



Photo:
Denise Maples

WINTER 2025

ELIZABETH RIVER PROJECT 4610 Colley Avenue, Norfolk, VA 23508 | ElizabethRiver.org

Where Art Meets Rising Tides: *Tidal Rhythms* Joins the Ryan Resilience Lab

At the Elizabeth River Project's Ryan Resilience Lab, science and art are not separate disciplines—they're partners in storytelling.

Composed of three stainless steel columns, *Tidal Rhythms* translates tidal records from Sewell's Point into a textured surface that captures both the daily pulse of the tides and the long-term rise of sea levels due to climate change. Viewed up close, the sculpture reveals the subtle fluctuations of local tides; from a distance, the **vertical gradient charts the upward march of water over time.** Its form also echoes the shape of a milkweed seed pod—a visual nod to the Lab's native landscaping, which includes milkweed, the host plant for monarch butterflies.

"The beauty of this sculpture is it invites people to feel the rhythm of the river. It is a physical depiction of the changes happening beneath the surface," says Matthew Fine, who, along with Karen Fine, generously supported the installation.

But *Tidal Rhythms* is more than a visual experience—it's a marker of the future. At the base of each column, sculpted points represent key sea level thresholds,

including the final trigger for retreat. These markers correspond to monitoring benchmarks that track rising tides over time. When sea levels rise by about five and a half feet averaged over three years, the sculpture will stand as a sentinel at the Ryan Resilience Lab's planned point of deconstruction. Under the terms of the **nation's first privately-held rolling conservation easement**—created in partnership with Wetlands Watch and the Coastal Virginia Conservancy—the Lab will be removed and the site returned to a fully restored shoreline.

Unlike traditional conservation easements, which prohibit development to protect natural values, a rolling easement anticipates the inland migration of wetlands. It also guarantees public access to the site in perpetuity. In this way, ***Tidal Rhythms* becomes a sentinel—quietly marking the line between today's resilience and tomorrow's restoration.**

The sculpture's surface is also designed to evolve with the landscape. As tides rise, the



Tidal Rhythms stands as a sculptural sentinel at the Ryan Resilience Lab—translating nearly a century of tidal data into a powerful marker for the future, where rising seas will one day signal the site's return to nature.

columns will host marine life, oysters, crabs, and mussels, transforming into a living sculpture that participates in the very ecosystem it honors.

Tidal Rhythms continues the Ryan Resilience Lab's mission to make environmental science tangible and personal—inviting visitors to see the Elizabeth River

as a living story shaped by rising tides and human response. Thanks to the generosity of Matthew and Karen Fine and members like you, *Tidal Rhythms* now stands as both a work of art and a call to action—reminding us that **resilience is not just about holding the line, but knowing when and how to let go.**



Save the River. Wear the Mission.

Give \$100 or more today and receive a limited-edition ERP sweatshirt as our thanks—a symbol of your belief in a cleaner, healthier Elizabeth River.



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From the Executive Director



It's hard to believe it's already been nine months since I joined the Elizabeth River Project. In that time, I've learned so much—from the intricacies of our restoration work to the deep passion that fuels this organization. And yet, I know there's still so much more to learn.

What drew me here—and what continues to inspire me—is our shared mission to restore the health of the Elizabeth River.

Whether it's installing living shorelines, teaching the next generation of river stewards, or celebrating the everyday actions of our River Star heroes, everything we do is grounded in one unifying goal: a cleaner, healthier river for all.

This year, we've set an ambitious goal to raise \$1 million to accelerate that mission. Those dollars translate directly into impact—projects like the Buckeye Living Shoreline, which is transforming a hardened, once-toxic shoreline into thriving marsh habitat that protects both people and wildlife.

They also support our River Star Home site visits, where our team helps homeowners take meaningful steps to protect the watershed—whether they live directly on the water or miles inland. Equally inspiring is our education work aboard the Learning Barge and at Paradise Creek Nature Park, reaching thousands of students and teachers each year.

Together for a Cleaner, Healthier River

Watching young people light up as they test water quality or encounter river creatures reminds me that the river's future depends on the lessons we're teaching today.

And at the heart of our future is the Ryan Resilience Lab, a global model for coastal resilience. This remarkable facility brings together scientists, students, businesses, and community members to test real-world solutions to sea level rise and inspire climate-ready communities around the world. It embodies everything the Elizabeth River Project stands for—innovation, collaboration, and hope.

In a time when the world can feel increasingly divided, I'm proud to lead an organization rooted in the opposite. The Elizabeth River Project was founded on the belief that people with different perspectives can come together around a shared love of place. That **spirit of collaboration—neighbors helping neighbors, businesses partnering with communities, educators inspiring action—is what makes our work not just successful, but hopeful.**

As I look ahead, I'm filled with gratitude for everyone who makes this mission possible. Thank you for your commitment, your ideas, and your belief in the power of coming together for the river we all share. **The Elizabeth River's story is still being written—and together, we're ensuring it's one of restoration, resilience, and unity.**

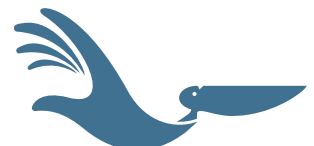

Lacy Shirey, Executive Director

Land Acknowledgement – The Elizabeth River Project acknowledges the Indigenous peoples of Tsenacommacah, which means “land of many villages” and is the coastal Algonquian name for Eastern Virginia. We thank the Nansemond, Chesepic, and other Indigenous nations of the Powhatan Confederacy for continuing to steward these lands and waters as they have for thousands of generations.

We honor them now and in the future as the original knowledge-keepers of just relationship with the river that together we seek to heal.

Mission – To restore the health of the Elizabeth River by working with our neighbors, businesses, and governments.

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



ELIZABETH RIVER
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Soaked by rain but undeterred, Buckeye Partners volunteers planted over 15,000 marsh grasses—transforming a hardened shoreline into a thriving wetland along the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River.

Collaboration in Action: Restoring the Elizabeth River’s Industrial Shoreline



The Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River has long been shaped by industry—lined with hardened shorelines, shipping terminals, and the steady movement of commerce. This year, a new chapter began at Buckeye Partners Terminal, a Model Level River Star Business, where a partnership with the Elizabeth River Project and HRPDC launched the largest living

shoreline project planned for the year.

Spanning nearly 700 linear feet and restoring 12,918 square feet of wetlands, the effort was made possible through a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Chesapeake Bay Small Watershed grant. On planting day, seventy Buckeye team members from across the country arrived in force,

ready to install more than 15,000 native wetland grasses along the shoreline at Money Point.

But nature had its own plans. A torrential downpour soaked volunteers from the start. **“The rain was relentless, soaking volunteers to the bone. But the team pressed on, driven by a shared purpose,”** said Pam Boatwright, River Star Business Program Manager. **“With grit and determination, we planted every last marsh grass plug.”**

By day’s end, the transformation was undeniable. What had

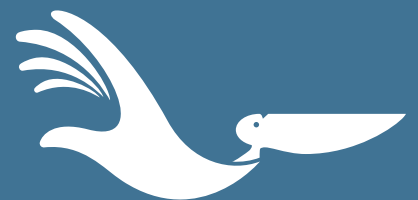
once been a hardened edge of industry now swayed with life—grasses dancing in the wind, a future haven for fish, crabs, and shorebirds. **“Buckeye’s leading by example as a waterfront industry,”** said KC Filippino, HRPDC Senior Water Resources Planner. **“It’s showing how they, too, can partner in helping to clean up the river.”**

Buckeye’s commitment reflects the heart of the River Star Businesses program: voluntary action, bold leadership, and a shared vision for a restored Elizabeth River.

Save the Date! Join us for the Annual River Star Businesses Recognition Luncheon

Thursday, January 29, 2026 | Chesapeake Conference Center

Celebrate the inspiring achievements of local organizations “Doing Something Beautiful” for the Elizabeth River through voluntary pollution prevention and habitat restoration. Sponsorship opportunities available—contact pboatwright@elizabethriver.org to learn more!



ELIZABETH RIVER
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RIVER STAR BUSINESSES

Watch How 5 Portsmouth Teens Became River Stewards

Since 2019, the Elizabeth River Project's Youth Conservation Internship has offered Portsmouth high school students a unique opportunity to connect with nature, gain professional skills, and become stewards of their home river. This summer, five dedicated interns—Cahlique Y., Brooklyn C., Anjeanette W., Zephyr N., and Aaliyah H.—joined us at Paradise Creek Nature Park for an eight-week journey of learning and leadership.

Presented in partnership with the Hampton Roads Workforce Council's NextGen Pathways program, the internship links youth with mentors in river-friendly horticulture and sustainable landscape design. Interns worked side-by-side with Elizabeth River Project staff, gaining hands-on experience in conservation landscaping. Their efforts earned them Chesapeake Bay Landscaping Professional Associate certification and a deeper understanding of the Elizabeth River's ecosystem.

Thank you to our partners, mentors, and members who make this program possible—and to the interns who remind us that the future of the river is in good hands.



Anjeanette W., Brooklyn C., Cahlique Y., and Aaliyah H. (left to right) took part in the Elizabeth River Project's Youth Conservation Internship, working alongside ERP staff to gain hands-on experience in sustainable landscaping and environmental stewardship.

The Youth Conservation Internship continues to grow as a model for workforce development, environmental education, and youth empowerment.

Watch this video to hear directly from this year's interns and see the impact of their work.



Interns explore the river's wetlands by kayak, gaining a close-up view of the ecosystem they're learning to protect.

Hooked & Hooped: Casting Lines, Building Connections



Volunteer angler Lee Owens (right) shares his fishing knowledge with local youth during Hooked & Hooped.

The 2nd Annual Hooked & Hooped event at our Ryan Resilience Lab brought together youth from Portsmouth-based CUTS (Cleaning Up The Streets) for a day of connection—with the river, with mentors, and with their own potential. In partnership with Virginia Coastal Fly Anglers, participants learned the art of fishing, while basketball offered a familiar way to break the ice.

ERP's Ru Williams led a hands-on tour of the Lab, helping

youth see the Elizabeth River as something they're connected to—and capable of protecting. **"When young people feel seen and connected to the river, they start to believe they belong—and that they matter.,"** Ru shared. **"That's the real power of Hooked & Hooped."**

Thanks to your support, Hooked & Hooped continues to grow as a bridge—linking young people to nature, community, and a future they can help shape.



Species caught during the catch-and-release fishing included speckled trout—and even an American eel.

Youth Resilience Projects Take Root Across the Watershed

This year, more than 4,000 students from 33 schools and community groups rolled up their sleeves to protect the Elizabeth River through Youth Resilience Projects.

From oyster gardening and composting to restoring eroded

shorelines and planting nearly 100 native species in schoolyard habitats, these young environmental leaders are making a real impact. Their efforts are a powerful reminder that resilience starts with education—and grows through action.

These projects were made possible thanks to generous support from Elizabeth River Project members and funders including The Blocker Foundation, Beazley Foundation, Roaring Brook

Family Foundation, Elizabeth River Garden Club, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, Chesapeake Bay Trust, and TC Energy. Thank you for helping us empower the next generation of river stewards!



Clockwise: **Churchland High School** AP Environmental Science students kicked off their oyster restoration project with a fall field trip to Paradise Creek Nature Park—paddling through wetlands, testing water quality, and doing a spontaneous litter cleanup. They'll care for oysters in a float for the year, releasing them on the reef in spring.

St. Patrick Catholic School students are reducing styrofoam and single-use plastics in their dining hall while turning food scraps into soil using a new composter and a vermicomposting system—an eco-friendly method that uses worms to break down organic waste.

Granby High School students in the I.B. Creativity, Activity and Service Program designed and built a school garden to promote sustainability and hands-on learning. They added over a dozen native plants after learning about their importance for pollinators during a field trip to Paradise Creek Nature Park.

Calling All Educators: Bring Youth Resilience Projects to Your Classroom

Are you a teacher looking to inspire your students through hands-on environmental learning? The Elizabeth River Project's River Star Schools Program is here to help! We offer funding to cover supplies for Youth Resilience Projects, field trips to our award-winning Learning Barge and Paradise Creek Nature Park, and access to our Teacher Training Website packed with resources. We're also happy to visit your school to meet with teachers or students and share how the program works.

Learn more and get started:



[Click Here](#)

Elizabeth River Project in Action



River Star Business Cox Communications team members lend a hand at Paradise Creek Nature Park, mulching native trees and removing invasive plants to support a thriving habitat.



Volunteers spend the fall harvesting seeds to restock the Ryan Resilience Lab's popular Native Seed Library, helping meet growing community demand for native plants.



Elizabeth River Project staff team up with the Center for Conservation Biology as part of a Chesapeake Bay-wide osprey survey, revealing troubling results: osprey pairs on the Elizabeth River produce only 0.53 young per nest—well below the 0.8 threshold needed for a stable population.



Youth from ForKids pause to pick blackberries at Paradise Creek Nature Park, connecting with nature through our edible park initiative—an effort to help address food insecurity in a community located within a food desert.



Governor-elect Abigail Spanberger visits the Ryan Resilience Lab to learn about sea level rise challenges and innovative resilience strategies shaping Coastal Virginia's future.



After fall storms and King Tides swept litter into the marshes, our volunteers, including George Bangs (left), launched a rapid-response cleanup by kayak and foot to protect the Elizabeth River.

Staff Spotlight: Phoebe Murrell, Director of Restoration & River Star Homes

Phoebe Murrell's journey with the Elizabeth River Project began in 2018 with a splash — On her first day as an intern, she waded into a living shoreline project on the Indian River and promptly fell in. "It's a rite of passage here," she laughs. That moment sparked a passion for environmental restoration that's guided her ever since.

While studying horticulture at TCC, Phoebe was encouraged by a professor to apply for the internship. She later transferred to Virginia Wesleyan University to pursue Earth and Environmental Sciences, gaining hands-on experience across ERP's departments—from administration and development to River Star Homes and Businesses. "It was like solving a puzzle," she says, describing how understanding the inner workings of the organization helped her improve stewardship of both the river and the resources entrusted to ERP.

After earning her Master's in Public Policy from Duke University, Phoebe returned

to ERP and now serves as the Director of Restoration & River Star Homes Manager. She leads a dynamic team, balancing boots-in-the-mud restoration with strategic planning, grant writing, and community partnerships.

Having grown up near Crab Creek on the Lafayette, Phoebe's heart lies with the people of the watershed. "I'm driven by those who live, work, and play along the river," she says. Her team works hand-in-hand with residents to design projects that tackle flooding, erosion, and climate resilience—from living shorelines to conservation landscaping to pioneering marsh elevation enhancement using beneficial dredge material.

Looking ahead to 2026, Phoebe is leading the charge on an ambitious new chapter for the Elizabeth River Project: mosaic restoration. This innovative approach treats the shoreline not as isolated pieces, but as a connected system—from mudflats and marshes to upland



buffers and inland zones—all working together to clean the water, protect the shore, and strengthen the communities behind it.

Phoebe's story is a testament to what's possible when passion meets purpose. **From intern to director, she's grown**

alongside the Elizabeth River Project. With every shoreline planted and every neighbor empowered, Phoebe and her team are building something bigger than any one project: a future where the Elizabeth River thrives because the community stands behind it.



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\$100 ERP Sweatshirt
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A Million Reasons to Believe

In a cleaner Elizabeth River.
In thriving wildlife.
In investing in education.
In a resilient future.

Your gift helps make it happen. Help us reach our **\$1 million goal** and keep the river's story flowing forward. **DONATE TODAY!**



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Invest in a sound, proven environmental non-profit organization and ensure that our work continues.



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Join hands with a business-friendly organization to work towards a healthier river together.



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Include the Elizabeth River Project in your will or estate plan to leave a lasting environmental legacy.



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Share your love for the river—support local restoration and inspire your loved ones with an ERP membership.

Deepest thanks to our donor circles

Elizabeth River Project is proud to recognize these leadership members for supporting our award-winning restoration and education programs. For information on joining a donor circle, contact Susan Smith at 757-828-1422 or ssmith@elizabethriver.org.



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 J. Jeffrey and Denise Tinkham, In memory of **Thomas Bain Bilisoly**
 Scott, Lori and Dirk Wilkins, In memory of **Thomas Bain Bilisoly**
 Melanie and Kenneth Wills, In memory of **Thomas Bain Bilisoly**
 Maureen McKnight, In memory of **Tom McKnight**, who loved to fish the Western Branch
 Gail Savage, In memory of **Toy D. Savage III**
 Betty Thomas, In memory of **Wescott B. Northam**



**ELIZABETH RIVER
PROJECT**

Upcoming Event Highlights

Celebrate the Elizabeth River with events that bring our community together—sharing stories, learning, and taking action for a cleaner, more resilient future. See all upcoming events and register [HERE](#):



Plus follow @elizabethriverproject to stay up-to-date with all things happening on your home river.



Marsh Litter Cleanup

**Friday, December 12, 9am-11am
Paradise Creek Nature Park**

Join us at Paradise Creek Nature Park to help restore vital marsh habitat—removing litter that threatens nesting areas, feeding grounds, and the health of the Elizabeth River's wildlife.



Winter Solstice Celebration

**Saturday, December 20, 7am-8am
Paradise Creek Nature Park**

Welcome the winter solstice sunrise at "Treehenge," an astronomical calendar that aligns with solstice sunrises and celebrates nature's rhythms



Volunteer Litter Cleanups

**Saturday, January 24, 9am-10:30am |
Ryan Resilience Lab**
**Saturday, February 21, 9am-10:30am |
Harbor Park, Norfolk**

Help make the Elizabeth River a cleaner and healthier place for all by participating in a litter cleanup to help remove harmful debris, safeguard local wildlife, and improve water quality.

River Star Businesses Annual Recognition Luncheon

**Thursday, January 29, 11:30am-2pm
Chesapeake Conference Center**

Honor the impactful work of local organizations that are "Doing Something Beautiful" for the Elizabeth River through voluntary efforts in pollution prevention and habitat restoration. *Registration required - \$30 per ticket*



Seed Keepers: Seed Processing Workshops

**Thursdays, January 29, 5:30pm-7pm
Ryan Resilience Lab**

Explore the art of seed keeping with Elizabeth River Project experts as you clean and prepare native plant seeds—helping grow the stock for our community's Native Seed Library and future restoration efforts.



World Wetlands Day: Wetland Ecology Pub Science Night

**Monday, February 2, 6pm-7:30pm
Ryan Resilience Lab**

Sip and learn at our World Wetlands Day Pub Science event, where expert voices and casual conversation come together to explore the ecology, challenges, and future of wetlands



Winter Watercolors

**Saturday, February 21, 10am-Noon
Paradise Creek Nature Park**

Create your own nature-inspired masterpiece at Paradise Creek Nature Park in a guided watercolor workshop.



Winter Bird Walk

**Saturday, March 21, 8:30am-10:00am
Paradise Creek Nature Park**

Join our Master Birder for a free guided tour and discover how birding can lift your mood, sharpen your mind, and deepen your connection to nature—all while exploring easy trails.



Opening of "Weaving Bullrush," an Original Show by Desmond Ellsworth

**Friday, March 27
Ryan Resilience Lab**

Explore an original show by Nansemond artist Desmond Ellsworth featuring handcrafted tapestries woven from native plants gathered along the wetlands of the Elizabeth River.



Book Your Event at the Ryan Resilience Lab

The Ryan Resilience Lab is a versatile, state-of-the-art space perfect for hosting classes, meetings, lectures, film screenings, and celebrations. Conveniently located near ODU and downtown Norfolk, the Lab can be tailored to fit your event needs.

With a focus on sustainability, we're here to help you create something beautiful. We look forward to working with you!



[CLICK HERE](#)