

Seaside Ecotourism Site Improvement: Willis Wharf
NOAA Grant #: NA05NOS4191180
Grant Year 2005 Task 9.2
Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries
Final Project Report

This observation deck was established through a partnership of the Village of Willis Wharf, Northampton County, Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program. The deck is an ecotourism project of the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program.

Construction of the deck was funded by the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program at the Department of Environmental Quality through a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration under the Coastal Zone Management Act. Matching funds were provided by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.



Virginia Coastal Zone
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM



(Project Acknowledgment Sign)

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This project developed an observation platform overlooking the tidal wetlands adjacent to the Willis Wharf Marina in Northampton County, VA. Construction occurred on county-owned property at the marina. The viewing platform is a 4 foot high platform with a handicap accessible ramp. The surface is 24 feet wide by 64 feet long with railings. The decking surface was constructed with recycled plastic lumber to increase the durability of the platform and reduce maintenance. The property is owned by the County of Northampton and the platform will be open to the public. This will provide opportunities to view a variety of shorebirds and improve the ecotourism infrastructure of the area. This project complements FY 2003 Task 12.11, which constructed a floating dock at Willis Wharf Marina, for use by paddlers utilizing the Seaside Water Trail. In addition Willis Wharf is a site on the Virginia Birding & Wildlife Trail. This wildlife viewing platform acts to enhance all aspects of this site's sustainable ecotourism infrastructure.

The platform overlooks extensive mudflats and wetlands of the Parting Creek. This area has consistently provided feeding and resting habitat for a variety of unique shorebirds such as: marbled godwits, willet, whimbrel, black skimmers, and a variety of sandpipers, terns and long-legged waders.

In consultation with a variety of partners (Northampton County, Willis Wharf Village Committee, Virginia DEQ CZM and Northampton-Accomack PDC), initial design parameters were defined. These included accessibility, and synthesizing the structure with the surrounding working waterfront.

With guidance from DGIF Watchable Wildlife Staff, DGIF Capital Programs staff created detailed plans for the platform. These plans were forwarded to all partners for review and comment. The plans were modified to incorporate changes agreed upon by the project partners. The revised plans were found to be satisfactory and were approved by the Northampton County Board of Supervisors. Northampton County put the project to public bid and received three bids in Dec. 2007. The construction contract was awarded to Eastern Shore Homecrafters.

DGIF entered into a cooperative agreement that delineates the responsibilities of the primary partners (DGIF and Northampton County) regarding construction and maintenance of the viewing platform. These documents were approved by the Northampton County Board of Supervisors at their October meeting. Signage acknowledging the contributions of NOAA, CZM and all other partners has been installed on site. A site visit by DGIF staff on April 7, 2008 has confirmed that all construction is satisfactory and consistent with the plans provided.

A mounted set of 10x Binoculars provided by the Accomack-Northampton PDC through FY 2004 CZM Grant, Task 11.1, has been installed in the northeastern corner of the deck. This non-coin operated set of optics will provide additional viewing access for casual wildlife watchers.

Figure 1. Viewing Platform



Figure 2. Handicapped Parking Detail



Figure 3. Acknowledgement Sign



Figure 4. Acknowledgement Sign Detail



Figure 4. Handicapped Ramp South Elevation



Figure 5. Handicapped Ramp North North Elevation



Figure 6. Stairs



Figure 7. North View



Figure 10. South View



Figure 8. Deck Surface North View



Figure 9. Railing Detail



Figure 11. Creekside View



Figure 12. Mounted Binoculars



