

WATER TRAILS IN ST. MARY'S COUNTY

Explore the Trails of the Tidal Potomac

Welcome to St. Mary's County, the birthplace of Maryland. Shaped by the Chesapeake Bay and its mighty tributaries, the Patuxent and Potomac Rivers, the St. Mary's peninsula has fostered a traditional lifestyle anchored in the natural beauty of the Tidewater. Today, Maryland's oldest county blends a vibrant economy – it's the state's fastest growing region in terms of technology-related jobs – with its rural past, giving the area a unique character as well as a high quality of life.

St. Mary's County features historic sites such as St. Clement's Island and Historic St. Mary's City, which tell the story of the first colonists in Maryland, other sites explore the area's rich maritime and military history. St. Mary's County has lighthouses, Civil War sites and the Patuxent River Naval Air Museum dedicated to the history of naval aviation technology.

Sites and Attractions

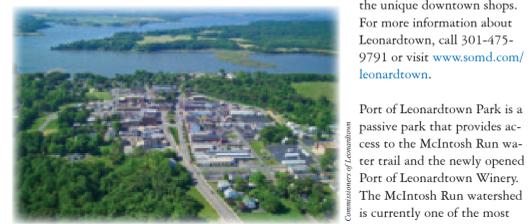
Leonardtown and McIntosh Run

Leonardtown was established in 1660 and is the St. Mary's County seat. This waterfront town has been a major player in Southern Maryland's history. Leonardtown was the site of skirmishes during the War of 1812 and the Civil War. Leonardtown was also a busy port and steamboat landing during the nineteenth century. During 2008, Leonardtown celebrated its 300th birthday and is continuing its tradition as a center of activity in Southern Maryland. Bring a picnic lunch or stroll up to Leonardtown Square to enjoy lunch at one of the many fine restaurants. While exploring the town, enjoy a visit to Tudor Hall and the Old Jail Museum for a taste of the town's rich history or browse one of the unique downtown shops. For more information about Leonardtown, call 301-475-9791 or visit www.somd.com/leonardtown.



Leonardtown Wharf

Port of Leonardtown Park is a passive park that provides access to the McIntosh Run water trail and the newly opened Port of Leonardtown Winery. The McIntosh Run watershed is currently one of the most ecologically intact watersheds remaining in Maryland, containing large blocks of contiguous forest, providing habitat for many different species of wildlife. The cool water, which flows freely from upstream, offers a good habitat for restocking and seining yellow perch. The Maryland Coastal Conservation Association seines in this area three to four times a year to study the fish population. Additionally, the watershed supports thriving populations of plants and animals. In fact, McIntosh Run supports one of three viable populations of endangered dwarf wedge mussels in Maryland and several rare plant species.



Aerial view of Leonardtown, Maryland

Historic St. Mary's City is an outdoor museum located on the site of Maryland's first colony and first capital. The museum protects one of the nation's finest colonial archaeological sites. Decades of research are the foundation of living history exhibits assembled across the landscape. Highlights include the Town Center, where visitors may tour Smith's Ordinary, a 17th-century forerunner of the modern hotel, and the Print House. The Woodland Indian Hamlet, the Goddard Spray Tobacco Plantation, and The Maryland Dove, are other great living history sites to explore and appear much as they would have over 375 years ago. Discover Maryland's legacy of liberty at the Brick Chapel, a symbol of the colony's early practice of religious tolerance, and the St. John's Site Museum, which encloses the excavation of the house where the state's first legislators met. There is also a Visitor Center with exhibits, a museum shop, and a network of trails. The site is located at the end of the Upper St. Mary's River Trail. For hours of operation, call 800-SMC-1634 or visit www.stmaryscity.org.

Historic St. Mary's City

There are a number of Amish and Mennonite communities located throughout St. Mary's County. Farms are recognizable by their windmills. Signs offering items such as quilts and hand-crafted items are posted at farm entrances of those who wish to conduct business. It is common to see Amish buggies driving on the roadways. Drivers are urged to use caution when passing Amish buggies. The Amish and Mennonite also enjoy paddling the St. Mary's County waterways and paddlers are encouraged to be respectful of the Amish and Mennonite culture.



The Maryland Dove, St. Mary's City

St. Mary's County Visitor Information

The two areas in the County with the widest variety of dining and lodging options are Leonardtown and the California/Lexington Park corridor. For information on accommodations, dining, sites and attractions, trip planning and more, contact the St. Mary's County Division of Tourism at 800-327-9023 or visit www.VisitStMarysMd.com.

The St. Mary's County Welcome Center in Charlotte Hall is also a great source of visitor information. The Welcome Center staff are experts on what to see and do in St. Mary's County. Pick up a map or guidebook, or learn about the weekend's special events. Check the website, www.VisitStMarysMd.com, or call 301-884-7059 for current hours of operation. The Welcome Center is located at 37575 Charlotte Hall School Road, Charlotte Hall, Maryland 20622.



Piney Point Lighthouse, Museum & Historic Park

The Piney Point Lighthouse, Museum and Historic Park is the site of the oldest lighthouse on the Potomac River. Spread over two campuses the six acre park is the home of the 1836 lighthouse and keeper's quarters, two completed exhibit buildings, a museum store, picnic area, pier and kayak launch. 170 years of maritime and military history are highlighted and explored through beautiful exhibits and self-guided signage. The museum and park serve as the monitoring station for the Maryland Historic Trust's First Underwater Shipwreck Preserve for a U-1105 Black Panther submarine brought to the US for study after WWI. The site is managed by the St. Mary's County Department of Recreation and Parks, Museum Division. Call ahead for seasonal schedules and hours at 301-994-1471 or visit www.stmarysmd.com/recreate/museums.



Piney Point Lighthouse

St. Clement's Island Museum is an American Association of Museum's accredited museum and park complex. The museum is located in Colton's Point on the Potomac River in sight of St. Clement's Island, the 1634 landing site of Lord Baltimore's first colonists in Maryland. The museum features exhibits illustrating the diverse history of St. Clement's Island, the maritime heritage of that region of the Potomac River, and a museum store. Park facilities include a picnic area, self-guided interpretive signage and outdoor exhibits, portable toilet and a public boating and fishing pier. This site is also home to the relocated 1820's Charlotte Hall one-room school house. During the summer season, a water taxi runs from the St. Clement's Island Museum out to St. Clement's Island, where visitors can tour the island and Blackstone Lighthouse. The museum coordinates transportation to St. Clement's Island on a seasonal schedule. Be sure to call the museum in advance for water taxi hours of operation and seasonal schedules at 301-769-2222 or visit www.stmarysmd.com/recreate/museums.

St. Clement's Island Museum

This scenic island, operated by the Maryland Park Service, is where "Maryland Began." It served as a temporary safe haven for travel-weary colonists arriving from England to settle in the newly forming Maryland colony. Park amenities include a picnic area, eco-toilets, nature trails, two public boating piers, interpretive signage, a 1934 commemorative monument, and a recently constructed replica of the 1856 Blackstone Lighthouse. For information about tours and public transportation to the island call St. Clement's Island Museum at 301-769-2222 or visit www.stmarysmd.com/recreate/museums. Contact Point Lookout State Park for group events or other park service questions at 301-872-5688 or visit www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/southern/stclemens.

St. Clement's Island State Park

There are a number of Amish and Mennonite communities located throughout St. Mary's County. Farms are recognizable by their windmills. Signs offering items such as quilts and hand-crafted items are posted at farm entrances of those who wish to conduct business. It is common to see Amish buggies driving on the roadways. Drivers are urged to use caution when passing Amish buggies. The Amish and Mennonite also enjoy paddling the St. Mary's County waterways and paddlers are encouraged to be respectful of the Amish and Mennonite culture.



Blackstone Lighthouse

Amish and Mennonite Communities

Traditional Amish Farming



Traditional Amish Farming

Land Trails

St. Mary's County has a developing network of local land-based trail initiatives and also lies along the route of emerging National trail efforts including the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail and the Star-Spangled Banner Trail.

The Three Notch Trail

St. Mary's County is in the process of constructing the Three Notch Trail on the County railroad right-of-way. The trail generally parallels MD Route 235 and, when completed, will run from Hughesville to Lexington Park. The Three Notch Trail is a non-motorized hiking/biking trail, with an asphalt surface, and is ten feet wide in most places. The trail will link the more developed areas of Lexington Park and California to the more rural and scenic areas of Laurel Grove, Mechanicsville and historic Charlotte Hall. For more information on the trail, visit the County website at www.co.saint-marys.md.us/recreate/facilities/threenotchtrail.asp or call St. Mary's County Recreation and Parks at (301) 475-4200 ext. 1811.



Three Notch Trail



The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail

The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail is an ever-growing network of locally managed trails located between the mouth of the Potomac River at St. Mary's County and the Allegheny Highlands. The trail spans five geographic regions, multiple jurisdictions, and includes a variety of trail experiences. As of early 2010, 830 miles of existing and planned trails have been recognized as segments of the Trail including the Southern Maryland Potomac Heritage Trail Bicycling Route in Charles and St. Mary's counties. For more information visit www.nps.gov/pohe/index.htm.

The Star-Spangled Banner Trail

The National Park Service is in the process of developing the Star-Spangled Banner Trail to commemorate the Chesapeake Campaign of the War of 1812. The trail will trace four major historical events associated with the War of 1812 along bikeways, byways, and waterways in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. As the Trail develops, it will link places through recreation and learning experiences. From 1813 until 1815, the Chesapeake Bay was the center of a fierce struggle between the British and Americans. Southern Maryland and the St. Mary's peninsula were strategic sites. To learn more about the effort to develop this trail visit www.nps.gov/stsp/index.htm.

Wildlife in the Estuary

The St. Mary's peninsula is situated on the Atlantic Coastal Plain and is bordered by the Chesapeake Bay, Potomac River, Wicomico River, and Patuxent River. The County's geography and largely undeveloped areas provide a variety of wildlife habitat ranging from rural agricultural areas to wetlands and pristine natural areas.

The waterfront areas are home to many plants and animals native to Maryland. The waters of the tributaries along the St. Mary's peninsula are brackish: a mixture of mostly fresh, from the watershed of the Potomac River, and partly salt from the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. This mixture occurs wherever rivers meet the ocean, in places like the Bay called estuaries.

Many young fish can only survive to young adulthood in this less salty habitat, so healthy estuaries are essential to maintain fish populations. Almost all commercial fisheries of the mid-Atlantic use estuaries as nursery grounds where juveniles can feed on the tiny shellfish, microscopic plants called phytoplankton, and decaying organic matter that are abundant in saltwater marshes.

Certain wetland plants, such as saltmarsh cordgrass and narrow-leaved cattail, also thrive in this slightly salty environment and they provide the food, protection, and stability that attract a wide variety of other creatures: mammals, birds, fish, shellfish, reptiles and insects. Look for ducks, wading birds, Osprey, Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, migratory songbirds, terrapins, frogs, snakes, snails and many other species as you explore the water trail routes of St. Mary's County.



Great Egrets



Osprey chicks in the nest

Southern Maryland Audubon Society

The Southern Maryland Audubon Society promotes the appreciation, conservation, and protection of birds, other wildlife, and their natural habitats through education, research and outreach. The society focuses on birding in Charles, Calvert, Prince George's, and St. Mary's Counties in Southern Maryland. For more information visit www.somdaudubon.org.

Fishing

The tidal Potomac in St. Mary's County is a vital part of the commercial and recreational fishing industry, serving as spawning grounds for the more than 60 fish species documented in the waters below Washington D.C. In St. Mary's County, there are four major tributaries to the Potomac River: Wicomico River, St. Clement's Bay, Breton Bay, and St. Mary's River.



Fishing from a kayak

Largemouth Bass

Usually found in large, slow moving rivers or streams with soft bottoms, largemouth bass are prevalent in the Potomac River and its tributaries year round. Largemouth bass can be recognized by the lower jaw which extends past the back edge of the eye, the dark green top of the body with silvery sides and belly, and the dark stripe that runs across its body. An extremely popular gamefish, largemouth bass can reach weights of over 20 pounds.

Rockfish

Also known as striped bass, rockfish is Maryland's official state fish. Rockfish are silvery fish that get their name from the seven or eight dark, continuous stripes along the side of their body and can grow to 60 inches in length. Rockfish migrate to tidal freshwater to spawn and are prevalent in the Potomac River and its tributaries from April through November.

Guides and Outfitters

There is no better way to get to know the extensive shoreline and abundant water-related resources of St. Mary's County than by exploring its waterways. Renting a kayak or canoe or working with a paddling guide is fun and easy. There are several kayak and canoe outfitters that offer on-site and off-site kayak and canoe rentals throughout the County. For a current list of outfitters call the St. Mary's County Division of Tourism at 301-475-4200 ext. 1404 or visit www.VisitStMarysMd.com.

PaddleQuest - The PaddleQuest website is an online guide to kayak and canoe trails in St. Mary's, Charles and Calvert Counties in Southern Maryland. The website is managed by local paddlers and features a variety of trails for novices to experienced paddlers. For more information, visit www.paddlequestmaryland.com.



Kayaks along the beach

Additional paddling trails can be found at the southern-most tip of the St. Mary's peninsula at Point Lookout State Park. Situated on a 1,046-acre peninsula, Point Lookout State Park has more than seven miles of water trails that offer paddlers one-to-two hour trips or all day excursions with overnight camping options. To request a copy of the Point Lookout Water Trails map, call 301-872-5688 or visit www.dnr.state.md.us/boating.

Wildlife Viewing Ethics



Diamondback Terrapin

- 1) Act responsibly.** Stay clear of nests, dens and rookeries. Do not touch or feed wild animals. Do not allow pets to interfere with wild animals.
- 2) Avoid getting too close.** View wild birds and other animals from an appropriate distance. If animals change their behavior, appear nervous, keep looking at you with head up and ears pointing toward you, or if the animal doesn't resume its normal activity, then you are too close.
- 3) Make your observation brief, then move on.** If you are looking at baby birds in a nest, fish in a pond, etc., remember that they can't leave and that you are interrupting normal behavior.
- 4) Don't chase an animal.** Don't chase an animal trying to get a better glimpse or photo. Don't follow animals or behave in any way that might be seen as "harassment." And don't allow your pets to do it either.
- 5) Move quietly and slowly. Use a blind if one has been provided.** Blinds, or hiding places for viewers, are sometimes built at popular viewing sites so that the movement of people does not distract the wildlife. Loud noises, sudden movements or an unannounced approach startles animals.
- 6) Do not use calls or whistles, or try to rouse animals in any way.** This can interrupt breeding cycles, drive birds from their territories, or make animals "call shy" so they don't respond to the real thing.
- 7) Divide large groups of people into small groups.** Small groups of people are less disturbing, usually talk more quietly, and tend to act in a more responsible way than big groups do.

Paddling and Boating Safety Tips

St. Mary's County has a variety of waterways that are suitable for paddlers of all levels, but all paddlers should think of safety first, regardless of experience level. Be prepared! Review these tips before getting on the water.

- Always wear a properly-fitted, U.S. Coast Guard approved, lifejacket while on the water. (See Maryland Boating Regulations www.dnr.state.md.us/boating)
- Boating safety increases with numbers. Boat with others and carry a spare paddle.
- Know your route and any potential hazards along it. Review maps, navigation aids, and weather conditions or marine forecasts before launching. Be aware of obstacles you may encounter along the trails such as trees or sandbars.
- Dress appropriately for weather and/or water conditions, including air and water temperature. Wear protective footwear if you plan to wade.
- Never paddle farther from shore than you are prepared to swim and stay at least 100 yards away from all moving vessels, piers and other restricted areas.
- Carry a supply of food and water adequate for the length of your trip. Stay well-hydrated and protected from the sun year-round to minimize the danger of dehydration and heat exhaustion.
- Keep your weight centered and as low as possible at all times, especially when entering and exiting a boat. When paddling in wind, stay close to the shoreline and paddle on the lee-side.
- If your boat flips over, remain calm. Hold onto your paddles and the boat if possible. Try to reach a calm, shallow spot or the shoreline, then empty the boat and re-enter.
- Be alert to possible weather changes. Squalls and thunderstorms are common during the warm months, usually accompanied by temperature drops, increased winds and dark clouds. Get off the water immediately if you see lightning.

Maryland Boating and Fishing Regulations

Personal Flotation Devices: Boats propelled by oars or paddles are required to carry one 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. Children under age 13 must wear a US Coast Guard approved PFD at all times in any boat under 21 feet. (MD State Law).

Boat Registration: All boats, whether commercial or recreational, must be registered in Maryland if it is equipped with any kind of primary or auxiliary mechanical propulsion; not currently registered with the U.S. Coast Guard (documented); and is being used principally in Maryland. Registering your vessel in Maryland involves applying for a Certificate of Title as well as a registration. For more information visit www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/registration.

Fishing Licenses: A Tidal Fishing License is required for both residents and non-residents to fish in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. License holders are allowed to fish from January 1 through December 31. A 5-day license can be purchased for a reduced fee. For more information visit www.3-wildlifelicense.com/md.

Leave No Trace

Please practice the following stewardship principles of Leave No Trace:

1) Plan Ahead and Prepare

- Know your route and the limitations of yourself and your group.
- Carry the proper equipment and clothing.
- Notify someone of the time you intend to return.

2) Stay in Designated Areas

- Keep to designated trails and public areas.
- Keep groups small and avoid trampling plants.
- Protect wildlife and your food - store rations securely.
- Leave recreation areas and picnic sites cleaner than you found them.

3) Properly Dispose of All Waste

- Clean fish at designated areas.
- Pick up litter and dispose of all waste in proper receptacles.

4) Leave What You Find and Be Considerate of Other Visitors

- Respect our natural and cultural heritage - leave all items as you found them.
- Keep noise to a minimum - enjoy the music of nature.
- Respect private property and the privacy of others.

For more information on Leave No Trace ethics visit www.lnt.org, call 1-800-332-4100, or contact your local resource managers for additional guidance.



For more paddling safety tips and information, visit the American Canoe Association website at www.americancanoe.org

For More Information

St. Mary's County Department of Recreation and Parks
23150 Leonard Hall Drive
Leonardtown, MD 20650
call 301-475-4200 x1800 or 1801
or visit www.co.saint-marys.md.us/recreate



St. Mary's County Division of Tourism
23115 Leonard Hall Drive
Leonardtown, MD 20650
call 1-800-327-9023
or visit www.VisitStMarysMd.com



Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources
Boating Services Unit

The Facilities and Access Planning Division of DNR's Boating Services Unit coordinates the creation of a statewide system of public water access sites and water trails. For more info visit www.dnr.state.md.us/boating

In Case of Emergency

In case of emergency, contact the Sheriff's Department Dispatch at (301) +911 and specify that you are in St. Mary's County, Maryland or call the Maryland Natural Resource Police at 410-260-8888.

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Anthony O'Malley, Governor
Anthony Brown, Lt. Governor
John R. Griffin, Secretary MD DNR

The facilities and services of the Department of Natural Resources are available to all without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, national origin or physical or mental disability.

Call toll free in Maryland, 1-877-630-8DNR ext. 8780. TTY users call via the Maryland Relay. Accommodations for individuals with disabilities will be provided upon request. Seven days advance notice is requested.

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WATER TRAILS

in Western
St. Mary's County
Maryland



Explore the Trails of the Tidal Potomac

PRODUCED THROUGH A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE
MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND
ST. MARY'S COUNTY

