

## Battle Creek Cypress Swamp, Calvert County

Battle Creek Cypress Swamp is one of the northernmost stands of bald cypress trees (*Taxodium distichum*) in the country and the only one on Maryland’s western shore. There is a wooden boardwalk throughout the swamp that allows visitors to admire these unique trees. These trees have gray to reddish-brown, shredded bark unlike other deciduous trees, which distinguishes them in winter. Bald cypress trees also have “knees,” or parts of their roots that burst through the ground and form knobby knee-like stumps. There is much to see at this preserve. The swamp is great for birdwatching; the golden-colored Prothonotary, parula, and hooded warblers, as well as ground-foraging Louisiana waterthrush all make their home here. In late summer, visitors can enjoy the blooms of a vast variety of flowers, including cardinal-flower, threatened red turtlehead (*Chelone obliqua*), and pink lady’s slipper orchids. The arboreal gray treefrog makes itself heard in the evenings. Other trees that appear throughout the swamp include sweet gum, ash, and southern arrow-wood.



Erika Nortemann/TNC

Open fields are interspersed with bald cypress forests at Battle Creek Cypress Swamp.



Erika Nortemann/TNC

Visitors can learn about different species at the nature center.

The cypress swamp played an important role in local history. It was the site of early flour and lumber mills, and the source of decay-resistant cypress lumber used in the construction of boats, siding, and shingles. Today, the swamp is a wonderful open space for outdoor recreational opportunities and nature education to the public.

The preserve encompasses 100 acres of cypress swamp and surrounding upland woods. It was purchased in 1957 by The Nature Conservancy and is currently leased and

### Key Elements

- Bald cypress
- Red turtlehead flower
- Cypress sphinx moth
- Warblers
- Coastal plain bottomland forest

### Visiting

- Nature center
- 1,700 foot boardwalk and trails
- Large groups welcome (plan in advance)
- April-Sept, Tues-Sat 10am-5pm, Sun 1pm-5pm
- Oct-March, Tues-Sat 10pm-4:30pm, Sun 1pm-4:30pm

operated by Calvert County Parks and Recreation. It was the Conservancy's first preserve in Maryland. Recognized as a National Natural Landmark in 1965, Battle Creek has been managed as a county park and environmental education center. Stewardship work includes a cypress tree study and controlling invasive species. There is also an audio tour available to enhance a visit to the preserve.

## An Ecological Force

Bald Cypress trees have existed for millions of years. Prior to the last Ice Age, when mammoths roamed the state, bald cypress were more widely distributed. At Battle Creek, fossil cypress knees, cones, and stumps with diameters up to 10 feet have been found in clay beds dating from 100,000 years ago. The present-day trees are thought to descend from trees in Battle Creek from 5,000 to 15,000 years ago, coinciding with the retreat of the Pleistocene glaciers. Scientists believe the climate warming led to the reemergence of the trees. Individual cypress trees can live for over 1,500 years, and some of the trees today are 100 feet tall and 4 feet in diameter.

## Cypress Dwellers

The rare cypress sphinx moth (*Isoparce cupressi*) feeds only on bald cypress leaves, one of three types of moths identified at Battle Creek that only feed off of those trees. Their larvae have a highly specialized diet which greatly restricts the distribution of the species. Adult moths fly at night while their larvae feed high in the canopy, making them difficult to observe. Further research is needed to determine their current status.



Erika Nortemann/TNC

The 1,700 foot boardwalk allows for pleasant walks throughout the swamp.

**Directions** (GPS Coordinates: 38°29'25.0"N 76°35'28.1"W)

### From Washington, DC:

Travel I-95/495 (Capital Beltway) to Exit 11 and head south on MD 4 into Calvert County. After about 30 miles (from the Beltway), continue past Prince Frederick another 2.3 miles to MD 506 (Sixes Road) and turn right (west). After 1.8 miles, look for the sign and turn left onto Gray's Road. The entrance to the nature center will be on your right in approximately 0.25 miles.

### Contact

Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Sanctuary  
288 Grays Road  
Prince Frederick, MD 20678  
P: 410-535-5327

For more information:  
[www.calvertparks.org/bccss.html](http://www.calvertparks.org/bccss.html)

### Watch Out For!

- Poison ivy
- Mosquitoes
- Ticks and chiggers
- Slippery boardwalk