

Oxbow Nature Preserve, Anne Arundel County



The key feature of this preserve is the Little Patuxent Oxbow, which is an impoundment of the Little Patuxent River that was created over hundreds of years by beaver activity. Another important element is Laurel Oxbow Lake, which is the largest naturally occurring body of freshwater in Maryland; other lakes are the result of damming creeks. Flooding occurs frequently, and water levels rise as northwest winds push water and debris during storms. It is easy throughout the preserve to find gnawed stumps made by beavers, a very active species in this area. They help maintain the lake as well.

Key Elements

- Beavers
- Bald eagles
- Laurel Oxbow Lake
- American chestnut

Russett Community Association



Laurel Oxbow Lake is the largest naturally occurring body of freshwater in the state.

Naturalists have found 106 native vascular plant species at Oxbow Nature Preserve, including rare species such as the Water-shield (*Brasenia schreberi*) and dodder (*Cuscuta polygonorum*). There are also spatterdock, water lily, and cattails. This preserve is home to the popular wildflowers blue-flag iris and cardinal flower. Visitors to Oxbow might hear the high piping whistle of the northern spring peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*). This type of frog can be found in brushy second growth near ponds or wetlands. More than half of this site is

covered with shallow water even during the dry summer months, resulting in a specific type of aquatic ecosystem. Naturalists have identified more than 150 species of birds here, including the bald eagle and the cooper's hawk. There are little blue herons, egrets, ducks, geese, and red shouldered hawks as well. Three species of turtle make their home here- eastern painted turtle, red bellied slider, and the large snapping turtle. Banded water snakes are quite common at Oxbow, as well as black rat snakes, and some others that are not as likely to be seen.

Watch Out For!

- Ticks and biting insects
- Raccoons
- Trail overgrowth

The American chestnut tree is uncommon in Maryland, yet it can be found at Oxbow Nature Preserve. These trees are black at the bottom to prevent beavers from damaging them for dam building.



TNC

Beavers can easily be spotted at Oxbow Nature Preserve.

The evergreen mountain laurel blooms the last two weeks in May, while blueberry bushes yield their ripe fruits in the summer. Pitch pines and Virginia pines can also be found at Oxbow. One noticeable feature of this preserve is the prevalence of snags, or dead trees. Most of these trees have been girdled by beavers, struck by lightning, or killed by disease. The preserve managers do not dispose of them because they create homes for different animals.

The Maryland/DC Chapter of the Conservancy helped the State of Maryland acquire this important area. It contains approximately 70 acres of wetland in the floodplain of the Little Patuxent River and is unique to Maryland. At 250 acres total, Oxbow is half in county or state land ownership, while other portions are owned by the local community association. Management activities include maintaining and improving trails, making a lookout platform on the lake, controlling invasives, and preserving forest growth. There is also an audio tour available to enhance a visit to the preserve.



Harold Malde

Dodder is a rare plant species found at Oxbow, along with many others.

Directions (GPS Coordinates: 39°06'52.5"N 76°48'23.4"W)

From I-295 (Baltimore Washington Parkway)

Take the 198 west exit toward Laurel. In less than 1 mile, turn right on Russett Green West. **NOTE:** The first Russett Green is East, do not take this. Drive through the development and turn left after 0.8 miles onto Oxbow Place. When you see a sign that says Oxbow Lake Nature Preserve, park on the west side of the road (facing south) and enter the woods at the wheelchair ramp on the left side of the street.

From I-95:

Take the 198 east exit. Pass through Laurel and pass the Laurel Racetrack. Turn left on Russett Green West. Drive through the development and turn left on Oxbow Place after 0.8 miles. When you see a sign that says Oxbow Lake Nature Preserve, park on the west side of the road (facing south) and enter the woods at the wheelchair ramp on the left side of the street.

Visiting

- Parking available at the entrance sign except from 9pm to 6am
- Easy to moderate trails
- Informational signs posted

Contact

For more information, please visit the Anne Arundel County Department of Recreation and Parks website:

<http://www.aacounty.org/recparks/parks/community/oxbownatural.cfm#.U6hZtl4s4uN>