

Spotlight on Talbot County – Wye Island National Resource Management Area



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by Kimberly K. Egan, MHC Co-President

Wye Island Natural Resources Management Area covers 2,450 acres on Wye Island, in Talbot County on the Eastern Shore.

The area was originally inhabited by the Choptank, who occupied much of the central coastline of the Eastern Shore, between the Nanticoke to the south and the Lenape to the north. The first European to settle in the area was Edward Lloyd, a Welsh Puritan who fled the Anglican regime in Jamestown and arrived in Maryland in 1649. He built Wye House around 1660 and began planting wheat and tobacco. The property was later owned by William Paca, who signed the Declaration of Independence and was Governor of Maryland from 1782-1785. Perhaps the most famous resident of the Wye plantation, however, was Frederick Douglass. Douglass was enslaved on the plantation as a 5-year old child until he was hired out to a white man in Baltimore and escaped to freedom on a north-bound train.

The Wye Island of today is a bucolic wildlife sanctuary with equestrian trails that wind through ancient forests and overlook both wooded wetlands and the Chesapeake Bay's many creeks. The School House Woods Trail runs through a 14-acre swath of old growth forest estimated to be 10,000 years old, the last remnant of what the Eastern Shore looked like before the Europeans arrived. Equestrians can also follow the Holly Tree Trail to the 300-year-old Wye Holly, or the Osage Trail under a large canopy of mature Osage orange trees, or the Ferry Landing trail along a sandy beach.

The island is home to the endangered Delmarva fox squirrel, the gray fox, and the white-tailed deer, as well as 28 species of waterfowl and 200 other bird species. Trail riders often spot bald eagles, ospreys, wild turkey, and both green and blue herons. Migratory birds such as geese, coot, ducks, doves, rail, snipe, and woodcock pass over the island twice a year.

The park is open from sunrise to sunset. There is no admission fee. Overnight accommodations are available for \$250+ a night at Duck House Lodge conference center. Camping is available for youth groups. Trailer parking is off Lodge Lane Road. Tuckahoe Equestrian Center is about half an hour away and offers its members corrals, stalls, and hi-lines with 30 amp electricity.

There are many places to eat near the Bay Bridge but trail riders particularly recommend Carmine's on Kent Island, at 2126 Didonato Drive, Chestertown, Maryland, 21619.

Directions from the Bay Bridge: Travel 12.5 miles east on Route 50. Turn right onto Carmichael Road. Travel 5.1 miles and cross the Wye Island Bridge. Once on the island, follow signs to the NRMA parking area. The address is 632 Wye Island Road.

For more information visit <https://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/pages/eastern/wyeisland.aspx>.



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