

Dragon Run Watershed

According to the Virginia Natural Heritage Program, the Dragon Run watershed “encompasses some of the most extensive and unspoiled swamp forest and woodland communities in Virginia.” One researcher describes it as a 100-year-old time capsule that resembles coastal plain streams in Virginia at the turn of the 20th century. The watershed is mostly undeveloped and encompasses approximately 140 square miles (90,000 acres) of rural landscape – primarily forests, farms, and wetlands. The spring-fed fresh and brackish water stream meanders forty miles through nontidal and tidal cypress swamp in Essex, King and Queen, Middlesex, and Gloucester Counties, emptying into the Piankatank River and Chesapeake Bay.



Majestic Baldcypress



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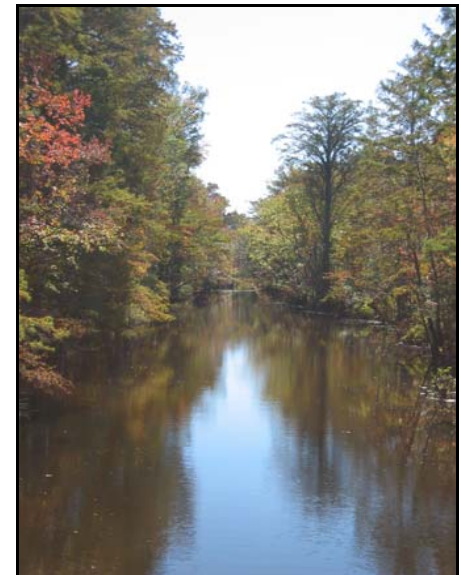
Dragon Run Steering Committee

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The State of the Dragon Run Watershed



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State of the Dragon Run



The Dragon Run in winter

The Dragon Run watershed supports many unique resources. It is largely intact, with more than 80% forest and wetlands, 18% agricultural, and 1% commercial and residential. Natural heritage resources in the Dragon Run include five rare

natural communities, seven rare animals, and seven rare plants. In addition, the Dragon Run supports a diversity of freshwater and estuarine fishes, aquatic macroinvertebrates (primarily insects), freshwater bivalves (primarily mussels), amphibians, and reptiles. At least forty-five fish species and sixty-five macroinvertebrate species have been collected in the Dragon Run. The watershed also harbors a number of rookeries for colonial water birds, such as egrets and herons. These resources are all associated with the extensive tidal and non-tidal freshwater wetlands in the watershed.

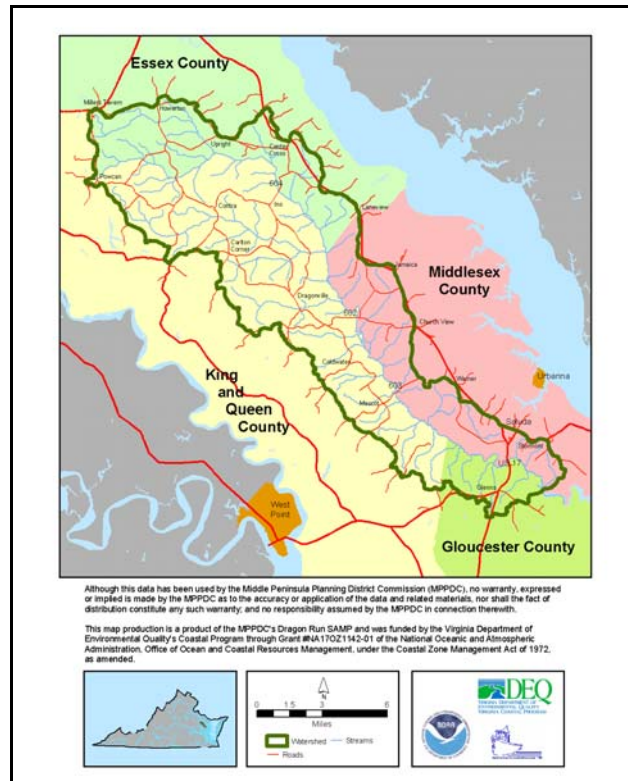


Heron rookery

Meanwhile, the watershed contains limited examples of non-native species, again emphasizing an intact natural system.

The Dragon Run exhibits moderately low streamflow, most of which originates from groundwater. The watershed has few point sources of pollution and a low nonpoint source pollution potential rating. Nevertheless, it exceeds state standards for several water quality parameters, including pH, fecal coliform bacteria, mercury, and lead. With the possible exception of fecal coliform, however, these “impairments” are likely due to natural conditions.

Since the watershed is mostly undeveloped and exhibits low impervious cover (e.g. hard surfaces), it remains in good condition. There are relatively few land parcels in the watershed and even fewer structures, which are primarily located along the sparse road network. Due to its pristine condition, the Dragon Run watershed supports hunting, fishing, boating, nature-based tourism, and education activities.



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