

Prince William Forest Park was once colonial farmland

By JIM ROGERS
of the Potomac News

QUANTICO — If you want to get an idea of what Prince William County looked like when the colonists first arrived in Virginia, a visit to Prince William Forest Park could be enlightening.

The park, a 13,500-acre area run by the U.S. Park Service, is bordered by Interstate 95, Va. 234 and Va. 619. It is nestled against the northern edge of the U.S. Marine Corps Reservation.

Park Ranger George Liffert said the park became national in 1948. Prior to then, the large piece of property was called the Chopawamsic Recreation Demonstration Area, which was run under the auspices of the Resettlement Administration.

The Resettlement Administration was an agency created during the New Deal days of President Franklin Roosevelt, Liffert said. Its purpose was to identify rustic areas near urban areas and convert them into places where city dwellers could go for a taste of country life.

"It was a program that worked in conjunction with the Civilian Conservation Corps," he said. "This particular area was one of 46 recreation demonstration areas in the country."

From about the mid-1700s until the Roosevelt years, the area that comprises the park was farmed by hundreds of families, Liffert says, mostly tobacco farmers who were descendants of the settlers who founded the Port of Dumfries.

In the 1930s, the Resettlement Administration relocated all of the farm families "to land that was more productive than this," the ranger says. The old farms were allowed to return to the forest.

"There are a lot of places in the park where you can still see traces of the farming that took place," he says. "Perhaps the best place is the Taylor Farm

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PRINCE WILLIAM FOREST PARK



By Steve Davis-Potomac News

Prince William Forest Park is an ideal spot for avid hikers and campers.

Places

site near the very heart of the park."

The park is home to a large population of beaver, deer, and wild turkey.

"This also is an excellent place for bird watchers," Liffert says. "We've got a large variety of songbirds here."

The park features a wide variety of activities including tent camping, recreational vehicle camping and group camping. Camping is limited to 28 nights per year. The the park service provides firewood at all the camping areas.

Oak Ridge campground has 113 camp sites available on a first-come, first-serve basis. The spaces are for tents and small recreational vehicles less than 18 feet long. Each site has a paved parking slip.

For groups, two types of camping are available: cabin camps for groups of 50 or more, and tent camps. The five cabin camps — all built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the late 1930s, Liffert says — have sleeping cabins, a central kitchen-dining cabin, rest rooms and showers, staff quarters, a nature lodge, and an administrative building. Groups must provide their own bedding and

cooking utensils. U.S. Park Rangers and volunteers at the Nature Center can answer most questions a visitor may have about the park. They give talks on many subjects, including seasonal blooming of wild flowers, how early settlers farmed the land, and recreational opportunities in the park.

Picnic areas are provided near the main entrance station at Pine Grove and Telegraph Road. Each picnic area has tables, campfire grills, trash containers, rest rooms and playgrounds. No firewood is provided at the picnic areas.

The park features approximately 35 miles of hiking trails and fire roads. The Farms to Forest Trail at Oak Ridge campground shows how wounds on the landscape, mostly a result of the early tobacco farming, are healing, Liffert says. The Living Forest Trail near Travel Trailer Village acquaints the hiker with the surroundings and shows how the natural elements work together, while the Crossing Nature Trail at the Telegraph Road picnic area shows how the natural and human history of the park are entwined.

Fishing is allowed in the park's streams where bass, bluegill, perch and catfish are found. The staff at park headquarters can give fishermen a list of state and park fishing regulations and provide information about the closest locations for buying a Virginia fishing license.

"You won't find any trophy-size fish in the streams" Liffert says. "But the young kids might enjoy taking the pan-size fish from the streams. We don't have a size limitation. If you want to keep a small one, that's up to you."

There is an entrance fee of \$3 per car required at the main gate on Va. 695 just off I-95 near Quantico. The fee is good for one week.

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