



Audubon MARYLAND-DC

Important Bird Areas

Mattawoman Creek IBA

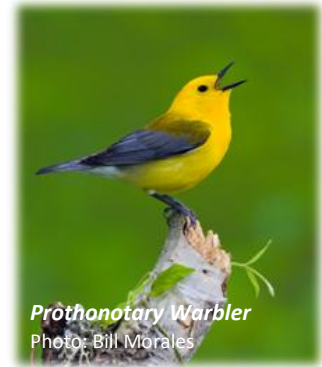
Date of site account: May 2016

County: Charles

Area: 16,520 acres (6,685 ha)

Status: Recognized

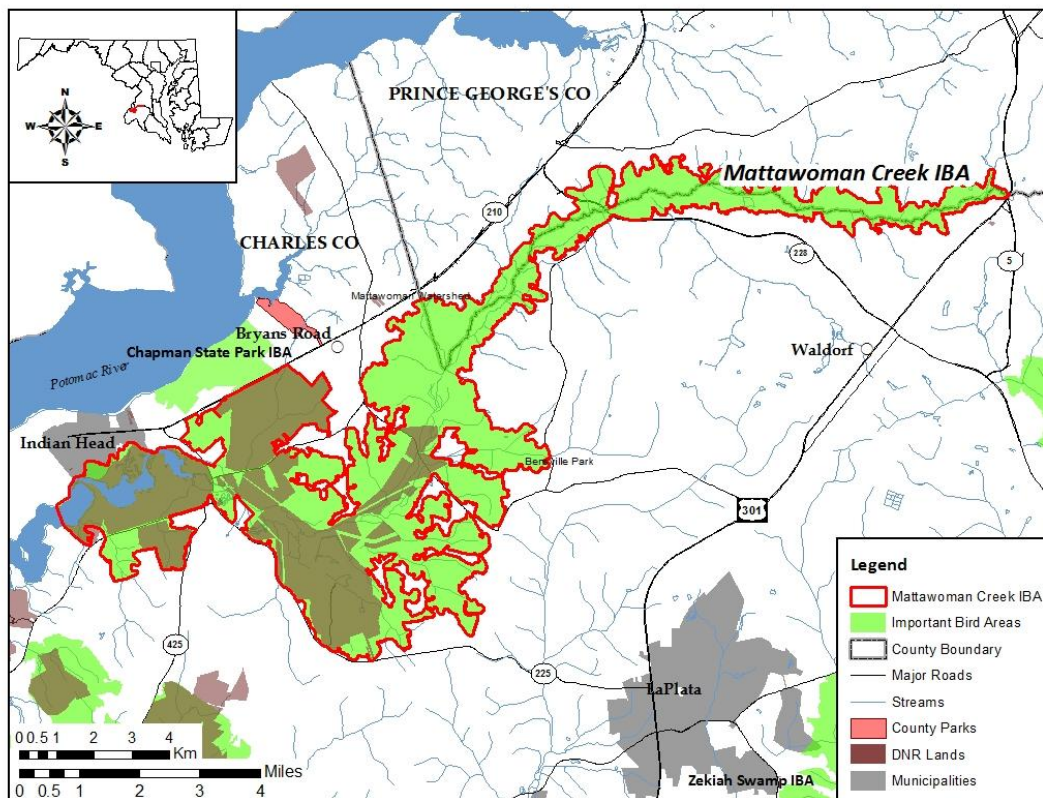
Priority: State



Prothonotary Warbler
Photo: Bill Morales

Site Description

Mattawoman Creek IBA encompasses 16,520 acres in Charles and Prince George's Counties and extends from the town of Mattawoman 21 miles downstream to Indian Head where Mattawoman Creek widens considerably before entering the Potomac River. The site is one of two extensive floodplain forest systems in Charles County, the other being Zekiah Swamp, also an IBA. The site includes the forested lands of numerous tributaries which feed into Mattawoman Creek. The major habitat types present are upland oak-hickory forest, accounting for about 86% of the area, and forested wetland on the creek's floodplain, representing 5% of the area. Tidal freshwater wetlands flank the lower reaches of Mattawoman Creek. In addition to its bird interest, Mattawoman Creek is among the most productive finfish spawning and nursery areas in the entire Chesapeake Bay. Most of the lands within the IBA are privately owned. The Indian Head Rail Trail passes through the southern portion of the site. The boundary of this IBA is based on green infrastructure hubs from Maryland's Green Infrastructure Assessment. Mattawoman Creek IBA was dedicated at a ceremony in Mattingly Park, Indian Head, on August 21, 2010.



Birds

Mattawoman Creek IBA is a site of statewide importance for bird conservation. It was identified as an IBA in 2009. Data from the 2nd Breeding Bird Atlas of Maryland and DC (Ellison 2010) and Bird Blitz surveys conducted by Audubon in 2009 demonstrate that the site supports one of the most diverse assemblages of Forest Interior Dwelling Species (FIDS) in Maryland's Coastal Plain, with 20 out of 24 potentially occurring species breeding regularly. Three declining at-risk bird species on the Audubon/American Bird Conservancy Watchlist (category Yellow) breed here in significant numbers. Prothonotary Warbler is a specialist of floodplain forests and nests in tree cavities. Kentucky Warbler requires forests with a dense shrub layer, and Wood Thrush inhabits a wide variety of forest types but has declined steadily across its range in recent decades. One other WatchList species (category Red), Red-headed Woodpecker, is regularly present at the site and counts of up to 23 birds in the winter of 2011 indicate that it may occur in sufficient numbers (30 individuals) to trigger the IBA criterion for this species.

Table 1. Qualifying IBA Criteria¹: Category MD-DC 1 (D1), Category MD-DC 2 (D3)

IBA Criterion	Species	Data	Season
Category 1: <i>At-risk species</i>	Prothonotary Warbler	111 pairs estimated ² ; 7 of 9 Atlas blocks ³	Breeding
Category 1: <i>At-risk species</i>	Kentucky Warbler	28 pairs estimated ² ; 8 of 9 Atlas blocks ³	Breeding
Category 1: <i>At-risk species</i>	Wood Thrush	284 pairs estimated ² ; 9 of 9 Atlas blocks ³	Breeding
Category 2: <i>Species assemblages</i>	Forest interior dwelling species (FIDS): Red-shouldered Hawk, Barred Owl, Eastern Whip-poor-will, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Wood Thrush, Northern Parula, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Prothonotary Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Summer Tanager.	20 FIDS breed regularly out of 24 potentially regular in Coastal Plain; Mean FIDS per Atlas block (n=9) = 16.6; represents the 88.4 th percentile for Coastal Plain forests ³	Breeding

1. Audubon Maryland-DC. 2011. Important Bird Areas Program criteria for site selection. Available online: <http://md.audubon.org/important-bird-areas-2> .
2. Audubon Maryland-DC. 2009. Bird Blitz survey data and population estimates. Unpublished data.
3. Ellison, W.G., editor. 2010. Second atlas of the breeding birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia. Johns Hopkins University Press. 494 p.

Conservation Status and Management

Of the 16,520 acres of Mattawoman Creek IBA, 46% are protected as public land. Approximately 5,942 acres of the IBA are owned and managed by Maryland Department of Natural Resources in two units, Mattawoman Natural Environment Area and Myrtle Grove Wildlife Management Area. In 2015, 1,353 acres were transferred from Chapman State Park into the Mattawoman Natural Environment Area. The majority of Mattawoman NEA is classified as State Wildlands and is managed to preserve the area's natural ecosystems. Myrtle Grove WMA is managed as a hunting area and is also open to the public for non-hunting uses. Both of these state lands contain extensive mature forest supporting a diverse assemblage of FIDS species. This IBA also contains two county parks, Mattawoman Watershed in Prince George's County, and Bensville Park in Charles County. A local naturalist and founding member of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society, George B. Wilmot, was instrumental in winning protection of parts of this IBA.

Threats and Conservation

The main threats to this IBA are the continuing rapid loss and fragmentation of forest habitat and the degradation of aquatic habitats, both resulting from urbanization within the IBA and the surrounding watershed. Forest-Interior Dwelling Birds (FIDS) require large intact areas of forest in order to breed successfully, and their populations generally decline following forest fragmentation. Two forest birds, Prothonotary Warbler and Louisiana Waterthrush, feed largely on aquatic invertebrates and are especially vulnerable to impairment of water quality.



Mattawoman Creek floodplain forest
Photo: Jim Long

Land use zoning has been a contentious issue in Charles County for the past decade, and much of the contention has centered on Mattawoman Creek. The inclusion of central and eastern portions of the IBA within Charles County's Development District has encouraged significant residential development on forest land, which is likely to continue.

Specific development threats at the current time include the proposed expansion of the Maryland Airport and the proposed industrial development of a science and technology park at Bryan's Road. Both of these sites are just outside the current boundary of Mattawoman Creek IBA but would encourage further development within the IBA boundary.

Another development proposal, the Cross County Connector road project, was shelved in 2011 when Maryland Department of Environment denied the required wetland-destruction permits due to environmental concerns. This highway would have bisected Mattawoman Creek IBA near the

town of Bryans Road and likely have spurred extensive sprawl development. There have been recent calls to revive this road project.

Other threats in the Mattawoman Creek IBA include invasive plant species, over-browsing by white-tailed deer, off-road vehicles and illegal dumping, all of which degrade forest habitats.

There is a need for bird population monitoring in this IBA. Data on bird population trends over time could assist with the management of public lands and help to demonstrate the conservation value of protecting forest land throughout the IBA from conversion to other uses.

Public Access and More Information

Mattawoman NEA and Myrtle Grove WMA are open to the public and are ideal places to view the forest birds typical of this IBA. For more information on these public lands, visit the Maryland DNR website at:

Myrtle Grove WMA:

<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/publiclands/southern/myrtlegrove.aspx>

Mattawoman NEA:

http://www.dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Publiclands/Natural_Areas/MattawomanCreek.asp

The Indian Head Rail Trail, owned and maintained by Charles County, passes through forestlands of Mattawoman Creek IBA and is accessible to the public by foot and by bicycle. See

<https://www.charlescountyparks.com/parks/trails>

Mattawoman Creek can be viewed at a number of roadside locations. The creek can be accessed by public boat ramp at Mattingly Park in the town of Indian Head.

The Mattawoman Watershed Society is the principal organization concerned with environmental preservation and conservation of the Mattawoman Creek Watershed. For more details see:

<http://www.mattawomanwatershedsociety.org/>

For more information about this and other Important Bird Areas, visit Audubon Maryland-DC online at: <http://md.audubon.org/conservation/important-bird-areas>

This IBA site account was produced with a generous grant from Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust.



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