

## West River Marsh Trail: Numbered Nature Walk

### Beginning of the Marsh Trail

Welcome to the West River Marsh Trail! Did you read our **Tips and Preparation** document before getting started? If you're ready to go, follow the **blue blazes** along the trail, and when you get to a number, **STOP** and read the information in this resource that matches up with the number!

1

**Sensory Observations:** Now that you've entered the woods, take a moment to pause and observe your environment. What different living things are around you? How many types of plants do you see? What other senses can you use?

**Listen** to your surroundings; maybe you can hear bugs or birds. **Feel** the temperature; is there any wind? Can you **smell** the marsh? As you continue on your hike, make sure to keep using senses other than just sight to make observations! You can practice your visual observation skills with the game See and Find, from our **At-Home Activities** document!

2

**Mighty Phragmites:** Did you notice that the very tall grasses you see around you all seem to be the same type of plant? Maybe you noticed that this is different from back in the woods, where there were many different types of plants, even including different types of trees and vines. The tall grasses you see are called **phragmites** (pronounced: frag-mite-eez) and they are an invasive species. An invasive species is a species of plant or animal that has two things true about it: it is non-native, brought into one environment from a different one; and it is harmful to native species. Phragmites grows very quickly and strongly, and takes space and nutrients that native grasses would use, so the native grasses end up dying. That's why most of the marsh grass you see is phragmites. What other invasive species do you know of? What plants other than phragmites can you still see around you?



3

**A Likin' for Lichen:** Standing next to the number 2 on the path, look to your left. The forked tree you see has some greenish-grayish stuff growing on its trunk. That stuff is called **lichen**. Lichen is a special type of living thing, because it's actually two different organisms living together! There are different types of lichen, but all lichen consists of both a fungus and some algae. The fungus gives it the shape you see; the algae gives it the greenish color. The algae can make food from sunlight through photosynthesis, and this food goes to the fungus part of a lichen, too. Two organisms living together like this is called **symbiosis**.



4

**On the Marsh Platform:** What can you see around you? Make some observations. What type of ecosystem can you see in the distance, beyond the marsh? You should be able to see just a little of the West River. Although phragmites is an invasive species, it and all the plants in the marsh still serve an important purpose in the life of the West River. Every time it rains, water runs from the neighborhoods around the camp, and much of it goes through the marsh before making it to the open water. The plants and soil in the marsh slow down the water and trap pollutants and sediment, acting as a filter to protect the river from some of the things that run off the land. For a demonstration, try the Marsh Filter Activity in our **At-Home Activities** document.

5

**Living on the Edge:** How many types of wildlife have you seen on your hike? Even if you haven't seen any big animals to go along with the plants and bugs, you probably saw some evidence that they were around. Now think about the evidence you may have observed of human presence (besides yourself!). What things have you heard or seen that tell you how humans interact with the ecosystem around you? What effect do you think those humans have? There might be good and bad answers: you may have seen some evidence of humans littering, but you also have evidence of humans teaching and learning about this ecosystem! To learn more about humans interacting with marshes and other wetlands around the Chesapeake Bay, check out:

<https://www.chesapeakebay.net/issues/wetlands>.

6

**Osprey Nest:** In the river in front of you is a platform with an osprey nest on it. Depending on the season, you might not see an osprey living in it! Osprey are birds of prey that are related to Bald Eagles. Osprey from Maryland migrate to South America during the winter, and return during the spring. They often mate with the same partner for their whole life, and return to the same nesting spots year after year. Their nests can include anything the osprey find that they think is useful, such as sticks and branches, but also fishing line and other man-made things. How well can you see the osprey nest? Is there anything unexpected in it?

