

## VIRGINIA SEASIDE WATER TRAIL

One of the best ways to explore Virginia's Seaside is by kayak. The Virginia Seaside Water Trail provides recommended paddling routes and trip guidance originating from several different seaside locations. Visit [virginiawatertrails.org](http://virginiawatertrails.org) to learn more and plan a trip today!



## CERTIFIED ECOTOUR GUIDES

Certified Ecotour Guides can provide unforgettable Seaside experiences filled with knowledge and passion. Their dedicated efforts to teach visitors about the unique natural resources of this area help build a stronger and more informed community of Seaside stewards. Visit [exploreourseaside.org](http://exploreourseaside.org) to find a certified guide to lead your trip!

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## BEING A GOOD STEWARD

Recreational opportunities abound on Virginia's Seaside for the adventurous visitor, but exploring this remote region must be done respectfully and responsibly. Visitors may unknowingly harm or disturb habitats and wildlife, impacting the experiences of other visitors. Learn more about how you can be a good steward and help protect sensitive natural resources before you "Explore Our Seaside."

Contact landowners with specific questions about seaside properties or visit [exploreourseaside.org](http://exploreourseaside.org).

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*Your guide to the wild side of  
Virginia's Eastern Shore*



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## Our Seaside...

...provides important ecological services and plays a vital role in supporting and shaping the daily lives of our Eastern Shore communities.

### PROVIDING HABITAT

The barrier islands, marshes, mudflats and coastal bays found along our Seaside support an incredible diversity of wildlife and plants. Our islands and marshes are recognized as one of the most important places for migratory birds within the Western Hemisphere and our coastal bays provide critical nursery habitats for fish and shellfish.

### BUILDING RESILIENCY

Restored marine habitats increase the resiliency of this vast coastal system in the face of a changing climate. For example, innovative methods for constructing oyster reefs are providing more nature-based solutions for protecting coastlines from erosion.

### RESTORING HABITATS

Our creeks and coastal bays feature an impressive number of marine habitat restoration projects including oyster reefs, the re-introduction of the bay scallop and the largest seagrass restoration project in the world. Restored habitats like seagrass meadows and oyster reefs provide important services for natural and human communities alike. In 2001 the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program initiated the "Seaside Heritage Program" bringing many partners together and funding efforts to jump start restoration and promote ecotourism.

### PROTECTING OUR MAINLAND

Virginia's Seaside is home to the longest expanse of undeveloped barrier islands along the eastern seaboard of the United States. This system of islands, salt marshes, tidal mudflats, and shallow bays provides a strong line of defense for Eastern Shore communities against storms, hurricanes, and flooding.

### SUPPORTING COASTAL ECONOMIES

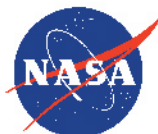
Working waterfronts along Virginia's Seaside are the hubs for several water-based economies. For example, clam aquaculture is a nation-leading industry here that provides fresh shellfish across the country. Many watermen also still work the seaside for wild shellfish and can be seen dotted across the landscape at low tide. These local industries are thriving in this unique natural setting surrounded by protected lands and clean water.

### OFFERING ADVENTURES

Virginia's Seaside offers endless opportunities for coastal wilderness adventures. Visitors can paddle along the Seaside Water Trail, explore remote beaches, fish, hunt, or simply observe and enjoy the peaceful surroundings. Visitation policies are in place to protect sensitive natural resources – visit [exploreourseaside.org](http://exploreourseaside.org) to learn more.

## THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

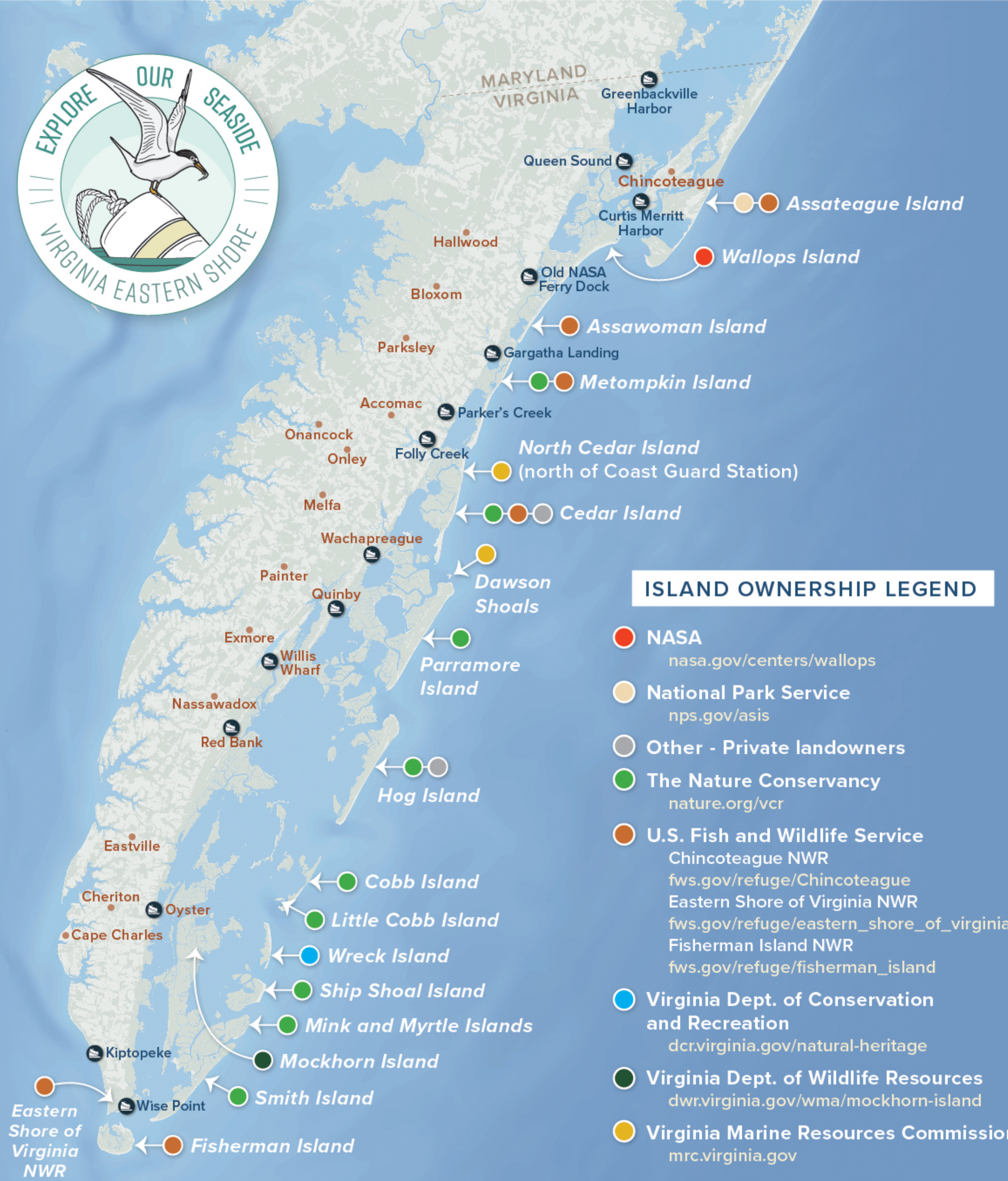
The seaside of Virginia's Eastern Shore is almost entirely owned and managed by non-profit, state and federal agencies. These partners share the common goal of protecting natural resources, while balancing sustainable recreational and economic use of the seaside. Learn more at [exploreourseaside.org](http://exploreourseaside.org).



### FUNDING

This project was funded, in part, by the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program led by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality through Grant #NA17N OS4190152 of the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, and by The Nature Conservancy with support from the Volgenau Foundation. All Explore Our Seaside partners also contributed significant time and effort to the project.





## WHEN YOU VISIT

Most barrier islands are open to the public for low-impact, recreational day use, such as hiking, bird watching, surf fishing and photography. Camping, campfires, vehicles and pets are prohibited on most islands. Please help protect sensitive habitats and wildlife by observing all visitation policies and seasonal restrictions. Learn more at [exploreourseaside.org](http://exploreourseaside.org).

### VISITATION POLICIES

**Cobb, Metompkin, Mink, Myrtle, Parramore and Smith Islands:** **CLOSED** above high tide line April through Aug.



**Wreck Island:** **CLOSED** April 15 through Aug 31.



**Cedar and Hog Islands:** **CLOSED** above high tide line April through August. **BE AWARE:** private inholdings exist and visitors should respect property boundaries.



**Assateague and Assawoman Islands:** Contact Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge for more details or visit: [exploreourseaside.org](http://exploreourseaside.org). Note Assawoman Island is **CLOSED** Mar 15 – Sept. 15.



**Assateague only**

**Mockhorn Island:** For hunting, camping and other use policies: [dwr.virginia.gov/wma/mockhorn-island](http://dwr.virginia.gov/wma/mockhorn-island)  
**Dawson Shoals and N. Cedar Island:** All visitors, pets and activities must remain outside of posted bird nesting areas. For more information visit [exploreourseaside.org](http://exploreourseaside.org).



**Wallops, Ship Shoal, Little Cobb and Fisherman Islands:** **CLOSED** to the public (guided tours are available on Fisherman Island).

## PROTECTING MIGRATORY BIRDS

Virginia's Seaside is incredibly important for migratory birds throughout the year. The spring and summer months are particularly sensitive times when thousands of pairs are attempting to raise their young throughout the barrier island and marsh habitats. These birds need your help to survive. Please be aware of policies and seasonal restrictions that are in place to protect them. You are visiting but for these birds, the Seaside is home.



The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) designated the Virginia and Maryland barrier islands as a **Site of International Importance** because of their importance to migratory birds.



The National Audubon Society identified the Virginia Barrier Islands as a high-priority **Global Important Bird Area** for the conservation of bird populations.

## SEASIDE BIRD NESTING HABITATS



### Ocean or inlet intertidal zone

Areas below the high tide line are safe for low-impact visitor activities.

Please stay in the **INTERTIDAL ZONE** and **DO NOT WALK** through bird nesting habitats during the breeding season – April through August.



### Berm

Nesting habitat for ground nesters such as terns, skimmers, and shorebirds.



### Dune

Nesting habitat for ground nesters such as shorebirds, gulls, waterfowl, and terns.



### Back dune

Nesting habitat for shorebirds, gulls, waterfowl, pelicans, songbirds, herons, and egrets.



### Mudflat and salt marsh

**Mudflats** are critical feeding habitat for shorebirds and their young. **Salt marsh** provides nesting and feeding habitat for marsh dependent species such as rails and several species of gulls, waterfowl, shorebirds, terns, and songbirds.



### Washover

A flat expanse of beach, created by major storm events, that forms an extension of the berm to the backside of the island. Washovers are important nesting areas for ground nesters such as shorebirds, terns, and skimmers.