



# WATER TRAILS IN CHARLES COUNTY

## Explore The Wild Side of the Potomac River

Charles County has paddling routes that range from short 1 to 2 hour trips, to all day excursions with overnight camping options. Miles of undeveloped shoreline offer unparalleled opportunities for fishing, bird and wildlife watching, and exploring the Lower Potomac and its tributaries.

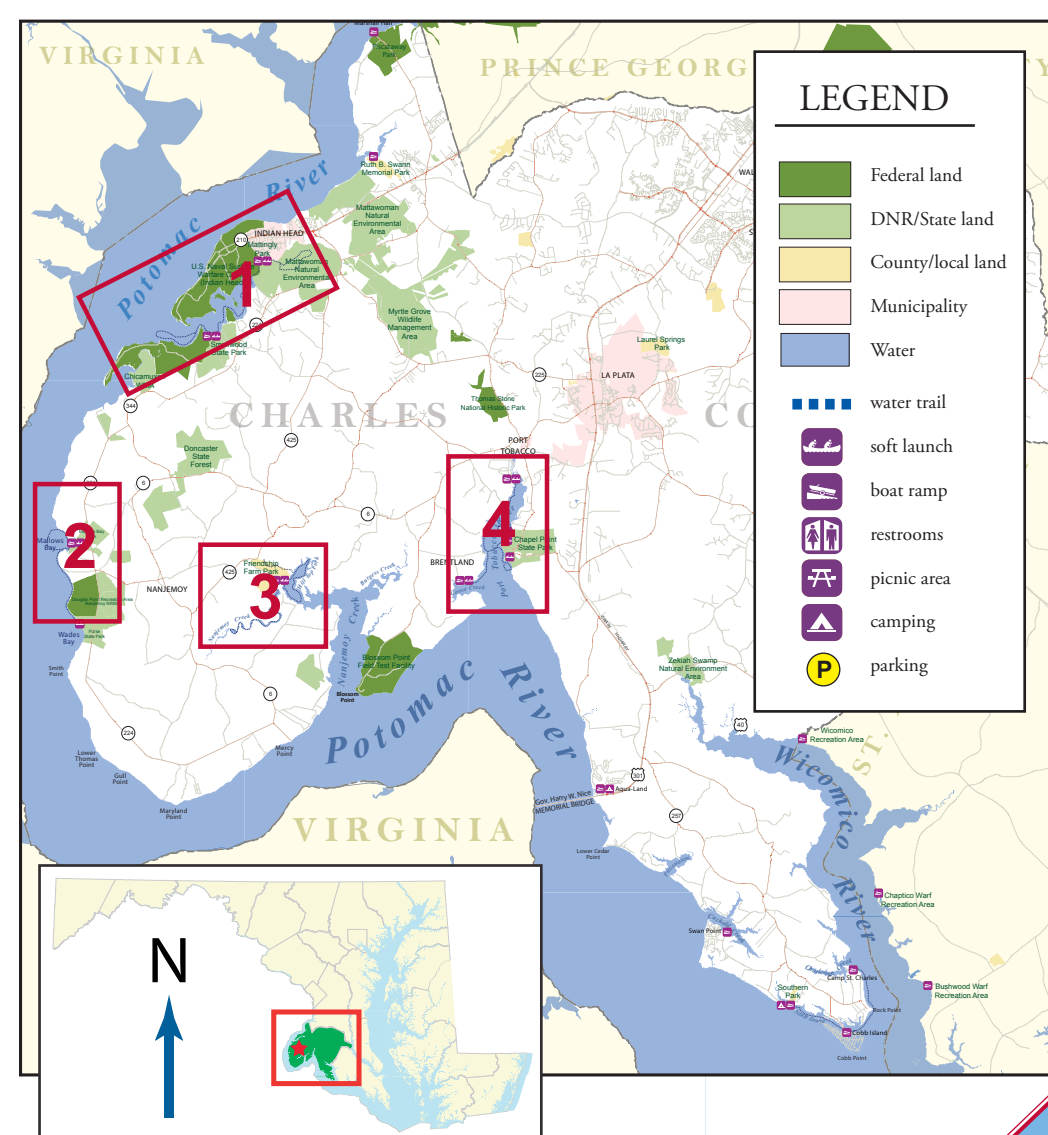
Some of the routes are in sheltered areas with moderate wind and current conditions that provide ideal conditions for novices and families. Other routes, such as those along the mainstem of the Potomac River, are more exposed and offer more challenging opportunities for experienced paddlers.

Water trails in this area support the Potomac River Water Trail, which is a federally designated National Recreation Trail that spans from western Maryland to the Chesapeake Bay. The water trail falls within the corridor of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (PHNST). To learn more about the PHNST visit [www.nps.gov/poh](http://www.nps.gov/poh).

- 1 MATTAWOMAN CREEK TRAIL
- 2 MALLOW'S BAY TO PURSE STATE PARK (LOWER POTOMAC RIVER)
- 3 FRIENDSHIP FARM PARK TRAILS / NANJEMOY CREEK
- 4 PORT TOBACCO RIVER TRAIL

These maps are meant to be used as a reference for existing public boating access sites and facilities. It is strongly recommended that you consult a range of other detailed maps, charts and supplemental information geared to your specific needs when planning for or undertaking extended excursions.

All boat launch and access site fees listed here are subject to change.



### Respect Private Property - Do Not Trespass

The water access sites on this map welcome the public but be aware that there are extensive privately-owned lands along each of the water trails. Please respect private property - don't trespass.

### ATTENTION BOATERS

Boats propelled by oars or paddles are required to carry one personal flotation device (PFD) of either Type I, II, III, or V, for each person on board, regardless of length. All motorized craft 16-65 feet must carry a Type I, II, III, or V, for each person on board, plus one extra Type IV. Persons under age 13 must wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved PFD at all times in any boat under 21 feet. (MD State Law).

Before you get on the water be sure to check Weather, Tides and River Conditions

## 1 Mattawoman Creek Trail Mattingly Park, Sweden Point and the Potomac River

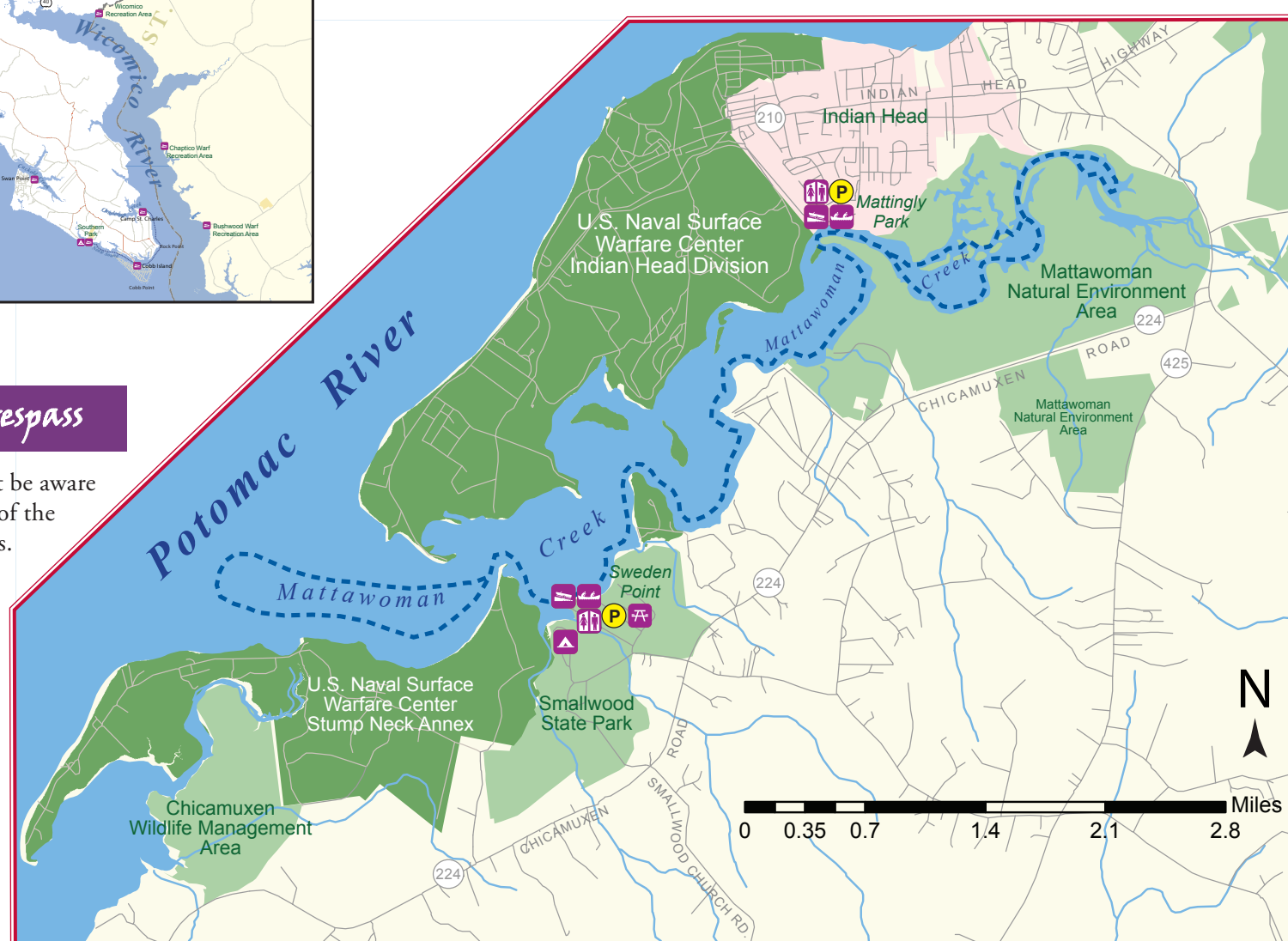
There are many ways to explore the Mattawoman Creek trail. Launch from Mattingly Park and head north to the Mattawoman Natural Environment Area (NEA). The sheltered creek is good for paddlers of all levels, and the riparian forest habitat is excellent for bird-watching. Paddlers can also follow the creek south past the U.S. Naval Surface Warfare Center to Smallwood State Park or continue on to the Potomac River. The distance from Mattingly Park downstream to Smallwood State Park, is approximately 4.5 miles and from the Park to the mouth of the Potomac River is an additional 2.25 miles. Keep in mind that the section of the trail below Smallwood is open water which is subject to wind, tide fluctuations, and variable weather conditions and is suitable for experienced paddlers only.

### Mattingly Park Boat Ramp

**GPS Location:** 38°35'24.90"N 77°9'38.86"W  
**Managed by:** The Town of Indian Head (301) 743-5511  
**Amenities:** Two lane boat ramp with boarding piers, portable toilet, picnic tables, fishing piers and trails. The large paved parking lot has spaces for cars and trailers. This access point is located along deep water in Mattawoman Creek and is most often frequented by bass boaters and other small boats.  
**Hours and fee:** \$5 access fee (pay at ramp-side honor box)  
**Directions:** Follow Indian Head Highway/Rt. 210 south approximately 18 miles from the Capital Beltway (I-95). Turn left onto Mattingly Avenue and follow to the end of road.

### Sweden Point Marina and Smallwood State Park

**GPS Location:** 38°33'30.76"N 77°11'19.62"W  
**Managed by:** Maryland Department of Natural Resources (301) 743-7613  
**Amenities:** The marina has a six-lane boat ramp, restrooms, picnic and fishing areas, campsites, trails, a seasonal concession stand and small boat rentals. Transient docking and annual leases are available for slips that can accommodate boats up to 36 feet. The parking lot is large and paved with room for 140 cars and trailers. The 628-acre park borders Mattawoman Creek less than a mile from its confluence with the Potomac River. The park is named after General William Smallwood, the fourth Governor of Maryland and a Revolutionary War officer. The plantation home is open on Sundays with limited hours. For more information visit the Park website at <http://dnr2.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/southern/smallwood.aspx>  
**Hours and fees:** Smallwood State Park is open year-round (April through October) from 5 a.m. to sunset, and (November through March) from 7 a.m. to sunset. The daily boat ramp fee is \$10 or \$60 for a seasonal pass. Day use service charges are \$3 per person on weekends and holidays, April through October; \$3 per vehicle weekdays and weekends year round (honor system in effect when toll booth is not staffed). Out-of-state residents add \$2 to all day use service charges. Headquarters Office hours (November 1, 2012 - March 31, 2013) are Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
**Directions:** Route 225 south from Indian Head to right on Route 224 (Chicamuxen Road) at Mason Springs. The Park is on the right, 4 miles south of Mason Springs.



Recreating on the water involves risks so safety and planning is of utmost importance. Even if the water looks calm, conditions on waterways are subject to rapidly changing conditions due to tides, wind and weather. Be sure to check river levels before launching. For more information call the National Weather Service at 703-996-2200.

## 2 Mallow's Bay to Purse State Park Trail Mallows Bay and the Lower Potomac River

This trail is part of the larger Lower Potomac River Water Trail, which runs from Washington, D.C., to Chesapeake Bay. Access points are few and far between here, but experienced paddlers and those who are willing to portage will be rewarded by the beautiful views and variety of habitats. Start your paddle by launching at Mallow's Bay.

Mallows Bay features one of the largest "sunken ship graveyards" in North America, with vessels dating from the period of the American Revolution. The area is home to over 100 wooden ships from of the U.S. Shipping Board Emergency Fleet, intended to carry troops and supplies to Europe during World War I. Over time, many of the ships have become small islands with their own mini-ecosystems and have converted the Bay into an area of natural and historic wonder. By law, the state owns any historic artifacts in tidal waters. State and federal officials are dedicated to preserving and protecting these resources. The loop trail around Mallow's Bay is approximately 1.5 miles long.

Those interested in an extended and more challenging paddle can head south on the Potomac River from Mallow's Bay to Purse State Park. This route is approximately 3 miles long and requires paddling on open water that is subject to tides, wind and waves. Along the way, paddlers can explore the Douglas Point Recreation Area / Nanjemoy Natural Resource Management Area (NRMA), which is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). BLM allows beach access and day-use along the shoreline which makes it an ideal resting spot for paddlers. Driftwood from the river often collects in this area so use caution when landing and exploring. Climb the bluff near the beach to see beautiful views of the river and Virginia shoreline. This 1900-acre site is contiguous to Purse State Park and Maryland Route 224. It has been labeled one of the most ecologically and culturally significant landscapes in Maryland. Migratory waterfowl, wading birds and Bald Eagles are common sights.

### Mallows Bay Park Boat Ramp and Soft Launch

**GPS Location:** 38°28'8.77"N 77°15'49.31"W  
**Managed by:** Charles County Parks Department (301) 932-3470  
**Amenities:** Boat ramp, soft launch, and portable toilet. The paved parking lot has space for 16 cars, 15 trailers, and 3 ADA accessible spaces. The park also has hiking trails, interpretive signs, and picnic areas.  
**Hours and fee:** Open year-round from 5:30 a.m. to dusk  
**Directions:** From MD Rt. 210 head south on Rt. 225 to Rt. 224 (Chicamuxen Road). Continue south on Rt. 224 which becomes Riverside Road. Turn left onto Wilson Landing Road and follow it to the end.  
**Address:** 1440 Wilson Landing Road, Nanjemoy, MD 20662

### Douglas Point Recreation Area / Nanjemoy NRMA

**GPS Location:** 38°26'58.76"N 77°15'45.65"W  
**Managed by:** U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lower Potomac Field Station (703) 339-8009  
**Amenities:** Beach access, trails, picnic area and wildlife viewing. There is a small gravel lot for this site along Rt. 224. This site has 3 miles of land trails for hiking, horse riding, and mountain biking, 548 acres of hardwood forest and marshes, picnic areas, and a universally accessible, historical interpretive walk and a hunting blind.  
**Hours and fee:** Open seven days a week year-round, from sunrise to sunset. No fee.  
**Directions:** From MD Rt. 210 head south on Rt. 225 to Rt. 224 (Chicamuxen Road) Continue south on Rt. 224 which becomes Riverside Road. The parking area is on the right (west side of Route 224) approximately 1 mile past Liverpool Point Road.

### Purse State Park

**GPS Location:** 38°25'57.54" N 77°15'24.13" W  
**Managed by:** Maryland Department of Natural Resources (301) 743-7613  
**Amenities:** Access to the water at this site requires a 1/4-mile portage along a wooded, natural surface trail. Visitors should check tides before visiting, as there is very little beach area at high tide. Parking is provided at the small gravel lot on Rt. 224, which has room for approximately 8 vehicles. Other activities at the park include beachcombing, fishing, land trails, hunting, and bird watching. The park is a 90-acre reserve located on Wades Bay, off the Potomac River and has high quality forest, marshlands and pools surrounded by moss-covered rock walls. This is an excellent place for wildlife viewing as eagles, ospreys and Great Blue Herons can be seen here. Forest interior nesting birds such as acadian flycatchers, wood thrushes, northern parula warblers, ovenbirds, hooded warblers, scarlet tanagers and the uncommon worm-eating warbler have been seen in the park and at other nearby places along Rt. 224.  
**Hours and fee:** Open year-round from sunrise to sunset. No fee.  
**Directions:** Follow Rt. 225 south from Indian Head and take a right onto Rt. 224 (Chicamuxen Road) at Mason Springs. Continue for approximately 13.5 miles. The parking lot is on left (east side of Route 224), 1.8 miles south of Liverpool Point Road.  
**Address:** 2750 Sweden Point Road, Maury, MD 20658



The sunken ships in Mallow's Bay serve as habitat for wildlife.



## 4 Port Tobacco River Trail Port Tobacco Marina to Chapel Point and Goose Creek

This trail is remote but very scenic. Start your trip at Port Tobacco Marina. This small, privately-operated marina is located in the quiet headwaters of the Port Tobacco River. From the boat ramp head south along the river. Follow the shoreline and be aware of larger motorized boats that travel the main channel and can create waves in their wake. Cross the river to reach Fourth Point, which is the prominent outcropping that marks the northwest corner of Chapel Point State Park. Follow the park shoreline south to reach the earthen boat ramp. The distance from Port Tobacco Marina to the Chapel Point launch is approximately 2.5 miles.

The quiet and secluded shoreline of Chapel Point State Park is ideal for exploring in canoes and kayaks. Chapel Point has a paddle-in campsite that is available seasonally and by permit only. Call 301-743-7613 for permit information. Short trips can be made by heading either north or south from the boat ramp, making a loop in the coves, and returning. The northern loop is a distance of approximately 1.5 miles and the southern loop is approximately 2 miles. Those wanting a longer, more challenging paddling experience can launch from Chapel Point and head south, crossing the river at Deep Point, to reach the western shore of the Port Tobacco River and continuing to Goose Bay Marina and Campground. The distance from Chapel Point boat ramp to Goose Bay Marina and Campground is approximately 2.25 miles.

### Port Tobacco Marina

**GPS Location:** 38°29'49.29"N 77°1'34.86"W  
**Managed by:** Port Tobacco Marina (301) 870-3133  
**Amenities:** This site has restrooms, a concrete boat ramp, vehicle and trailer parking in a small grass lot (on the hill). This site can get very busy on weekends during the boating season so plan ahead and visit accordingly.  
**Hours and fee:** Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily during the boating season. Winter hours are limited. There is a \$5 fee to launch from the boat ramp. All visitors must go to the office to pay the launch fee and receive a receipt.  
**Directions:** From the Town of La Plata, go west on MD Rt. 6 (Port Tobacco Road) to Shirley Blvd. and follow the signs to the marina.  
**Address:** 7610 Shirley Blvd., Port Tobacco, MD 20677



Scenic view from Chapel Point State Park



Wades Bay at Purse State Park

## 3 Friendship Farm Park Trails Nanjemoy Creek, Hilltop Fork and Church Creek

These trails provide options for paddlers of all skill levels that range from leisurely to more challenging paddling experiences. The creeks in this area feature open water and scenic marshes, abundant with wildlife, marsh plants and several species of dragonflies. Please note that all of the paddle routes here are loop trails which start and end at the boat ramp and/or kayak launch.

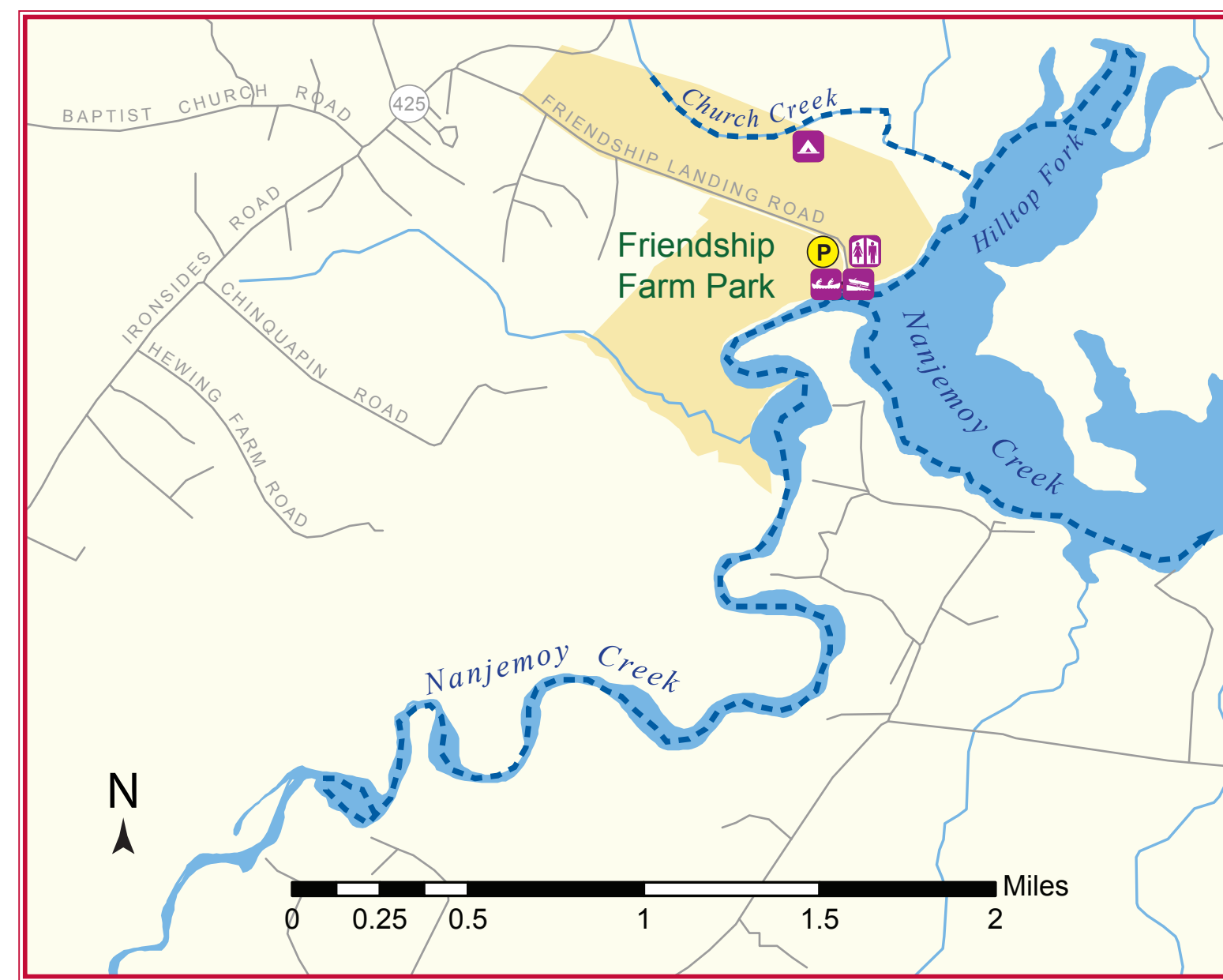
**Hilltop Fork and Church Creek:** To paddle these routes, launch and take a left (heading northeast). Follow the shoreline to your left to enter Church Creek. This route is a good choice for less experienced paddlers or those wanting a leisurely experience since the high banks provide a more sheltered area where paddlers are protected from extreme winds and rough water. The Church Creek route is approximately 2 miles round-trip. To reach Hilltop Fork continue northeast past Church Creek following the shoreline to your left. Hilltop Fork has several fingers which end in shallow waters. The round-trip route is about 4 miles long.

**Nanjemoy Creek:** To explore the meandering headwaters of Nanjemoy Creek, launch and take a right (heading southwest). This is another route that is relatively sheltered. It winds through low marshes and forested areas. The waterway is accessible for several miles but there are no support facilities or designated rest areas so paddlers need to monitor their distance. This is a loop trail so plan for your return to the launch site. Those seeking a more challenging paddle experience can head straight out from the launch into the open waters of Nanjemoy Creek and the Potomac River. It is 5 miles one-way from the launch site to the Potomac River. This distance should only be attempted by experienced paddlers.

The boat ramp and dock area are designated as "Free Fishing Zones," meaning that no fishing license is required in this area. The park also has opportunities for wildlife viewing and over seven miles of recreational trails which feature interpretive signs, benches and observation decks.

### Friendship Farm Park Boat Ramp and Soft Launch

**GPS Location:** 38°27'14.81" N 77°9'1.17" W  
**Managed by:** Charles County Parks Department (301) 932-3470  
**Amenities:** Boat ramp, fishing pier, primitive campsite, portable toilet, picnic areas,



land trails and wildlife observation decks. The parking lot is paved with space for approximately 14 vehicles and one ADA accessible space. The park is 382 acres.  
**Hours and fee:** Open year-round from dawn to dusk. No fee.  
**Directions:** From La Plata, take MD Rt. 6 (Port Tobacco Road) west to Durham Church Road. Turn left onto Durham Church Road, which becomes Rt. 425 (Ironsides Road.) Turn left onto Friendship Landing Road which will end at the boat ramp parking lot.  
**Address:** 4750 Friendship Landing Road, Nanjemoy, MD 20662



Paddlers exploring Nanjemoy Creek.

### Chapel Point State Park

**GPS Location:** 38°28'14.58"N 77°1'53.37"W  
**Managed by:** Maryland Department of Natural Resources at 301-743-7613  
**Amenities:** Portable toilet, picnic area, fishing, trails and a primitive paddle-in campsite (available by permit only). Parking at the small gravel lot is limited. The 828-acre park is located on the Port Tobacco River and is mostly natural areas with a rich diversity of forest, field, and tidal wetland habitats. Four permanent waterfowl blinds are available for observation or hunting use. The area has a small sand and gravel launch that is suitable for small boats, canoes and kayaks, and personal watercraft. Consult tide charts before visiting this area since there is almost no beach at high tide. The waterfront offers excellent fishing.  
**Hours and fee:** Open year-round from sunrise to sunset. No fee.  
**Directions:** Chapel Point is located 5 miles south of La Plata. From the MD Rt. 6 and Rt. 301 intersection, follow Rt. 301 south to Chapel Point Road. Follow Chapel Point Road west for approximately 2.3 miles to the park entrance, and follow signs to the ramp.

### Goose Bay Marina and Campground

**Managed by:** Goose Bay Marina and Campground (301) 932-0885  
**Amenities:** Goose Bay is a large privately-operated marina and campground located on the Port Tobacco River near the confluence with the Potomac River. The marina has restrooms, a three-lane concrete boat ramp that can be accessed between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m., and a large parking area. The campground has both RV and tent camping sites. Campers have access to bathhouses, the picnic pavilion, playground and swimming pool. This facility is very busy on weekends during the boating season, so plan ahead.  
**Hours and fees:** Seasonal hours are 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily. Winter hours are limited. There is an \$8 boat launching fee and a \$3 parking fee if you wish to park an additional vehicle.  
**Directions:** Follow US 301 south to the Intersection of US 301 & Rt. 6 (La Plata, MD), turn right on Rt. 6 (West) continue on Rt. 6 approx. 5.5 miles, turning left on Blossom Point Road (Goose Bay sign on roadway). Follow Blossom Point Road 1.6 miles, turning left on Brentland Road. Continue on Brentland Road 1 mile, then turn right on Goose Bay Lane. Follow Goose Bay Lane to the store (on left). Be careful, there are speed bumps on this road. For more information see [www.goosebaymarina.com](http://www.goosebaymarina.com).  
**Address:** Goose Bay Lane, Welcome, MD 20693



On the dock at Goose Bay Marina

