

Delmarva Bays



PRESERVE

PROTECT

Delmarva Bays are usually fed by seasonal rains or high groundwater levels, and appear wet at the surface for only part of the year (typically winter through early spring). They also feature some of our most vital habitats for biodiversity in the state (including many species not found anywhere else), and are also the ones most vulnerable to loss through human impacts.

The Delmarva Bays Explained

Coastal Plain Seasonal Ponds, also called Delmarva Bays, are isolated, small, shallow, seasonally-wet areas, often circular or elliptical in shape, fed by groundwater, or rain and snow in winter/spring and drying up in summer/fall. Over a thousand of these exist in the state, concentrated in inland parts of lower New Castle and upper/middle Kent counties. Often surrounded by woodlands, the inner (wetter) zones feature a variety of low shrubs (e.g. buttonbush) and non-woody plants.

Despite their isolated, seasonal nature, coastal plain ponds provide critical habitat to many rare and threatened plants and animals, and are especially vital to frog and salamander breeding. Frogs and salamanders use the seasonal water level to breed – and can only do so because predatory fish cannot survive the lack of permanent water – and use the surrounding drier wetlands and uplands as summer habitat. Many of these habitats have been lost already, and those remaining are vulnerable to development. Preservation of adjacent contiguous forested habitats is a high conservation priority.



The Delmarva Bays Complex

In the prominent areas where Delmarva Bays exist over the landscape, Delmarva Bays are usually part of a complex or aquatic system integrated with other water features such as other wetlands and headwater streams. Delmarva Bays may have different vegetation structure even within complexes with:

- open canopies with emergent vegetation such as grasses, rushes and sedges
- a dominant shrub layer of buttonbush, sweet pepper bush and highbush blueberry
- closed canopies with mature trees such as red maple, black gum and willow oak.

Subject to a jurisdictional determination under the new EPA Clean Water Act Waters of the U.S. rule, these areas could be 'similarly situated' and part of a wetland or aquatic complex.



The Delmarva Bays Showcase

Delmarva Bays are unique wetland communities. Their geologic formation, water level fluctuations, and special ecologic communities make them gems across the Delmarva landscape. Huckleberry Pond located in Sussex County is among the unique and it differs in a few ways from the thousands of other Delmarva Bays. It is similar in that it is situated with the NW to SE orientation and contains the sandy ridge, but it is more like the classic Carolina Bay along the Carolina Coastal Plain. There is only one other spot on the Delmarva (in Dorchester County Maryland) that contains such as sizeable and pristine example of a Delmarva Bay. One study on Delmarva Bays by The Nature Conservancy found 45 plant species considered rare and uncommon, which is 58% of the plants that occur in Delmarva Bays, and includes 8 that are classified as globally rare.



Huckleberry Pond



Huckleberry Pond

Well over half of the original Delmarva Bays have been lost in Delaware, and there are only approximately 6,000 acres remaining. Efforts now and in the future to protect remaining Delmarva Bays will be extremely important. The EPA Waters of the U.S. rule recognizes the importance of these systems that may seem isolated but perform functions that protect biological, chemical and physical condition of downstream waters.

6/26/2015

