

Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers

New Kent, King and Queen,
King William, and Hanover Counties

Total Size: 55,931 ha (138,209 acres)

Elevation: 0-53.8 m (0-176.5 feet)



IBA Criteria Met

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Season</i>	<i>Source</i>
Species at Risk	American Black Duck	3 breeding pairs in 1995. Population likely to meet threshold.	Breeding	Surveys by B.J. Paxton and B.D. Watts
Species at Risk	King Rail	Estimate of at least 300 breeding pairs	Breeding	Marsh bird surveys by B.J. Paxton and B.D. Watts and population projection by B.D. Watts
Species at Risk	Least Bittern	Estimate of at least 100 breeding pairs	Breeding	Marsh bird surveys by B.J. Paxton and B.D. Watts and population projection by B.D. Watts
Species at Risk	American Woodcock	Extensive habitat available. Population likely meets threshold	Breeding	B.D. Watts - personal communication
Species at Risk	Red-headed Woodpecker	33 individuals in 2003. Population likely exceeds threshold.	Wintering	Christmas Bird Counts
Species at Risk	Rusty Blackbird	550 individuals in 2005. Area likely to support thousands	Wintering	F. Atwood – personal observations reported in Virginia Birds
Species at Risk	Northern Bobwhite	23 individuals in 2003. Considerable habitat available. Population likely to exceed threshold.	Wintering	Christmas Bird Count
Species at Risk	Prairie Warbler	Common breeder in area and is likely to meet population threshold.	Breeding	B.D. Watts - personal communication

Species at Risk	Eastern Meadowlark	176 individuals in 2003. Population almost certainly exceeds threshold.	Wintering	Christmas Bird Counts
Species at Risk	Grasshopper Sparrow	Common breeder and habitat is extensive. Population almost certainly exceeds threshold.	Breeding	B.D. Watts - personal communication
Species at Risk	Field Sparrow	Common breeder and habitat is extensive. Population almost certainly exceeds threshold.	Breeding	B.D. Watts - personal communication
Responsibility Species Assemblage - Forest	Red-shouldered Hawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Whip-poor-will, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-pewee, Wood Thrush, Prothonotary Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler	Breeds	Breeding	References above
Responsibility Species Assemblage - Shrub	Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Kingbird, Brown Thrasher, Prairie Warbler, Field Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Towhee	Breeds	Breeding	References above
Responsibility Species Assemblage - Coastal Marsh	American Black Duck, Least Bittern, King Rail, Marsh Wren	Breeds	Breeding	References above

Site Description

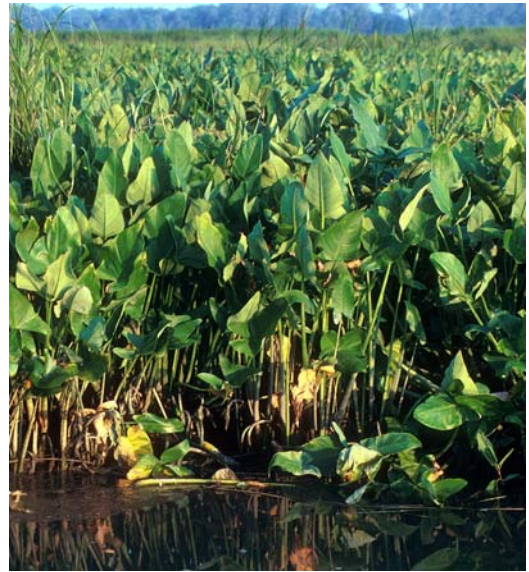
The tidal fresh reach of the York River begins near the confluence of the Pamunkey and Mattaponi Rivers and extends westward to below the crossing of Route 360. This area supports one of the largest complexes of brackish to tidal fresh marshes in North America. The surrounding landscape is home to the Pamunkey and Mattaponi Indian tribes and contains several historic plantations. Until recently, the area has experienced less pressure for residential development compared to other jurisdictions within the region. Uplands remain predominantly rural and are used for agriculture and forestry. The waterways support extensive forested wetlands.

Conservation and Management Units

The area has relatively few parcels of land within protected status with owners including The Nature Conservancy (Mattaponi River Megacomplex, Cumberland Marsh Preserve), the Pamunkey Tribe, and the Mattaponi Tribe. However, large tracts of both upland and wetland in private ownership are under progressive management for wildlife including birds.

Birds

The oligohaline (low salinity) and tidal-freshwater marshes of the lower Pamunkey and Mattaponi Rivers likely support the largest population of King Rails and Least Bitterns in Virginia. These marshes also support thousands of staging Soras and Tree Swallows during fall migration and high concentrations of waterfowl during winter. Extensive forested wetlands support several species of neotropical migrants during the breeding season such as the Prothonotary Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, and Louisiana Waterthrush, and are important stopover habitats during fall migration. These patches support large communal roosts of mixed blackbirds during the winter including the Rusty Blackbird. The waterways support significant and growing populations of Bald Eagles and Osprey. The site has not been a major area of bird research and much remains to be learned about its appropriate role in bird conservation.



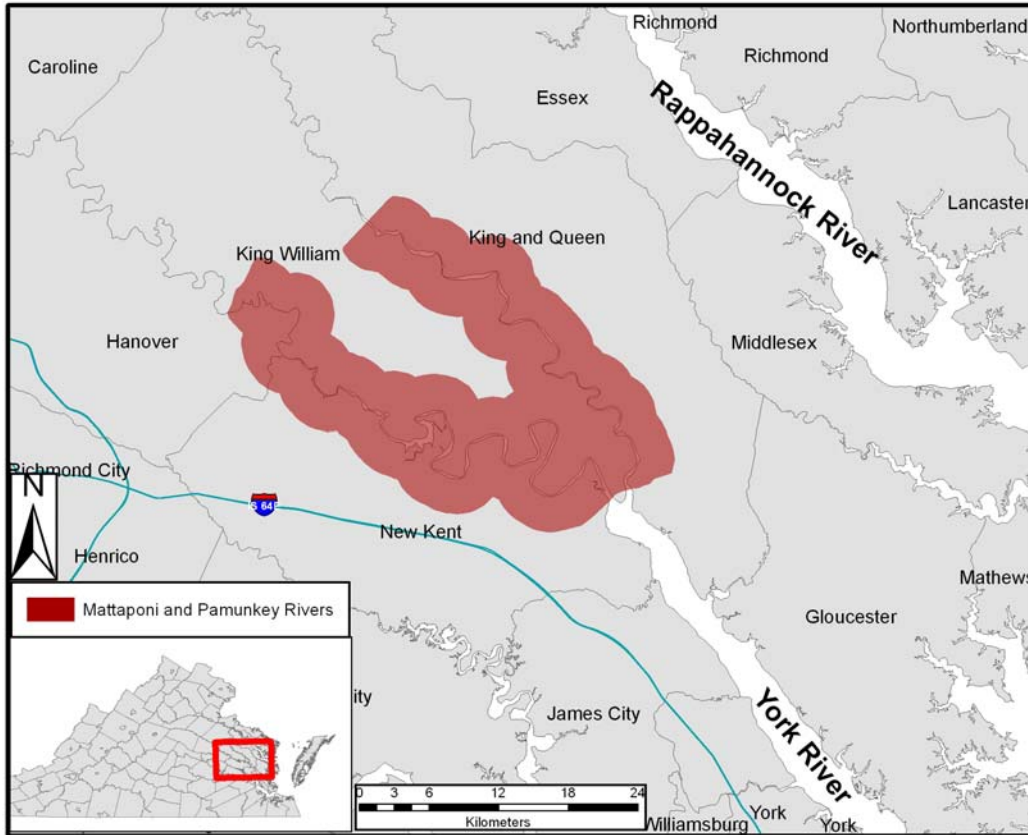
Tidal Fresh Marsh

Photo by Bryan Watts

Conservation and Threats

Two primary threats are currently of concern including 1) the loss of marshes to sea-level rise and 2) the conversion of open land to residential development. Over the past decade, the oligohaline marshes have begun to exhibit a transition in vegetational composition related to sea-level rise. Natural sediment deposition is not keeping pace with rising sea-levels causing the marsh surfaces to 'sink' and leading to a shift in the vegetation community. This drowning of the marsh will also result in a shift in the associated bird community. Because this marsh type is rare within the region, these changes will continue to be cause for concern. Until recently, the upland landscape within the area has remained rural with relatively little development pressure. Since the year 2000, however, there has been an increase in residential development, particularly along primary shorelines. Many of the species that depend on habitats within the area are sensitive to development and will be negatively impacted by increased fragmentation and disturbance.

Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers IBA Map



For more information about this and other IBAs in Virginia please visit our website at:
<http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/virginia/>

Or contact Mary Elfner, the Virginia IBA Coordinator, at:
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