanjemoy Loop



Marsh along the Nanjemoy Loop

Furthermore, their shade helps to maintain cooler water temperatures during the warmer months. While providing habitat to woodland species, these forests protect the habitats of numerous aquatic species.

Wetlands

Interspersed among forested lands and along waterways, several swamps and marshes offer additional natural resources along the Byway. The marshes of Purse State Park provide habitat for beavers, nesting waterfowl, such as wood ducks, red-headed woodpeckers and other nesting birds, while wetlands along the Chicamuxen and Mattawoman Creeks harbor "rare and endangered species, such as the Louisiana thrush."²⁰ Recognized as an area of "unique ecological importance by the State of Maryland," the Mattawoman Creek area contains both tidal and non-tidal wetlands, each of which offers different habitats and supports different plant and animal species.²¹ The tidal wetlands in this area are of particular importance as nursery areas for a variety of fish species.

Like the Mattawoman, the Zekiah Swamp was designated an Area of Critical State concern in 1981.²² The Swamp is the largest hardwood swamp in the state and received the "highest rating of all natural areas in the Chesapeake Bay region from the Smithsonian Institution."²³ Known for their unique insect population, the headwaters of the Zekiah Swamp have yielded several specimens that are part of the Smithsonian Institution collection.²⁴ At the opposite end of the swamp, near Allens Fresh, the salty waters of the swamp mix with the fresh water of the Lower Potomac River. Here both fresh- and saltwater plants thrive.²⁵