**Segment for Week of 12 July, 2021 757-550-1854**

**Natural Area Preserves**

This is Steve Rulison bringing you information on Shore friendly living and gardening from the Eastern Shore Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension. This week we are going to talk about the Eastern Shore’s Natural Area Preserves.

From my perch near the mouth of Occohannock Creek, I recorded \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of rain last week.

Natural Area Preserves, or NAPs, harbor many of Virginia’s exemplary natural communities and rare species habitats and provide visitors unique outdoor experiences. Here on the Eastern Shore, there are four Natural Area Preserves with public access – Savage Neck Dunes, Cape Charles, Magothy Bay and Mutton Hunk. These preserves are available for those who are looking for quiet and relaxing time away from crowds.

Savage Neck Dunes NAP features diverse coastal natural communities including Chesapeake Bay beach, maritime grasslands, a rare maritime dune woodland, maritime forest and natural freshwater pond. Cape Charles NAP provides important resting and feeding habitat for songbirds during migration. The sandy shoreline is home to the federally threatened northeastern beach tiger beetle. Magothy Bay NAP is made up of woodlands, forested wetlands and an extensive salt marsh. Mutton Hunk NAP encompasses restored upland migratory songbird habitat, maritime forest, salt marshes, a remnant Carolina bay and rare sea-level fen community.

Visitors are welcome to walk the trails, take photos and observe wildlife. You will notice that parking areas are small – usually from four to 20 spaces. A full parking lot indicates that the preserve has reached capacity. If you find the lot full, please return at another time. Read and obey posted signs. There are no public restrooms or trash bins, so please help us keep the areas clean and natural. And, if you visit, please remember to social distance and to have a mask readily available to cover your face when encountering other visitors on the trails.

Stewards monitor the NAPs regularly to keep the areas clean, report any concerns, and assist Department of Conservation Recreation in tasks such as planting trees and shrubs in newly purchased areas to restore habitat.

If you would like more information about the Natural Area Preserves here on the Shore, including directions to the preserves, visit [www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural)-heritage. And, of course, as always information on soil testing or answers to other gardening questions, call your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. Here on the Shore call either 678-7946 or 787-1361.