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MONEY POINT “GOO” WILL GO! VIRGINIA BUDGET ALLOCATES \$3.75 MILLION TO CLEAN UP ONE OF THE ELIZABETH RIVER’S MOST CONTAMINATED SITES

Chesapeake, VA – When Gov. Youngkin signed the state budget into law this week, the Commonwealth took a decisive step forward to clean up one of the most contaminated sites on the Chesapeake Bay.

Known as “Money Point III,” the site for decades has been the highest priority for the nonprofit Elizabeth River Project in its work to restore the Elizabeth River. The project represents the third and final phase of cleaning up 25 acres of toxic material on the river bottom off-shore of South Norfolk in Chesapeake.

The new state budget allocates a critical \$3.75 million for the Money Point project. Thanks to US Rep. Robert C. “Bobby” Scott, who secured a prior federal commitment of \$11.25 million, the project is now fully funded at \$15 million. Del. Alex Askew and Sen. Angelia Williams Graves persevered as chief patrons of a state budget amendment for the need.

“I was happy to play my part in the Senate to further this milestone cleanup of our local environment, and in particular the Elizabeth River, our home river,” stated Sen. Williams Graves. “Environmental justice is a crucial part of this effort, ensuring that all communities, regardless of their background or economic status, have a clean and safe environment to live in.”

The project will be completed by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Earlier phases, led by the Elizabeth River Project in collaboration with many partners, reduced cancer six-fold in the indicator fish, the mummichog. The Elizabeth River Project since the early 2000s has advocated for cleanup of this and other contaminated sites along the river with the popular slogan: “The Goo Must Go!”

“We have waited a very long time for this moment,” said Marjorie Mayfield Jackson, Executive Director, Elizabeth River Project. “This is an enormous milestone in the cleanup of the Elizabeth River and the Chesapeake Bay. We are especially grateful to Senator Graves, Delegate Askew and Congressman Scott for their critical leadership, and to Governor Youngkin for signing the state’s allocation into law.”

“Our efforts here demonstrate that with dedication and collaboration, we can reverse the damage done to our natural habitats,” said Joe Rieger, Elizabeth River Project Deputy Director – Restoration. “I am so appreciative for the state’s support for cost sharing the cleanup of one of the most contaminated sites in Chesapeake Bay. I can’t wait to see fish cancer rates continuing to drop.”

Located along an industrial waterfront in Chesapeake’s South Norfolk, on the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River, Money Point was the site of a defunct wood treatment facility known as Eppinger and Russell. Creosote, an oily black form of tar used to preserve wood, seeped into the river from daily practices and a 1960s fire at the site in which 40,000 gallons of creosote escaped to the Elizabeth. Studies showed a correlation between the creosote, laden with PAH (polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons), and cancer in fish.

When the Elizabeth River Project began a stakeholder-led plan to restore the health of this stretch of river in the mid-2000s, scientists found the area biologically depleted with only four species of fish. By the end of the first two phases of cleanup, in 2012, there were 26 species of fish as well as otters and eagles, and cancer had dropped dramatically in the indicator species, the mummichog – considered the “canary in the coal mine” for the Elizabeth River.

The Money Point Restoration Project became the nation’s first large-scale sediment remediation project spearheaded by a non-profit organization. Thanks to earlier phases, the site hosts 7 acres of tidal marsh, a 3-acre oyster reef, forested upland shoreline, and an innovative “living cap” designed to isolate contaminated sediments while providing critical habitat for wetlands and oysters. The project won “Best Restored Shore” from the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association in 2019.

The final phase is crucial to continuing this award-winning progress, bringing back fish, otters, and eagles, while removing legacy contamination that hinders economic growth.

Despite this significant win for the river, there remain several significant contaminated sites to clean up in the bottom of the Elizabeth River, with some in worse condition than Money Point. “Huge thanks to our members for continuing to support our critical work to restore all contaminated sites, while also carrying out the numerous additional programs and projects that are needed to bring back the health of an urban river – from childhood education to restoring wetlands and helping industries and homes do all they can to avoid pollution,” said Mayfield Jackson.

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The non-profit Elizabeth River Project has worked since 1993 to restore the environmental health of the urban Elizabeth River, once presumed dead. Our work is made possible by membership support. Do something beautiful. Join us today: ElizabethRiver.org.