

VIMS staff help launch Gloucester Blueways Water Trails

By Erin Kelly

(October 25, 2012) Outdoor enthusiasts have a new destination for fishing, kayaking, and adventure within Tidewater Virginia with the launch of Gloucester Blueways, a system of 5 water trails spanning more than 40 miles.

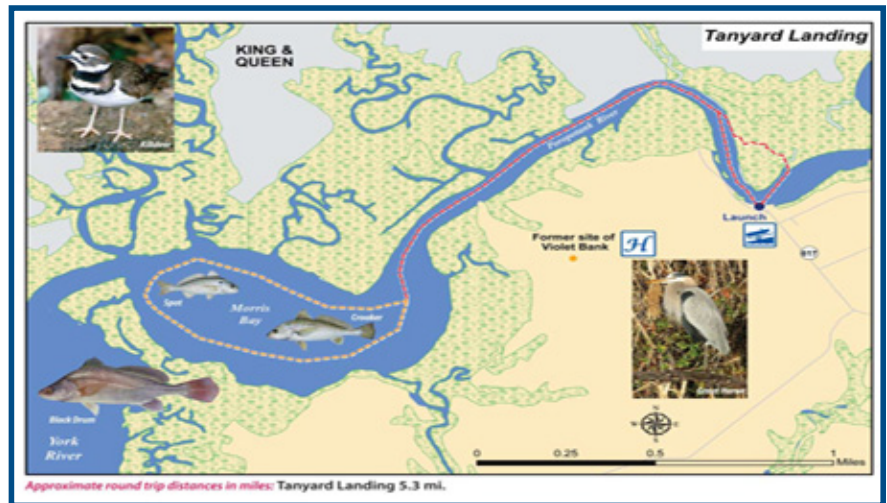
The trail system was announced on October 13th by Gloucester County Parks, Recreation & Tourism, along with their various partners. Visitors and residents can now enjoy all of the scenic beauty, history, wildlife, and fun that Gloucester has to offer by heading out on its natural waterways.

The project—which only took about 18 months to bring to fruition—enlisted the help of various partners in the Gloucester community. Among those involved were Gloucester County Parks, Recreation & Tourism; Bay Country Kayaking; York River Charters; Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries; and various individuals from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and its Center for Coastal Resources Management.

Marcia Berman, Program Manager for the Comprehensive Coastal Inventory Program at VIMS, took part in the project along with VIMS' Geographic Information System Programmer/Analyst Karinna Nunez. The pair developed several components of the 5 maps featured on the guides used to maneuver the various water trails.

“The initial focus was to provide safe trails for kayaking,” says Berman. “Then historical sites were added and I suggested we bring in some ecological aspects as well. I thought it would be fun for people to know and be able to spot the organisms they might see while out on the water trails.”

VIMS' marine recreation specialist Susanna Musick contributed to the environmental studies portion of the project by supplying ecological facts about each of the water trails, in addition to information for anglers. “Gloucester Blueways is a great resource for fishermen and anglers of all kinds, and people who want to explore Gloucester's wildlife and historical sites by water,” she says.



Water Trails: Staff at VIMS helped develop water trail maps for kayakers to be able to navigate and predict what wildlife they will see while out on the trails. Map courtesy of Gloucester Blueways Water Trails

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Hilton SnowBeaverdam trail is one of the 5 water trails launched by Gloucester Blueways. don, Tourism Coordinator for Gloucester Parks, Recreation & Tourism says the project would not have been possible without the Institute. “VIMS’ help with generating the maps, artwork, and the research that went into the project was worth thousands of dollars,” he says.

“VIMS is a part of the Gloucester community, so it is important for us to use our resources to help the community move forward in a positive way,” adds Berman.

Paddlers can expect to see a variety of wildlife while navigating the Blueway’s 5 water trails. Kayakers might encounter a wild turkey or beaver on the Beaverdam trail (the program’s only freshwater system), a bald eagle or terrapin on the John’s Point trail, or maybe catch some speckled trout during a fishing trip on the Warehouse Landing trail.

Snowdon says each water trail is unique. “Visitors will encounter wetlands, marsh, open waterways, and historical points along the way,” he says. “You come across so much during these fun and healthy outings.”

Snowdon says the main goal of the implementation of Gloucester Blueways was to promote ecotourism in the community. “The beautiful thing about Gloucester is that the resource was already here waiting for us,” he says. “We just had to map it, package it, and promote it.”

In addition to the ecotourism aspect, the creation of the Blueways water trails will also provide the local community with better access to its own aquatic resources. People will now have numerous access points where they can park, leave their car, and put their kayak in the water all in the same place.

Director of Gloucester Parks, Recreation & Tourism Carol Steele says the water trails will end up being an economic tool for businesses in Gloucester. “It’s our responsibility to promote the county by creating and expanding tourist attractions,” she says. “We want to focus on outdoor recreation and the fun components of the County. In return, it should deliver patrons to local businesses year-round.”

Steele says they consider the launch of the Blueways as stage one. “We have multiple other things we want to add and really hope to expand,” she says. “There are so many more places to discover, so we will also be partnering with our neighbors at York County Blueways and Mathews Blueways who have already been successful with their trails.”

To learn more about Gloucester Blueways Water Trails, or to start planning your first excursion, visit <http://www.gloucesterblueways.org>.



Kayaking the Blueways: Shannon Alexander of Bay Country Kayaks poses for a quick picture while enjoying a day on the Blueways. Photo by Alan Alexander