

# TIDELINES

News & Notes From the Hampton Roads Office of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation

MARCH 2024

## Virginia General Assembly: Status Report

The Virginia General Assembly session is more than halfway over and CBF staff have been hard at work advocating for clean-water initiatives. Here's an update on some of our key bills now that session is nearing its end.

The loss of tree canopy hinders Virginia's efforts to slow the impacts of climate change, manage stormwater, and reduce inland and coastal flooding. This is why one of CBF's top priorities in the 2024 General Assembly has been advocating to preserve and restore Virginia's tree canopy. We support House Bill 529 (Hope, D-1), which provides all localities with the authority to establish tree replacement requirements. Currently, localities have limited authority to require developers to replace a higher percentage of trees that are cleared for construction. House Bill 1100 (Carr, D-78) will enable statewide adoption of tree conservation language, which is currently limited to the Northern Virginia region. House Bill 459 (Sullivan, D-6) and Senate Bill 121 (Subramanyam, D-32) provide incentives to preserve mature trees and add flexibility for tree funds. House Bill 309 (Hope, D-1) and Senate Bill 461 (Marsden, D-35), dubbed the Forest Conservation Act, will charge the state with creating a baseline canopy assessment. All of these tree bills have passed out of their chambers of origin—and several have been approved by both chambers and are on their way to the governor's desk for consideration.

CBF supports House Bill 985 (Tran, D-18), prohibiting the use of toxic pavement sealants. Toxic pavement sealant, which is a black liquid sprayed or painted on asphalt pavement, is marketed as a way to protect the pavement. This type of sealant typically contains about 1,000 times more polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) than sealant products with an asphalt base. PAHs are toxic and carcinogenic, and harmful to birds, fish,



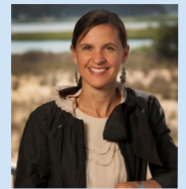
Delegate David Bulova addresses volunteer advocates at CBF's Clean Water Lobby Day in January.

mammals, and vegetation. This bill passed out of the House and Senate committee. It now awaits a hearing from the full Senate.

CBF has been part of a stakeholder group that came to consensus on resilience-related policies prior to session. As a result of these consensus items, Senate Bill 733 (Marsden, D-35) and House Bill 1458 (Hernandez, D-94) were introduced to centralize the state's climate resiliency efforts through the creation of the Office of Commonwealth Resilience, which would be nested under the governor. It also increases transparency and oversight over the distribution of money from the Community Flood Preparedness Fund and Resilient Virginia Revolving Fund. Initially, these bills garnered robust support; however, they met opposition in the Senate Finance Committee. CBF continues to work with stakeholders to modify the bills.

CBF welcomed nearly 100 volunteer advocates to Richmond on January 30 for a Clean Water Lobby Day. Delegate David Bulova (D-11), Chair of the Chesapeake Bay Commission, and Virginia Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, Travis Voyles, welcomed the group before the volunteers went off to meet their legislators. A group of CBF student leaders also participated in the event, and were welcomed to the House gallery by Delegate Alex Askew (D-95) during the floor session.

From the Desk of  
**Christy Everett**  
HAMPTON ROADS  
DIRECTOR



In February, CBF released our latest report, *Hope on the Half Shell: Harnessing oysters to build ecological and community resilience*, which focuses on the power of the oyster and its pivotal role in the Bay clean-up effort. As the report shows, there's never been a more important time to focus on the oyster. With Chesapeake Bay oyster recovery at a crucial point, building on current momentum will increase resiliency to climate change while creating multiple benefits for people and the environment.

The report highlights many critical recommendations, three of which include: targeting oyster restoration in 20 additional Bay tributaries; equitably growing the oyster aquaculture industry; and modernizing management of the wild oyster harvest.

Oysters are the bedrock of the Bay Ecosystem, long recognized for their ability to provide habitat and improve water quality. But their benefits to communities and the ecosystem extend far beyond that. They are key to adapting to climate change, supporting local economies, and cleaning up waterways.

Dive into our report by visiting [cbf.org/24oysterreport](https://cbf.org/24oysterreport) and join us in celebrating the Bay's oysters.

*Christy Everett*



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION  
Saving a National Treasure

## State's Budget Needs to Support the Bay

At the end of February, both the Virginia House of Delegates and Senate released their respective budgets, which included needed investments in environmental efforts—while also missing opportunities to support critical issues.

Building off last year's historic investment in farmers, legislators in both chambers proposed \$231 million for each year of the biennium to the Virginia agricultural cost-share program. Practices like fencing cattle out of streams and planting streamside trees are among the most cost-effective steps Virginia can take to improve water quality throughout the state.

The House proposed a \$20 million investment in a pilot program that would pay for verified, successful results in pollution-reduction projects. And with the state losing tree canopy at an alarming rate, the House included \$1.16 million in funding to study the Commonwealth's forests and conservation opportunities.

The House budget included \$400 million in bonds to fund upgrades at wastewater treatment plants. However, neither chamber proposed needed investment in the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund. This fund provides matching grants to localities for projects like rain gardens and stream restoration that help stymie polluted runoff.

The House proposed \$200 million over the biennium for the Community Flood Preparedness Fund, which supports local flood prevention and protection projects. This fund has been tapped by communities from Southwest Virginia to Fairfax to the Eastern Shore to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. The House conditioned their budget upon Virginia's reentry to the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), a multi-state carbon emission reduction program. RGGI participation is key to Virginia's climate adaptation and mitigation efforts as well as our clean-water goals.



Governor Youngkin samples oysters from Big Island Aquaculture at this year's Oysters on Capitol Square. The event is hosted by CBF and the Chesapeake Oyster Alliance.

Efforts to strengthen the blue catfish industry enjoyed support from both chambers with the House investing \$750,000 and the Senate \$250,000 in the second year of the two-year budget. A robust commercial fishery for blue catfish will help reduce their predatory pressure on other fishery species.

The Senate restored \$500,000 per year that had been removed for oyster replenishment activities. Oyster restoration efforts are vital to thriving waterways and local economies that until recently had long suffered from overharvesting, pollution, and disease.

Perhaps legislators were inclined to support oyster replenishment activities after attending CBF's and the Chesapeake Oyster Alliance's Oysters on Capitol Square event, held this year on Valentine's Day, right outside the General Assembly Building. Many legislators stopped by for a tasty treat while hearing from oyster farmers, including Walker's Seafood and Full Measure Oyster Company from the Eastern Shore, Steamboat Wharf Oyster Company from the Rappahannock River, Salty Bottom Blue Oysters from Gwynn's Island, Big Island Aquaculture from Hayes, and Lynnhaven Oyster Club from Virginia Beach.

A conference committee of legislators will now negotiate a single set of budget amendments, which will need approval from Governor Youngkin before becoming law.

## Plum Point Park Volunteer Restoration

In February, 45 volunteers joined CBF, the City of Norfolk, Norfolk Botanical Gardens, Norfolk Master Gardeners, and the Elizabeth River Trail to plant more than 30 native trees and remove roughly 33,000



A volunteer helps remove invasive species at Plum Point Park in Norfolk.

square feet of invasive species at Plum Point Park in Norfolk. Many thanks to everyone who provided their sweat to beautify this park.

## CBF in the Community ADVOCACY

### General Assembly Advocacy

Please contact legislators who are considering the state's final 2024-2026 biennial budget and ask them to support clean-water priorities. For more information, visit [bit.ly/48y1f2h](http://bit.ly/48y1f2h).

## COMMUNITY

### VoiCeS Adult Education Class

Monday evenings, April 8, 15, 22, and 29  
5:00–7:00 p.m.

Ivy Baptist Church

50 Maple Avenue, Newport News

Join CBF for our Volunteers as Chesapeake Stewards (VoiCeS) adult education class. The course will feature different speakers each week who are experts in their field. We will learn about a variety of topics impacting Newport News and the greater Chesapeake Bay watershed. To register, contact Lisa Renee Jennings at [ljennings@cbf.org](mailto:ljennings@cbf.org).

### Student Leadership Summer Expeditions

These multi-day, in-person, overnight experiences are open to rising 9th–12th graders. Expeditions primarily take place outdoors where participants explore different parts of the watershed and engage with CBF staff, field experts, and scientists. Courses scheduled for July and August. Register by April 19 at [cbf.org/studentleadership](http://cbf.org/studentleadership).



**CHESAPEAKE BAY  
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