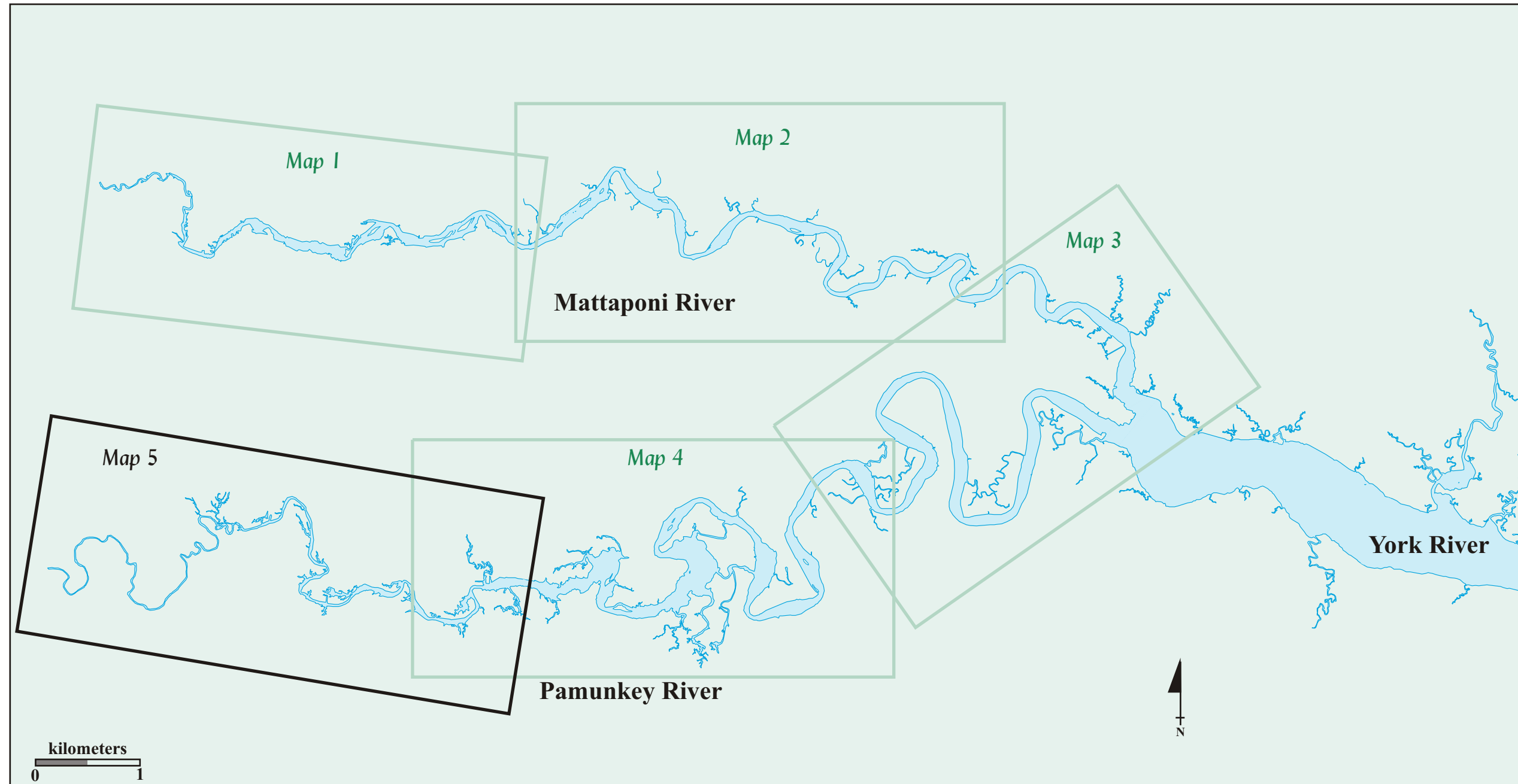


Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers

— Map Guide —



— What You Might Find on this Part of the River —

Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)

If you spend any amount of time paddling in the upper reaches, you will sooner or later encounter the engineering feats of this industrious river creature. Beaver homes, or dens, are usually built inside of deep ponds, created by dammed streams and creeks. Many a weary canoeist has been forced to portage around these obstructions of logs, mud, and debris, and frustrated farmers must contend with fields flooded along the water's edge nearby. The den features an underground entrance and exit for quick escapes.

While often cursed for their destructive behavior, beavers contribute to the growth of young shrubs, ground covers, and understory trees in the forest, which benefit from the added sunlight made available by their cutting activities. Beavers nearly succumbed to over-trapping during the 1800s, when their pelts were cured into a luscious felt for hats. They are still trapped in the marshes of the Pamunkey and Mattaponi rivers, often in contraptions modeled after the dead-fall trap, designed by the Pamunkey Indians centuries ago.

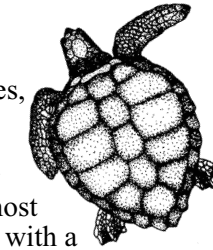
Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

The cottontail is a familiar sight throughout the fields and forests of the watershed. Dashing under cover or running in serpentine fashion across a country lane, the cottontail is sure to remind you of childhood tales and adventures.

This clever mammal has a voracious appetite, consuming just about anything that grows to the tune of forty percent of its body weight daily. Like other rabbits, it is a prolific breeder. Young rabbits reach independence in 16 short days, when their mother prepares for the arrival of the next litter. Many youngsters are lost in the nest to foul weather and predation. But those that reach maturity are assured a rich diet and plenty of good places to hide and raise their young in the dense thickets of the Mattaponi and Pamunkey lowlands.

Turtles

Turtles are curious creatures. They live right under our noses, yet rarely interrupt us while creeping about their daily business. On these rivers they are plentiful, of course, and most likely to reveal their presence with a loud splash after sliding off a log or down a muddy bank. Don't be surprised if a turtle escorts you on a paddle, bobbing above the surface from time to time.



The Eastern painted turtle is a familiar sight in marshes and upland areas, sporting a dark olive and red suit. They reach 7-8 inches in length. Interestingly, the smaller males grow long front fingernails which are used to stroke the necks of females during an elaborate face-to-face courtship. With their crinkly old skin and slow, deliberate movement, they are a humorous rejection of life on the information highway.

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

One of the many benefits of paddling through a marsh of the watershed is your proximity to its colorful mascot, the great blue heron. Don't be surprised if your arrival prompts a cantankerous squawk as the great blue heron lifts its pencil-thin legs into perfect horizontal formation while flying low over the water.



With keen short-range vision and the ability to uncoil its long neck in snakelike fashion, the great blue is a consummate predator in the mud bottom shallows. Great blues feed on young fish that inhabit the dense underwater grasses that define the river's edges. On the Mattaponi and Pamunkey rivers, their main fare includes shiners, young pickerel, snakes, and frogs. These year-round residents share the rivers of the Chesapeake Bay with eight other visiting heron species.

Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*)

Claiming home along freshwater edges is the jewelweed, also known as the spotted touch-me-not. This annual of the freshwater swamp flaunts an unusual, funnel-shaped flower hanging down from a slender stalk, which blooms July through September. The nectar of the orange and brown spotted flower is favored by the ruby-throated hummingbird, and the plant's seeds are eaten by birds and mice.

Downy Serviceberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*)

This special small tree is often referred to as shadblow, because it blooms with a profusion of massed white cascading blossoms in very early spring, usually marking the annual spring spawning "run" for blueback herring and shad fish here on both rivers. Triggered by the increasingly warmer temperatures and longer periods of daylight, the serviceberry bloom heralds the arrival of spring. Its light gray bark and dull green leaves make it hard to spot from the river, unless you are on the water in early spring, or catch a glimpse of its yellow-red fall blaze, away from the water's edge and under the larger tree canopy that shelters it.

White Dogwood (*Cornus florida*)

This majestic small flowering tree is indeed the landscape darling of the riverside forest. With its impressive large white petaled blossoms that come in early spring before the leaves do, the dogwood proclaims the new growing season is upon us. The bloom is followed by a bright red fruit, and the summer green color gives way to a scarlet fall color at season's end. Dogwood is a preferred wood for use in hand-made tools and long-lasting crafts, but is primarily renowned for how its aromatic bark and roots were useful in treating malaria, and for a brilliant red dye that can be extracted from its roots.