Mud flats

SUMMER 2022

ELIZABETH RIVER PROJECT

5205 Colley Ave., | Norfolk, VA 23508 | ElizabethRiver.org

Resilience Lab, returning falcons foretell river recovery

Record Peregrine Falcons among signs that your support is working miracles for Liz

Bryan Watts searches the state for the elusive, fast flying Peregrine Falcon. The ornithologist knows of only 30 pairs nesting in Virginia this spring, and to his surprise, three of the pairs chose bridges on the Elizabeth River.

Once so polluted that long stretches were almost devoid of life, your harbor river is entering its most promising era of recovery yet, thanks to members of the non-profit Elizabeth River Project. And two groundbreakings this spring mean the Elizabeth River Project is betting larger than ever on sustaining a healthier home river for coming generations. More help than ever is needed from generous members like you.

After leading projects for 30 years with everyone from shipyards and Fortune 500s to governments, homeowners and school children, the Elizabeth River Project has achieved pioneer progress ranging from the most restored oyster reefs in Virginia to some of the largest contamination cleanups in the nation. Payoffs include dramatic drops in fish cancer and the rewarding return of dolphins, otters, eagles, osprey and those falcons.

Ten percent of Virginia's peregrine falcons are nesting on the Elizabeth. Photo: Bryan Watts

"A great symbol of how far the river has come"

"That's 10 percent of the known state population," Watts, director, Center for Conservation Biology at William and Mary, said of the Peregrine Falcons now nesting on the Berkley, West Norfolk and Jordan bridges. Dropping on prey at rates as fast as 240 mph, those birds can be hard to

Cont'd p. 9

Two groundbreakings launch new river era

Kitchen table to national stage, thanks to YOU

- **Pru and Louis Ryan Resilience Lab** – The Elizabeth River Project takes the national stage to tackle sea level rise from an environmental perspective. Rendering - right.
- **Expansion of the Fred W. Beazley River Academy** – We're doubling the size of our education HQ in Portsmouth.

Help us grow region wide! More p. 3

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From the Executive Director

Photo by Eric Lusher

I have always loved coming home to the Elizabeth. Heidi, our new second dog, joins me.

I'm grateful to you for the delights of a reviving river

I have a new dock. It's almost embarrassingly long, crossing our also new restored wetland. But the dock takes me effortlessly to where I feel the peace and renewal that a river is all about, especially a reviving one such as our members make possible - our "Liz."

The dock is less than a week old and already, these delights for the soul have paddled by: First evening, a river otter, nose tilting up, long back sticking out of the water just a bit; heading down river, observing the dock, then 20 minutes later, returning. Today at sundown, a mother duck, sailing majestically ahead of her train of tiny ducklings; an osprey wheeling above.

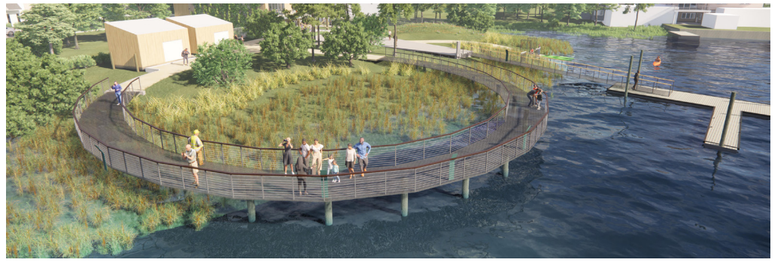
Leaning back in a two-seater Adirondack with my Bob, our faces to a strong breeze tunneling down our stretch of the Elizabeth, my greatest wishes are to: **a) Sleep here** - I have a hammock on a portable stand, after all! **b) Eat here** - though when I mention this, Bob idly objects: "Now, I prefer a table to put my dinner on."

New to The Elizabeth River Project? Join us. Maybe you don't have a dock, but our updated plan is all about making access to the wonders of the reviving Elizabeth accessible to all. In fact, our new Resilience Lab will have a one-of-a-kind boardwalk accessible to all.

Long-time supporters, thank you. On my dock I also intend to: **c) Pray** with unending gratitude for the progress you've made possible.

Marjorie Mayfield Jackson
Executive Director

P.S. Keep your river reviving. Thanks in advance for your special gift today.



Artist's rendering of the Perry Family Boardwalk, coming to our Ryan Resilience Lab.

Mission – To restore the Elizabeth River to the highest practical level of environmental quality through community, business and government partnerships.

JOIN the Elizabeth River Project. Our mission is made possible by generous members like you. Email Jessica Pinsky, jpinsky@elizabethriver.org, for membership questions.

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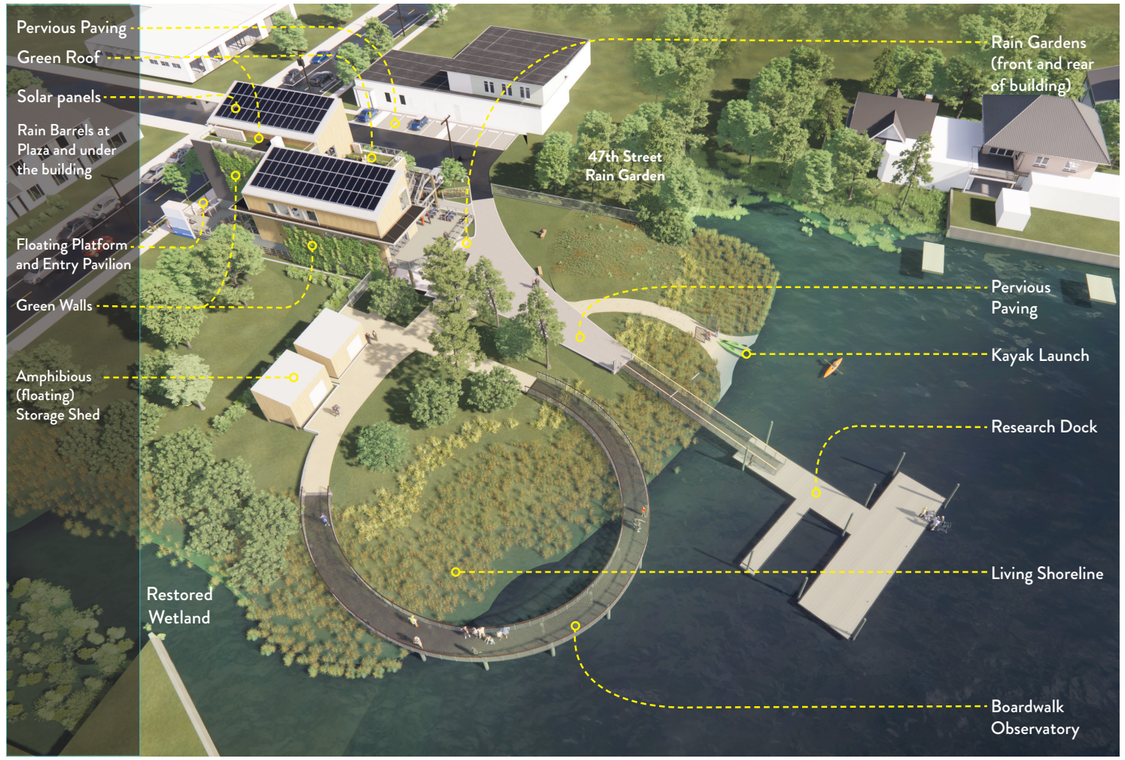

Resilience Lab construction begins - plus park expansion

Gaining region-wide visibility for restoring your river, with locations in Norfolk and Portsmouth

It's not much to look at now - a failing marina; a cinderblock building. But the location is prime, at least for us: North Colley Avenue, Norfolk's fastest growing commercial corridor, which happens also to parallel one of the Elizabeth River's most troubled creeks.

Each August, fish go belly-up in Knitting Mill Creek. As usual, we're going where the problems are worst in order to show best how to remedy them. At 4610 Colley Ave., we began construction in May for one of the Elizabeth River Project's most ambitious undertakings yet - the Pru and Louis Ryan Resilience Lab, named for two of our most generous supporters.

Also enlisting other businesses to create an "Eco-Corridor" on North Colley, Elizabeth River Project will showcase emerging practices to achieve coastal resilience, with a focus we haven't seen elsewhere: How to protect the ecosystem as well as the people, in a deeply urban setting, with an intentional focus on practical approaches for homes and businesses.

Meanwhile in Portsmouth, the Nansemond Indian Nation blessed the site and Portsmouth Mayor Shannon Glover officiated April 12 at the groundbreaking to add 2,000 sq. ft. to our Fred W. Beazley River Academy at Paradise Creek Nature Park. With a projected completion of this fall, the new wing will include a lecture hall for 50. First up: Our coming Urban Nature Lecture Series.

Thank you to everyone helping with the extraordinary Next Wave campaign, especially Jane Batten and Dills Architects for the park expansion. At the Resilience Lab, coming features will include:

- The Townebank Learning Park and Perry Family Boardwalk will be open to the public with changing displays and activities ranging from science to art, fishing lessons and kayaking.
- The HRSD Research Dock will host multiple universities already beginning research together.
- The Brock River Room will present workshops and lectures with many partners.
- The Goode Family Entry Pavilion will double as a floating dock on Colley for refuge in storms.
- The marina will be replaced with a signature Elizabeth River Project "living shoreline."

Join us to make these and more dreams a reality. Thank you for your special gift today.

The City of Norfolk won our Hall of Fame award this year for decades of projects like this one with Lafayette Wetlands Partnership. Volunteers install a log of coconut fibers to hold the sand until marsh grasses take root.

"We've nearly fully restored the Lafayette"

Wetland leadership lands City of Norfolk in our River Star Hall of Fame

The new wetland grasses go on for miles, protecting the shore during rising seas, filtering runoff, giving refuge to fish. That's thanks to Norfolk's Environmental Storm Water Management. The department doesn't just control runoff when it rains. This team is well on its way to recreating the natural ecosystem of the Elizabeth River's Lafayette branch.

In fact, "we've nearly fully restored the Lafayette as far as big sites," says Justin Shafer, City project manager.

A decades-long partnership with Elizabeth River Project, made possible by YOU, our generous supporters, on Jan. 20 landed the City of Norfolk in our Inside Business River Star Hall of Fame for 2022. Norfolk was among 47 organizations documenting new results in either pollution prevention or wildlife habitat for our voluntary program, River Star Businesses.

Working with the Elizabeth River Project, the City in 1997 pioneered the first voluntary wetland restoration in Virginia. Reclaiming a muddy field at Larchmont Library, Birdsong Wetland won an international Clearwater Award. The City kept going. In the last five years alone, Norfolk has built more than six acres of wetlands while also proactively addressing stormwater runoff with efforts such as the large-scale retrofit of Lake Taylor, reducing pollutants by 65,661 lbs. per year.

Thank you to the 143 River Star Businesses who together have made environmental stewardship the business standard on the Elizabeth. Advancing to Model Level 2022: Chesapeake Humane Society, Great Bridge Battlefield & Waterways History Foundation, Norfolk State University.

Elizabeth River Project's Inside Business River Star Hall of Fame

2011 Inaugural Winner – BAE Systems Norfolk Ship Repair

2012 Winner – Port of Virginia

2013 Winner – Kinder Morgan/Elizabeth River Terminals

2014 Winner – Old Dominion University

2015 Winner – Wheelabrator Portsmouth

2016 Winner – HRSD

2017 Winner – Norfolk Naval Shipyard

2018 Winner – Naval Support Activity Hampton Roads Portsmouth Annex

2019 Winner – General Dynamics NASSCO-Norfolk

2020 Winner – Naval Station Norfolk

2021 Winner – Norfolk Southern Corp. Lambert's Point

2022 Winner – Norfolk Environmental Storm Water Management

Congratulations, River Star Businesses!

The Elizabeth River Project launched River Star Businesses for organizational partners in 1997. Since then, River Star Businesses have become the finest environmental stewards on the Elizabeth.

- **Pollution reduced: 370 million pounds.**
- **Wildlife habitat restored, conserved: 2,485 acres.**
- **Other materials reduced, recycled or reused: More than a billion pounds.**

Find out if River Star Businesses is right for you. Contact Pam Boatwright, pboatwright@elizabethriver.org.

"We saw four Bald Eagles chasing each other"

Once saddened by a river "void of life," member grateful for transformation

When Patrick Hilton first moved to the Elizabeth River, he launched his skiff near the Great Bridge locks in Chesapeake with high hopes for enjoying nature and catching abundant fish. Instead, he was "saddened by the health of the marsh and the lack of predator birds," he recalls.

"This marsh had wide stretches of black mud, void of life, with fringe pieces of marsh barely hanging on. It was clear the river was in bad shape."

That was 21 years ago. Last fall, after bragging to a friend about a changed scenario, the pair launched from the same spot. "We saw four Bald Eagles chasing each other through the trees, screaming loudly."

From his vantage point, "the transformation over 21 years has been astonishing," Patrick says. That's why he is a member of Elizabeth River Project and his employer, Cox Communications, now generously supports our work as well.

"When I moved here there were one or two osprey, no eagles and the only place to catch fish was the 'hot ditch' (former site of a power plant), not my kind of fishing... Steadily I watched osprey come back to be on every platform. The marsh rebounded," and capping it off, those eagles.

"The fishing, health of the marsh and raptors that live here now can only be sustained by healthy food sources - a direct reflection of the work you all have done," says Patrick.

Patrick Hilton caught this Red Drum last spring near St. Julian's Creek. Patrick has witnessed an astonishing return of river life in recent years.

Already a member? Thank you! Not yet a member - please join us.

Coleman Place Elementary students meet our spider crab during a visit from our Elizabeth River Crossings Learning Barge on Wheels.

Kids! Barge on Wheels can bring the river to you.

When Covid arrived, our education team pivoted. Instead of giving up because students rarely could go on field trips to our "real" Learning Barge (120 feet long), we outfitted a van to take our hands-on ecology lessons on the road.

Book our new Learning Barge on Wheels, made possible by Elizabeth River Crossings and generous donors like you, this summer June 20-July 29; typically 9 am - 10 am for up to 20 students. $10/student for non-members and $5 for members. Email Summer Mace, smace@elizabethriver.org.

Deepest thanks to our donor circles

The Elizabeth River Project is proud to recognize members of our leadership giving circles. Thank you for contributing $500 or more annually to support our award-winning restoration and education programs. Join us! For more information, contact Susan Smith at 757-399-7487 or 757-407-1406 (c) or ssmith@elizabethriver.org.

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NEW!
Do something beautiful.
Join our Oyster Circle.

OYSTER CIRCLE

Become a charter member of our new "Oyster Circle," celebrating the once famous Norfolk oyster, now returning throughout the Elizabeth with your help.

Make an annual gift of $250 to $499 for individuals or a corporate gift of $500 to $999 to join the exclusive circle of the top supporters making river restoration a reality.

Benefits:
Elizabeth River Project ball call with new logo – a real collectible.
Volunteer opportunities to improve the health of your home river
Satisfaction of leading one of the great river restorations of our time.

Return the enclosed card, visit elizabethriver.org or contact Susan Smith, ssmith@elizabethriver.org, 757-399-7487.

1,200 dedicated students roll up their sleeves for Liz

"You're not just talking about (environmental problems)... you are doing someting about it"

~ Elise Trelegan, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office

The fourth grader didn't like the litter that appeared daily on his playground. Frowning, he explained that it could wash into the river when it rains "and kill the animals."

"Be a true Hawk hero - Feed the trash cans," said his team's homemade signs at Hickory Elementary School - "so we don't kill anything," the youngster urged in a video for our Youth Resilience Expo, held virtually on April 23.

In all, 22 schools and 1,200 students participated in hands-on projects with Elizabeth River Project, recognized at the Expo as Resilient River Star Schools. Thanks to members like you and program sponsors including Hampton Roads Community Foundation and NOAA, many of the school groups conducted year-long projects with us, focusing on the Blue Crab and how it may be impacted by increased flooding and other changing climate conditions. Despite Covid, almost daily our Elizabeth River Crossings Learning Barge on Wheels also visited schools with hands-on lessons.

Deep Creek Central Elementary students measured standing water on their school grounds, then tested various soils to see which would do best with absorbing runoff pollution (Answer? Soil mixed with oyster shell and sand). A team from West Ghent adopted Plum Point Park, picking up 200 pounds of litter. Other school groups planted rain gardens, pollinator gardens, installed rain barrels and even solar powered lights (Maury High).

The West Ghent Team adopted Plum Point Park for litter cleanups.

"What I think is really special about what you all are up to," the Expo keynote speaker, Elise Trelegan, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office, told the students, "is that you're not just talking about (environmental problems) and saying, 'Well, I hope somebody does something about that.' Instead, YOU are doing something about it."

Participate next year - Contact Sarah McBride, smcbride@elizabethriver.org. Keep all our programs strong with your membership support.

River recovery *Cont'd from p. 1*

spot. In contrast, osprey represent a more readily observed sign of hope, Watts said. Having declined to zero here in the 1970s, osprey now number more than 80 pairs on the Elizabeth. "For a species that sits on the top of the food chain, the recovery of the osprey is a great symbol of how far the river has come."

But pollution levels are still dangerously high in many parts of the Elizabeth and new challenges are emerging. Topping the list: the highest rate of sea level rise on the East Coast. More than 80 percent of the Elizabeth's wetlands could be under water by 2080. Each storm rises higher to wash unprecedented amounts of new pollution off streets and yards and into the Elizabeth.

Cornerstone of Innovation Corridor

Answer: The Elizabeth River Project's Pru and Lous Ryan Resilience Lab. Thanks to our Next Wave campaign and generous donors like you, we began construction this spring. We're intentionally rebuilding in the urban flood plain to show others how to live and work in ways that safeguard both humans and the ecosystem, as the waters rise.

Anticipated as a cornerstone of the new Norfolk Innovation Corridor, the Lab will replace a failing marina and one-story building on Knitting Mill Creek with a three-story learning center on pilings, flanked by a restored natural shore.

A Learning Park will showcase changing research with area universities while a large River Room will host workshops. Resilience features will range from the expected-- solar power; green roof -- to the more unusual, including a floating entry pavilion to provide refuge during flooding along busy North Colley Avenue.

An even more important answer for sustaining the Elizabeth River's health long-term: broadening the fold of dues-paying members, partners and participants with the Elizabeth River Project.

"Do something beautiful"

In a second groundbreaking this spring, on April 12, the Elizabeth River Project began construction to expand its education HQ: The Fred W. Beazley River Academy at Paradise Creek Nature Park, a partnership with the City of Portsmouth. A new lecture hall will host lectures and accommodate student programs now exceeding capacity.

For this urban river to recover, restoration efforts must inspire people to get involved across all four cities along the Elizabeth: Chesapeake, Portsmouth, Norfolk and Virginia Beach (Kempsville in Virginia Beach once hosted tall ships as a port on the Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth).

A companion rebranding campaign seeks to achieve just that. "Do something beautiful" is the tagline of the Elizabeth River Project's newly refreshed logo. The design is modern-looking but retains the same symbol of hope adopted by the Elizabeth River Project when it incorporated in 1993: The Brown Pelican, absent from the Elizabeth until it began making a comeback.

Do something beautiful. Send your special gift to the Elizabeth River Project today.

Huge thanks to Dills Architects for donating design of the River Academy expansion. (Rendering above). Below left, The Nansemond Indian Nation blesses the sight during the groundbreaking, inspiring children visiting the adjacent playground to pause and watch.

“Our Elizabeth:” New updated strategy

Stakeholders prioritize equity, resilience for next phase of community action

More than 150 stakeholders, meeting for the last year, have set new priorities for the next phase of community-wide action to restore the Elizabeth River. Convened by the Elizabeth River Project with funding from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, Watershed Action Team 2021 chose new guiding principles, equity and sea level resilience.

Download the full plan at elizabethriver.org.

Teja Deonarine helps restore wetlands on the Elizabeth.

THE SIX OVER-ARCHING ACTIONS:

ACTION 1: Achieve fair and equitable restoration of the Elizabeth River, reducing unfair pollution burdens and advancing community-wide engagement

The first enslaved people stepped ashore in America just a few miles north of the Elizabeth River. It’s time to reclaim our river’s history with people of color, while achieving more equitable river restoration and education.

ACTION 2: Collaborate regionally to become a model for resilience to rising seas and a changing climate. Support this with strong research, examples, policies.

One of the world’s busiest ports, the Elizabeth River ranks 19th worldwide in value of assets at risk from tidal flooding by 2100. Sea level rise will significantly impact under-resourced communities while causing more toxics to enter the river through floodwaters. Massive changes in river habitat will occur.

ACTION 3: Restore clean water. Reduce nutrients, chemicals and harmful bacteria and improve water clarity in the river, with a focus on reducing pollution in under-served communities and those vulnerable to rising seas.

Once presumed dead, the Elizabeth River earned to a “C” in the last scorecard. Water quality, though, still suffers. Some problems are new, including plastic pollution. Others are chronic, such as excess nutrients, pathogens and suspended solids.

ACTION 4: Create an inclusive river revolution led by people of all ages and walks of life who understand, embrace and promote the restoration of the Elizabeth.

Not long ago, few even knew the name of the Elizabeth River. Urban legend had it, you would need six shots if you fell in. While much progress has been made, large swaths of apathy remain. Of greatest concern are under-resourced communities with little access and few recreation opportunities to enjoy the Elizabeth.

ACTION 5: The goo must go! Clean up contamination in the river bottom while also reducing PCBs (highly toxic polychlorinated hydrocarbons) in fish.

“The goo must go!” was the top focus of prior versions of the plan but drops in priority because of progress. While Elizabeth’s bottom still harbors hotspots with some of the highest levels of sediment contamination in the Chesapeake Bay, scientists estimate as many as half of the river’s hotspots have now been addressed.

ACTION 6: Create and protect healthy wildlife habitat, despite rising sea levels.

Trawling the Elizabeth River decades ago, scientists found few fish and those they caught were often deformed and cancerous. Today many species are abundant, helped by many miles of restored wetland and oyster habitat. But scientists predict a majority of the river’s wetlands may be lost to rising seas by 2080. Development and redevelopment continue to threaten current habitat.

Only you can help the non-profit Elizabeth River Project lead community-wide action to carry out this plan. Thank you for your special gift today.

What are we doing now? Something beautiful.

New tagline “turns the conversation from resoring something bad to doing something good”

At first, ERP’s newly unveiled marketing tagline Do Something Beautiful may seem a bit out of left field.

“Do what?” you say. “We’re restoring a polluted river! What’s beautiful about that?”

According to the bright advertising minds at Davis Ad Agency, everything.

As the Elizabeth River Project celebrates its 30th year, we charged the advertising creatives at Davis with giving our organization a whole new look, strategy and positioning in the crowded fundraising marketplace.

We asked Davis to create a new logo, tagline and marketing strategy, along with a new website, photo and video library, and a media strategy all designed to significantly increase our fundraising efforts.

THE RESULT? BEAUTIFUL.

“Do Something Beautiful is a way to encapsulate the Elizabeth River Project’s end-game: A healthy, beautiful Elizabeth River,” said Todd Aftel, associate creative director at Davis Ad Agency. “It turns the conversation from restoring something bad to doing something good in our community. It’s a promise to people that whether they’re donating their time or money or even just sharing a good-news social media post, they’re doing something beautiful to help the Elizabeth River.”

In updating our brand colors and logo, Davis made a conscious decision to keep our beloved pelican, which has been with us since the beginning. The new logo features a flying pelican with its tail feathers forming the shape of a hand, symbolizing people giving the Elizabeth River a hand.

“Whether you’re asking people to buy a product, use a service or join an organization, you have to ask people to do something in advertising,” Aftel said. “This gives us the chance to say “do something!” out loud. It invites people to donate, volunteer or get involved, and gives a well-deserved pat-on-the-back to anyone who has already lent their support.”

We’re thrilled with our new brand look and positioning and the positive outlook it brings to our organization and its future. We can’t wait for you to see it out raising money and memberships soon!

ELIZABETH RIVER PROJECT

DO SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

L: The Brown Pelican’s comeback has inspired our logo from day I. (Photo: Denise Maples, River Star Home) Above: River Star Homeowner Luana Hugel celebrates “doing something beautiful” - installing “oyster castles” to stabilize her shore while creating habitat for oysters.

Spend your summer in Paradise

Join the Elizabeth River Project for family fun at Paradise Creek Nature Park, 1141 Victory Blvd. Our 40-acre partnership with the City of Portsmouth is made possible by members like you. Join us today.

Junior Nature Explorers

Date: June 15
Time: 10 a.m. - 11:30 am.
Target age: 4-8 years old, accompanied by adult.
Cost: $10 members, $15 not-yet members, Elizabeth River Project, **Register Elizabethriver.org/paradisecreek.**
Outdoor fun and hands-on nature education. Children will discover the wonder of trees, birds and sunshine. They'll plant native seeds for the birds, create nature-themed art and learn about the park habitat.

Volunteer Service Days

Dates: Saturdays, July 2, 9. August 6, 13. September 3, 10.
Time: 9 a.m. – 11 a.m.
Target age: 16 and above
Volunteers will work on seasonal tasks such as weeding, planting, cleaning, pruning and light maintenance. Dress for working outdoors.
Bring: Work gloves, hat, sunscreen, water bottle.

Hispanic Month Walks - in Spanish!

Dates: Saturdays, September 10, 17.
Time: 9 a.m. – 10 a.m.
Target age: all ages, children accompanied by adults
Cost: FREE – Register at paradisecreek.elizabethriver.org.
This tour will be conducted in Spanish! Take a walk to learn park history, ecology. Wear comfortable shoes.
Bring: Sunscreen and water bottle

Family Nature Walks

Dates: Saturday August 27.
Time: 9 a.m. – 10 a.m.
Target Age: all ages, children accompanied by adults
Cost: FREE – Register at paradisecreek.elizabethriver.org.
Discover the wonders of Paradise Creek! Take a walk through the park with our educators to learn about park history, birds, and look for signs of wildlife. Wear comfortable shoes and dress for the weather.
Bring: Sunscreen and water bottle

Summer Bird Walks

Date: July 16, August 20, September 17.
Time: 8:30 a.m. – 10 a.m.
Target age: 16 and above
Cost: $5 per person, register: paradisecreek.elizabethriver.org.
Join our master birder to observe some of more than 160 species of birds that have been identified here.
Bring: Water bottle and binoculars.

Guided Kayaking Tours

Dates: Saturdays, July 30, September 3.
Time: 9- 11 a.m.
Target age: 12 and above. Ages 12-16 accompanied by adults.
Cost: - $30 pp members, $40 pp not-yet Elizabeth River Project members. Register at paradisecreek.elizabethriver.org
Paddle the largest restored wetland in Virginia that's open for public recreation! Bring: Hat, sunscreen, and water bottle.

Blackberry Foraging

Date: Saturday, July 2.
Time: 9 a.m. - 10 a.m.
Target Age: All ages; children accompanied by adults
Cost: FREE – Register at paradisecreek.elizabethriver.org.
Take home a bucket of wild blackberries!
Bring: Sunscreen, bucket, gloves and water bottle.

ID the Fungi

Date: Saturday, July 24
Time: 9 a.m. – 10 a.m.
Target Age: All ages; children accompanied by adults
Cost: $5 pp, register at paradisecreek.elizabethriver.org.
Join Theresa Augustin of Norfolk Botanical Gardens for fun fungi identification. Bring: Sunscreen and water bottle