Eastern Branch to Get New Strategy

A planning team, convened by Elizabeth River Project on Feb. 6, is working on a targeted strategy for restoring the Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth.

With seahorses, fast multiplying oysters and improving water quality on the Lafayette branch of the river, a focus area since 2010, “we’re super-excited to begin the shift to the next branch,” said Marjorie Mayfield Jackson, Executive Director, Elizabeth River Project.

The Elizabeth River has four branches: the Lafayette, the Eastern Branch, Western Branch and Southern Branch. Thanks to you, our generous donors and partners, Elizabeth River Project has discovered the strength of engaging diverse stakeholders to plan and implement a strategy specific to one stretch of river at a time.

The Eastern Branch... is the largest section of river we’ve tackled yet.

Elizabeth River Project piloted the approach on Paradise Creek, a tributary to the Southern Branch, in 2001. The Eastern Branch—which runs through three cities; Chesapeake, Norfolk and Portsmouth—is the largest section of river we’ve tackled yet.

Never fear, Lafayette residents: We’re still hard at work there. Come to Lafayette RIVERFest on Saturday, April 26 along Norfolk’s Mayflower Drive (see flyer) for the latest scorecard and new ways to get involved. We’re building two more oyster reefs on the Lafayette this year. And we remain cautiously optimistic that, by the end of 2014, we will meet our goal for achieving state water quality standards in all practical reaches of the Lafayette—an historic achievement that we will owe to you, our supporters.

Regarding the Eastern Branch... Dr. Frank Dukes of the University of Virginia is facilitating the team, which will meet through late June.

Ideas for the Eastern Branch restoration? Contact Joe Rieger, jrieger@elizabethriver.org. Consider a donation today to keep returning your home river to health.
Elizabeth River Project

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Sarah Sumoski, Education and Recreation Programs Manager, Paradise Creek Nature Park

Elizabeth River Project launched a planning team for restoring the Eastern Branch on Feb. 6, thanks to your generous support. Now comes the great fun of connecting the dots up and down this rather large stretch of our home river. Before long, we will know its specific challenges and opportunities quite well. Through a team picked to represent this branch’s singular spectrum of science, government, citizen and business interests, we’ll learn where the Eastern Branch needs help the most, and who is most likely to give it.

I know that, as with the best in love affairs, something marvelous and unexpected will emerge. A need to engage the mostly residential community of the Lafayette led us to invent River Star Homes, offering free yard flags to citizen stewards (now 1,850 strong and the inspiration for similar programs around the region) and Lafayette RiverFest (3,000 attendees last year – don’t miss it April 26, lafayetteriverfest.org). On Paradise Creek in Portsmouth, an outcry for public access led to Paradise Creek Nature Park, a remarkable 40 acres...
Club Scout Pack 207 had just become animal trackers. The Portsmouth youngsters spotted fox tracks, then songbird tracks. They learned how to tell a dog print from a fox print, and what the fox needs to thrive.

“We stopped near the fox, which lives on a hillside in the woods. They drew a picture of why it would be a good home,” recalls Sarah Sunoski, our new Education Park Ranger at Paradise Creek Nature Park. “There was a lot of excitement.”

Now you can join the excitement. Elizabeth River Project’s education programming at our new Portsmouth park begins in earnest this spring, thanks to your support and generous grantors including Hampton Roads Community Foundation. Most programs are FREE for our members ($5 non-members, unless otherwise noted). Explore all the activities at paradisecreekpark.org. Please register in advance. Here’s a sampling.

April 12 – Spring Plant Walk, 2-3:30 pm. Begin a garden in your own yard after learning the secrets of native plants. Bring home a wildflower guide and native seeds to start your own Paradise.

April 12, May 10, June 14 – Junior Rangers, 9-10:30 am. $10 members, $15 non-members includes all three sessions. Sign up your child (ages 7-11) to earn Elizabeth River Junior Ranger Certification. Explore the park, clean up trails, create a craft and play fun, nature-inspired games.

Soon anyone can stop by Paradise Creek Nature Park and pick up a book (or two) and bring back another book to share, ideally a children’s book on nature. Elizabeth River Project is adding a “Little Free Library,” a box shaped like an owl that will be full of books, as part of a one-of-a-kind playground to be added this year, with your help, at our joint park with the City of Portsmouth. Little Free Libraries are springing up around the country to invite neighbors to share literature. Columbia Gas and Maersk Line Limited are the lead funders right now for a playground also to include otter slides, outdoor musical instruments and a shipping container. Let us know how you would like to help: Rdunbar@elizaberhriver.org

“A LOVELY park...to get healthy and fit, preserve our land and resources, and teach our children about nature, giving back and getting outdoors.”
—Michelle Reeves, visitor


“Nature Playground to Offer “Little Free Library”

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The Elizabeth River Project

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This society recognizes top donors at the level of $2,500 or more per year for individuals and $5,000 or more for organizations.

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Chesterfield Heights: Neighbors To Help Neighbors with Lawns

Suppose you could have it all: A lawn that looks like a lush, green carpet; yet is safe for your kids, the dog and the river because no chemicals were used. You can. Even better, it can be cost-effective, with our help and perhaps that of your neighbors. Elizabeth River Project’s River Star Homes program already helps people achieve beautiful lawns without fertilizers, preventing harmful run off to the river. This spring we’ll pilot “neighbor to neighbor” lawn makeovers in Norfolk’s Chesterfield Heights on the Eastern Branch. Thanks to you, our generous donors including Bank of America, we’ll keep costs down for natural lawn care by enlisting neighbors to help each other, while we provide materials and guidance.

Learning why “the grass is always greener with River Star Homes” at riverstarhomes.org, or call Sara Felker, 392-7487. Even if you’re not in Chesterfield Heights, you may qualify for a free lawn visit and other help with your yard.

First Endowments Spell Stability

Most non-profits live hand-to-mouth, unable to count on funding in future years. If we are very lucky, one day a generous benefactor sets up an endowment, a fund that spins off interest to help keep programs going, year after year.

Cleaning up an urban river once presumed dead is a long and costly task. So we are very lucky indeed that Elizabeth River Project now has not one, but several such generous benefactors.

First, huge thanks to the Hampton Roads Community Foundation and Virginia Beach philanthropist Jane Batten for selecting us for the Batten Endowment Challenge. With it comes $1 million that will remain invested with the foundation but provide disbursements to us each year from interest earned. Better yet, this remarkable gift comes with an opportunity for YOU to double your dollar. For each dollar up to $500,000 that we raise for the Batten Challenge, the foundation will add another dollar. We could end up with a $2 million endowment to sustain the river you care about.

Second, sincerest thanks to the Southeast Virginia Community Foundation for another endowment challenge that we plan to use, for the near-term, to sustain our new 40-acre Paradise Creek Nature Park in Portsmouth. Your dollars can double there, too, thanks to the generosity of Susan Robertson and TowneBank. Interested in helping with either endowment challenge? Contact Joanne Hansinger, 392-7134, jhansinger@elizabethriver.org.

Lover’s Focus

(paradisecreekpark.org) where the power of balancing nature and industry is celebrated more eloquently every day. At Money Point in Chesapeake, who dreamed a family of river otters would show up, once we had begun clean up of one of the most toxic hotspots anywhere?

You make the love affair happen. Only through your generous donations have we come to this next bend in the restoration of the Elizabeth. Thanks in advance for seeing us through the long-term goal: Restoring all practical reaches of your home river, one focus area at a time.

Marjorie Mayfield Jackson
Executive Director

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY elizabethriver.org
COMMENTS FOR MARJORIE? mmayfield@elizabethriver.org

Don Watson applies compost for a great lawn without chemical runoff on the Lafayette.
The River is in Their Will

“One of us was born in Norfolk, the other in Portsmouth. The Elizabeth River flows between our birthplaces…Neither of us can imagine living in a place without the eb and flow of the tide, maritime traffic and the occasional parade of sail.

“We have been supporters of the Elizabeth River Project since its inception. The river has served our communities well for centuries, but we have not always served the river well. The Elizabeth River Project is restoring the health of the river and doing it the right way.

“We believe so strongly in the work of the Elizabeth River Project that we have included it in our estate plan. We know our continued financial support of the Elizabeth River Project will be used wisely and will continue to make a difference in the quality of the river and the quality of life of area residents.” — Gray and Sharon Puryear

Join Gray and Sharon by including the river in your estate plan, and please let us know if you already have. Contact Joanne Hansinger, 392-7134, jhansinger@elizabethriver.org.

Park Family Fun
continued from p3

April 16, May 14, June 18 – Creek Kids, 9-10:30 am. $10 members, $15 non-members includes all three sessions. Join your little one (ages 3–6) as they earn an Elizabeth River Creek Kid Certification. We will read a nature story, explore the park and complete each day with a fun, nature inspired craft to take home.

April 18 – Moonlit Journey, 7:30–9 pm. Explore the dark side of Paradise. Search for wildlife and get up-close with our bug light trap.

May 3 – Birds of Paradise, 8-9:30 am. Follow Cape Henry Audobon Society guides as we seek out birds of Paradise. Learn why the Elizabeth River is great habitat for an array of birds.

May 17 – Mothers Day in the Park, 1-3. Mothers FREE, members free (non-members, $3 per child). A special invitation for mothers to spend a day in the park with their children. Enjoy a beautiful nature walk with your child, create a meaningful craft together, and bring home a naturally colorful wildflower bouquet.

May 24 – Animal Tracking, 10-11:30 am. Children will track animals by searching for footprints, creating habitat maps and using nets to swipe for insects in the park woods and wetland.

Consider a special gift to continue restoration and education at Paradise Creek Nature Park. Park suggestions? Sarah Sumoski, ssunoski@elizabethriver.org.
Windmills, Massive Wall Cut Pollution at Hess Site
One of 40 Businesses Earning Stars

The towering windmill was not just blowing in the wind. The steel wall being pounded into the ground—1,400 feet long and as much as 40 feet deep—was a long way from just something to stabilize the shore.

“It all felt massive, futuristic, and incredibly important to the river,” recalled Marjorie Mayfield Jackson, Executive Director, Elizabeth River Project, describing a tour last year of Hess Corp.’s voluntary efforts to clean up contamination at its Chesapeake terminal.

Hess’ windmill was pumping raw creosote out of the ground. Associated with cancer in fish, the dark goo was left by a defunct wood treatment facility that sold the Money Point site to Hess decades ago. The steel wall will keep any remaining creosote from seeping through the ground to the river, where it could re-contaminate an adjacent cleanup of river bottom, underway since 2009 by Elizabeth River Project and partners.

The terminal’s exceptional efforts earned it Model Level at Elizabeth River Project’s annual River Star Businesses Recognition Luncheon on Jan. 23. Hess will continue its cleanup presence at the terminal despite selling it recently to Buckeye Partners.

Thanks to your generous support of the River Star program, 40 business and government facilities documented voluntary new results through working with us to prevent pollution and restore wildlife habitat. Maersk Line Ltd., headquartered in Norfolk, also earned Model Level for its super-certified green fleet of 56 cargo ships. Old Dominion University made Inside Business River Star Hall of Fame for its “can do” commitment to environmental stewardship. And two professors were on hand to tout their new book, The Case for Grassroots Collaboration (Lexington Books). It cites River Star Businesses as one of the best examples.

For a complete list of this year’s accomplishments and our 109 River Star Businesses, visit elizabethriver.org. Find out if River Star Businesses is right for you. Contact Pam Boatwright, pboatwright@elizabethriver.org, 399-7487.

Hess uses windmills to power pollution removal. Together, our River Star Businesses have voluntarily reduced pollution by 311 million pounds since 1997.