

# mudflats

NEWSLETTER OF THE

**Elizabeth River Project**  
*Making restoration a reality.*



MAKING RESTORATION A REALITY

SPRING 2010

WWW.ELIZABETHRIVER.ORG

## Better Than Perfect Learning Barge Scores High with Teachers

The Elizabeth River Project's Learning Barge, the world's only floating wetlands classroom, sailed through its first two months of instruction with glowing reviews from teachers and students. In fact, nearly every teacher's assessment was a perfect 10. The biggest exception was a chart-busting 15.

"Oh my goodness," one Norfolk Collegiate faculty member wrote. "I've been teaching for a lot of years and I've been on a lot of field trips, but I've never been on a field trip so engaging, so much fun, and so educational."

"Just Awesome!" a 5th grade teacher from Ocean View Elementary concluded.

The Learning Barge, a solar powered 120-by-32 foot environmental lab, was designed by the University of Virginia School of Architecture and made possible through key

support by Dominion Virginia Power and you, our loyal supporters. The vessel was christened Sept. 14 with a sprinkle of fresh water. The first field trip came aboard Oct. 2 – and since then, field trip opportunities for school year 2009-10 have sold out, with a waiting list. More than 1,300 students from 19 schools in the first two months learned first-hand how their actions can improve the Elizabeth River.

"They taught me something with value," student Aaron wrote. "Now I am yelling at my parents to recycle and don't use much fertilizer and rain is the only thing for the drain. Also scoop the poop, because we have a big, fat bulldog and he eats three big scoops of food two times a day."

This spring and summer, more than 50 schools are booked with more than 4,500



*Students take an active role on the Learning Barge in discovering what lives in the river and how to help. Here, Norfolk Collegiate students pull up a fish trap.*

students. And the Elizabeth River Project is adding a family opportunity this summer, with the River Star Families pilot program. Training opportunities for families (singles to seniors, not just folks with children) will be announced soon.



*The royal launch - "Princess Elizabeth," educator for Elizabeth River Project, welcomes guests to the world's first floating wetland classroom on christening day for the Learning Barge.*



*You have to earn your wash water here on the Learning Barge.*

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# Our Nature Park- More of "America's Best Idea"



From the  
Executive Director

Ken Burns calls our national parks "America's Best Idea." With his new PBS documentary, he makes a magnificent case for our own park-in-the-making, Paradise Creek Nature Park.

Burns reports that his film team was "principally drawn to the fact that, for the first time in human history, land – great sections of our natural landscape – was set aside, not for kings or noblemen or the very rich, but for everyone, for all time."

The 40 acres of wild shore on Paradise Creek, a tributary under transformation on the Elizabeth's Southern Branch, will be a municipal and not a federal park. But Paradise Creek Nature Park, like those Burns profiled, will be the product of people persisting against the odds, inspired by the same great idea.

From the perspective of the Elizabeth River Project, there must be places on the shoreline where people can fall in love with the river, if we are to inspire stewardship.

"Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike," the PBS special quotes naturalist John Muir.

From the perspective of the City of Portsmouth, the nature park will add precious acreage to its dearth of green space. Portsmouth has only 350 acres of parks when the standards dictate 1,000.

In 2003, our park was nothing more than the idea of a planning team who thought people would protect Paradise Creek if they had access to appreciate it. The site had to be studied, surveyed; the city convinced to accept and operate a new park; the \$1.4 million raised to buy the waterfront land. Now we are more than half-way into raising the \$800,000 or so needed to open Phase I by 2012 and have hired Clough Harbour Associates to prepare the final design.

Burns set out to follow "the ideas and individuals that have created this uniquely American thing called the national parks, an invention we now take for granted..."

I salute so many of you, donors, educators, government officials, naturalists and more, who are making a reality of one of our best ideas for inspiring appreciation of the Elizabeth River.

Download video from *The National Parks, America's Best Idea*, at [PBS.org](http://PBS.org). Visit [paradisecreekpark.org](http://paradisecreekpark.org) to learn more about our new park.

*mudflats* is the newsletter of The Elizabeth River Project, a membership-based non-profit working to restore the Elizabeth River through government, business and citizen partnerships. "Mudflats" refers to that slippery, biologically active zone where land and water meet, symbolizing our search for common ground.

[www.elizabethriver.org](http://www.elizabethriver.org)



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# Top River Stars Bring Back Wetlands

Pam Boatwright remembers when she got what sounded like a very humble offer. The manager of Elizabeth River Terminals on the Elizabeth's Southern Branch wondered if the Elizabeth River Project might be interested in helping with what he described as "this little area that might be good for wildlife habitat."

Wow, wasn't it.

This past summer, the bulk material terminal and Elizabeth River Project completed the largest voluntary wetland restoration yet on the river – 6.8 acres, counting the reforestation of the shore. The sprawling new wetland helped win Kinder Morgan/Elizabeth River Terminals the highest level of recognition, Model Level, at our annual luncheon for River Star businesses on Jan. 28.

Also reaching Model Level in the River Star program was Virginia Zoo – in part for a significant restoration of tidal wetland grasses on its shores.

All told, 30 facilities were recognized at this year's luncheon, together with past achievers

reaching a new grand total of 215 million pounds of pollution reduced since 1997 and 1,043 acres of wildlife habitat restored or conserved.

Elizabeth River Terminals volunteered its shore for excavation to wetland elevations and planting of more than 40,000 native plants and 2,126 trees and shrubs, complimenting our offshore clean up of contaminated sediments at Money Point.

The terminal also has done its part to reduce pollution, building a storage facility with a covered and computerized loading system that reduced product waste by 400 tons a year.

Meanwhile, the Virginia Zoo completed a half-acre wetland restoration at a high-visibility location with educational signage along its main parking area, removing old rubble and planting 9,000 native wetlands grasses, trees and shrubs. The zoo has added two additional environmental exhibits, an Eco-Garden and children's rain garden.



*Mark Schneider of the Virginia Zoo helps plant wetlands along the Lafayette River.*



*Phil Stedfast of Elizabeth River Terminals gives a thumbs up to the new wetland planting at Money Point.*

# Welcome to the Board

## John M.R. Bull, VMRC

John Bull lives in Hampton, where he routinely swims, fishes and kayaks on the Chesapeake Bay. He has been the director of public relations for the Virginia Marine Resources Commission since June, 2007. Before that he spent 23 years working at 8 newspapers, most in his native Pennsylvania. His last journalism job was at the Daily Press in Newport News, where he did investigations and covered the General Assembly.

Bull is one of two newly elected members of the Board of Directors of the Elizabeth River Project.

“This plays right into my love of our state’s natural resources,” he said. “The fact of the matter is that the Elizabeth River problems are not confined to the Elizabeth River.”

## Lauren V. Wolcott, CPA, P.C.

Lauren Wolcott lives on the Lafayette River in the home where her husband, lawyer Eddie Wolcott Jr., was raised. He remembers when you could swim in the river, she said. “It will be nice to restore it to the way it was years ago.”

She grew up in Bristol, Tenn., water skiing and boating on South Holston Lake, where you could drink the water without reservation. Wolcott moved to Hampton Roads after graduating from the University of Virginia. Three years ago she began her own firm providing accounting, tax and business consulting services.

Wolcott, 53, also serves on the boards of Norfolk Collegiate School, the American Red Cross of Southeastern Virginia and the Horizon Circle of the Children’s Hospital of the King’s Daughters.”

## Ship Repairers Adopt Learning Vessel Maritime Community Rallies ‘Round Barge



*Bay Towing and BAE Systems Norfolk Ship Repair move the barge to be winterized.*

From tugboat companies to shipyards and department stores, it seems everybody wants the Learning Barge to be safe and sound for the 60 students who come aboard each session.

The ship repair community, especially, has rallied to adopt maintenance of the 120-foot barge, the largest environmental education vessel on the lower Chesapeake Bay.

“The ship repairers are already some of our stars in reducing pollution on the river, so it is extra special to have them care so much about education of the children as well,” said Marjorie Mayfield Jackson, Executive Director, Elizabeth River Project.

After cold weather ended the first field trip season in December, BAE Systems Norfolk Ship Repair – the largest private yard on the Elizabeth – whisked the Learning Barge away by tug for donated winter storage and fine-tuning, including adding 40,000 pounds of ballast.

Colonna’s Shipyard has pledged to haul out the Learning Barge

every two years and paint the bottom – donated services valued at \$20,000. Ireland Marine and Crofton Diving have already moved the barge by tug (she has no motor), and Crofton is donating a regular schedule of dive surveys of the bottom. Earl Industries is helping with maintenance painting and other guidance along with PPG and 3M. Matherne Marine Design donated design of the barge hull and is now providing free help with maintenance oversight.

Lowe’s – sponsor of the River Lab aboard – has been donating routine supplies on a monthly basis.

Better still, the association with the maritime community is turning the innovative vessel into “yet another learning opportunity,” notes Robin Dunbar, program manager. Virginia Ship Repair Association plans to use the Learning Barge for apprentice classes.

Such stewardship from river professionals is more than heartening. It ensures your donations can be focused on providing the groundbreaking programming that students and teachers are finding so satisfying.

# Green Lawn Care - Resist the Urge to Splurge



*River Star School students grew native wetland grasses in the classroom and then planted them at the Virginia Zoo and other sites on the Lafayette River. Native species need less fertilizer and help restore the shoreline.*

With lawns growing like gangbusters, your natural reaction may be to start spreading the fertilizer.

Spring is actually a bad time to be pouring nutrients on that grass. A quick boost now is like using candy for energy. Sure, your lawn will perk up, but it won't be healthy – or permanent. If you must fertilize, fall is the best time to apply because it doesn't encourage such quick growth and weak roots.

In addition, spring rains can wash all your chemicals down storm drains before they have a chance to even seep into the soil. Every year, hundreds of thousands of pounds of nitrogen is applied to Hampton

Roads lawns. Much of it winds up in storm water runoff and contributes to algae blooms and fish kills.

Check weather forecasts, if you are determined to use chemical fertilizers, and aim for a prolonged dry period after application. Be sure to read the directions, most folks mistakenly believe more is always better. And don't spread it on walkways or other hard surfaces. It's a waste of money and a sure bet to wind up in the waterways.

Better still, think about replacing all or parts of your lawn with native plants. They won't need help to thrive in local conditions.

## Celebrating New River Star Achievements

The Elizabeth River Project's River Stars program aids and recognizes the business and government organizations who are voluntarily leading the way to restoring our river.

Since the program was begun in 1997, River Stars have reduced pollution by 215 million pounds and restored or conserved 1,043 acres of wildlife habitat.

Congratulations to those who joined or progressed in the River Stars program in 2009. They were:

### **Advancement to Model Level:**

- Kinder Morgan/Elizabeth River Terminals
- Virginia Zoo

### **Advancement to Achievement Level:**

- Christ & St. Luke's Episcopal Church
- Maersk Line, Limited
- Marine Hydraulics International
- Perdue Chesapeake Plant

### **Entry into program at Commitment Level:**

- Chesapeake Environmental Improvement Council
- Chesapeake Parks and Recreation
- Chesapeake Public Works
- Chesapeake Sheriff's Office
- FamilyCare Organic Land Care
- Knitting Mill Creek Yacht Club
- Luck Stone
- Norfolk Yacht & Country Club
- Waterside & Nauticus Marinas

### **Sustained Distinguished Performance**

- Accurate Marine Environmental (Achievement Level)
- BAE Systems Norfolk Ship Repair (Model Level)
- Chesapeake Arboretum (Model Level)
- Dominion Virginia Power, Chesapeake Energy Center (Model Level)
- Hermitage Museum & Gardens (Model Level)
- Hess Corp. Chesapeake Terminals (Achievement Level)
- HRSD (Model Level)
- Norfolk Environmental Commission (Model Level)
- Norfolk Stormwater Management Program (Commitment Level)
- Renaissance Portsmouth Hotel (Commitment Level)
- SPSA – Waste to Energy Facilities, Refuse Derived Fuel Plant (PLUS Recertifying at Model Level)
- US Coast Guard ISC Portsmouth (Model Level)
- Virginia Beach Eastern Branch Greenway (Commitment Level)
- Virginia Port Authority (Model Level)

### **Recertification**

- NOAA Marine Operations Center – Atlantic (Model Level)

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Contributions to The Elizabeth River Project received July 22, 2009 - January 31, 2010

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Living River Restoration Trust  
Lowe's Charitable & Educational Foundation  
US Environmental Protection Agency  
– Targeted Watershed Initiative Grant  
Virginia Dept. of Conservation & Recreation – Recreational Trails Grant

## \$50,000 to \$99,999

Chesapeake Bay Funders Network  
Dollar Tree Corporation  
FishAmerica Foundation & American Sportfishing Association  
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation  
– Lasting Legacy Grant  
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration  
The Norfolk Foundation  
US Environmental Protection Agency – Community Action for a Renewed Environment

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Elizabeth River Project members and donors are vital to the success of our organization. We appreciate each donation and have worked to ensure every one made within the listed timeframe is acknowledged here. We regret any unintended omissions. Please look for acknowledgement of 2010 United Way donations in the next issue of Mudflats.

# Paradise Creek Nature Park Final Design Plans Firm Up for Phase I



*ARTIST RENDITION: When the park is finished in 2014, a kayaker entering Paradise Creek will pass under a wooden bridge that allows visitors to walk a complete loop around the wetlands. The Victory Pavilion and a sculptural Tidal Garden will be along the shoreline to the west.*

Portsmouth “ought to have about 1,000 acres of parks, by standards,” said Mike Morris, the city’s director of parks and recreation. Instead, the city has only 350— one reason that Morris was excited to be part of a day-long session to prepare the final design for Phase I of Paradise Creek Nature Park.

Not only will the park conserve one of the last stands of mature forest on the Elizabeth River, it will restore 11 acres of tidal wetlands and, ultimately provide a one-of-a-kind outdoors museum of river restoration, with public art including a “tidal garden,” “earthworks mound” and a boardwalk at tree canopy height.

Paradise Creek Nature Park will add 40 precious, waterfront acres of public park in Portsmouth.

Thanks to your generous donations, The Elizabeth River Project in December was able to hire one of the top park designers in Virginia, Clough Harbour Associates, to complete the final design for Phase I of our coming oasis for education, conservation and restoration. Adjusting to the current economy, The Elizabeth River Project is now planning the park in two phases.

The initial phase is planned to open by 2012. It will offer two miles of nature trails, interpretive signage, minimal parking and access roads – all designed with a goal of zero stormwater runoff. Funding includes a \$125,000 Virginia Recreational

Trails grant and \$50,000 from the Hampton Roads Community Foundation.

The second phase is slated for completion by 2014 and will include an off-the-power-grid interpretive center, education pavilions, the interpretive public art pieces, a children’s playground, rain gardens and other innovative demonstrations of environmental sustainability.

The creek is a tributary of the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River near the Jordan Bridge. The park represents the public piece of more than 250 acres of restoration and conservation on Paradise Creek since Elizabeth River Project began work there in 2001. Directly across the creek, the U.S. Navy is transforming contaminated landfills into a 70-acre wildlife Mecca.

Dottie Wyatt has lived nearby for many years. After participating in the January planning “charrette,” she described the upcoming park as “an environmental blessing to all of us -- a place to play, a place to learn and a place to get a breath of fresh air.”

Maersk Line, Limited and Old Dominion University are just two community groups helping with volunteer work to prepare the park for opening. Find out how you can help! Contact Emma Ramsey, [eramsey@elizabethriver.org](mailto:eramsey@elizabethriver.org).