

Stop 5—Flavors

Speaking of eating, the riparian forest is loaded with tasty treats. It offers the very best in fruits, vegetables, meats, grains, and seafood. Not for us, of course. We can go to the grocery store to get our food, besides you should never eat anything in the forest unless supervised by an expert. But for a fox, opossum, or raccoon, the riparian forest is an ideal buffet. From berries to bugs, hungry wildlife can find plenty to eat in this habitat, whatever the season. In fact, most animals change their diets seasonally. Depending on the time of year, a fox may eat grapes, persimmons, rabbits, birds, eggs, or rodents.

Sense of Wonder

In her book, *Sense of Wonder*, naturalist Rachel Carson expresses that her wish for children is “a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life.” Let’s all, young and old, heed the wisdom of her words by keeping alive our own sense of wonder. Be curious, ask questions, seek answers, and marvel at nature’s mysteries. As you leave the riparian forest, take a moment to ponder the mystical migration of birds, the subtle changing of the seasons, and the ebb and flood of the tide.

Major funding for this project came from the Chesapeake Bay License Plate Fund & Virginia Department of Forestry’s Urban & Community Forest Program.



Forest Sense

A guide to the Riparian Forest Trail.



Distance: ½ mile

Estimated Walking Time: 15-30 min.



Hoffer Creek Wildlife Foundation
4510 Twin Pines Rd.
Portsmouth, VA 23703
(757) 686-8684
hofflercreek@hofflercreek.org
www.hofflercreek.org

Making Sense of the Forest

You are about to enter a riparian forest of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. A riparian forest is simply a forest along a waterway. This riparian forest touches the shores of Hoffler Creek, a salty, tidal creek at the mouth of the Bay.

The proximity of the creek and forest presents special benefits and challenges for plants and animals sharing the watershed.

As you step into the cool, shadowy shade of the forest, awaken your senses to the sights, sounds, smells, textures, flavors, and wonders of this riparian world.



Stop 1—Sights

Can you see the forest for the trees? Take a moment to let your eyes focus. Look up, look down, look all around. Notice the narrow path stretching out before you, the canopy of trees above you, and the carpet of leaves below you. See the big picture of the forest, but don't miss the beauty in the details of each leaf, seed, or flower.

Train your eyes to notice movement. All around you, animals are going about their daily activities. Look to the left. This muddy inlet is home to hundreds of tiny, marching fiddler crabs. Crabs in a forest, you might wonder? In a riparian forest—sure. Lots of animals call the riparian forest home. After all, who doesn't want waterfront property? Look to the right. What do you see?

Before moving on, find the red marks on the trees. These will guide you as you progress along the trail.



Stop 2—Sounds

Pause and listen to the music of the riparian forest. Close your eyes and cup your hands around your ears. Can you pick out the different sounds? Leaves rustle, winds

whisper, trees creak, branches snap, songbirds sing, owls hoot, raptors scream, and insects buzz. If you listen a little harder, you may hear the musicians in the creek, too. Hear the fish splashing, kingfishers rattling, herons squawking, and frogs croaking? What other sounds do you hear?

Stop 3—Smells

Ah, the sense of smell! Stop and take a deep breath. Inhale the aroma of the riparian forest. Experience the earthy scent of the soil, the fresh smell of green plants, the musky scent of wood, the pungent odor of the marsh, and the salty essence of the air.



Think you smell a skunk? Skunks do not live at the preserve, but foxes do. A male fox marking his territory leaves behind a “skunky” scent.

Stop 4—Textures

To really get to know the riparian forest, you must experience its many textures. Feel the squishiness of the soil, the warmth of the sun, the coolness of the shade, and the weight of the salty air. Reach out and touch tree bark, pinecones, gumballs, berries, feathers, and leaves. **Caution**—for your safety, if you do not know how to identify poison ivy, do not touch any leaves or vines.

Have you ever heard of raccoons washing their food before they eat? Rumor has it they are actually wetting their hands to stimulate their sense of touch so they can separate the parts they want to eat.

