General Assembly Supports Clean Water

The Virginia General Assembly session is nearing its end in early March. Several of CBF’s legislative priorities have been successful to date and we are excited to move through these final weeks of the legislative session.

As we reported previously, legislation to transfer management of the menhaden fishery to the experts at the Virginia Marine Resources Commission and legislation that prohibits offshore drilling have successfully passed both the House and the Senate and now await the governor’s signature.

Bills that establish a process for all farmers who operate at least 50 acres of cropland in the Bay watershed to implement an approved Nutrient Management Plan on fertilized acres, as well as a process for farmers who own 20 or more cows in the Bay watershed to install and maintain fencing to exclude cattle from perennial streams, both passed their respective chambers. Efforts were made to address concerns with the agricultural community about the bills’ provisions. The final outcome was strong legislation that both advances the Clean Water Blueprint and protects farmers’ livelihoods.

CBF has supported legislation called the Clean Energy and Community Flood Preparedness Act that would enable Virginia to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative or RGGI. By joining this program, the state will reduce carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel power plants by joining a regional cap and trade program. The bills describe how proceeds from sales of carbon allowances will be distributed, with some funds going to low-income energy efficiency programs, some going to the Virginia Community Flood Preparedness Fund, and some going for statewide climate change planning and mitigation activities. Both bills passed their respective chambers.

We have also been part of the development of legislation that will require the City of Richmond to create a plan to address its intermittent sewage overflows to the James River, as well as ongoing negotiations to develop legislation that would create a fee for single-use plastic bags. We await the final days of session to learn the outcomes of these bills.

The House of Delegates and the Senate have released their budget proposals and both show robust support for clean-water initiatives. CBF urges our legislators to support the House’s appropriation of $108.8 million to the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share, technical assistance, and related programs; the House’s allocation of $92 million over two years for the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund, a grant program for localities to implement projects that reduce polluted runoff; the Senate’s allocation of $60 million over two years for wastewater treatment plant upgrades; the Senate’s allocation of $4 million each year, plus $10 million, for oyster restoration; and the Senate’s allocation of $250,000 per year for environmental education programs.

Before the General Assembly session ends on March 7, budget committee members need to reconcile the differences between the two chambers’ budgets. You can take action now to urge budget committee members to include the above clean-water items in the state’s final budget. Visit cbf.org/take-action to find out how to make your voice heard.

CBF is proud of the work of the General Assembly to date and especially thankful to the many volunteers who have joined us this session to advocate for the Bay. Check out cbf.org/VASession to learn the latest news and how you can take action for the Bay.
Everybody Loves Oysters!

As mentioned on the front page, CBF has been working hard to encourage robust state funding for clean-water priorities during this year’s General Assembly session, including money for oyster restoration efforts.

The oyster is an iconic species in Virginia. However, decades of overharvesting, pollution, and disease have decimated the Bay’s oyster population to a fraction of its historic numbers. Fortunately, oysters are rebounding in Virginia, due to successful tributary-scale restoration, wise management, and increased disease resistance in the oyster population. Evidence of this rebound includes an oyster industry that has experienced a 52 percent increase in dockside value since 2013.

But this recovery needs an increase in state support to meet its goals. CBF urges legislators to support the Senate’s budget allocation of $4 million each year, plus $10 million, for oyster reef restoration efforts, in the next biennial budget.

Federal Funding for Bay Program in Jeopardy

In March, the Trump administration proposed slashing critical funding to the Chesapeake Bay’s restoration in its fiscal year 2020 budget. The budget, which cuts the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Chesapeake Bay Program by more than 91 percent, ignores funding requirements that are necessary for clean air, clean water, and efforts to combat climate change. This is the third year in a row that the administration has proposed either zeroing out or significantly reducing funding for this critical clean-water program.

If the Trump administration’s budget were to be enacted, it would devastate efforts to restore local rivers, streams, and the Chesapeake Bay. Improving water quality is essential not only for a healthy Bay but also for thriving farms, vibrant outdoor recreation, and clean drinking water.

EPA’s Chesapeake Bay Program is the glue that holds the Clean Water Blueprint—the historic Bay clean-up partnership between the states and the federal government—together. And the Blueprint is working: Dead zones are getting smaller, Bay grasses are increasing, and local economies are improving.

These proposed cuts ignore the strong bipartisan support for the Chesapeake Bay Program from members of Congress across the watershed. In fact, in December, Congress overwhelmingly approved a budget deal that not only reversed the Trump administration’s proposed cuts for the current fiscal year but also boosted Chesapeake Bay Program funding. The voices of CBF members were a critical part of this success.

Ultimately, the House of Representatives and the Senate have a robust process to draft spending bills, including the bill that funds the Chesapeake Bay Program. Stay tuned to learn how Bay lovers can engage and stand up for the Blueprint.

CBF in the Community

Oyster Shell Recycling
Remember to recycle your used oyster shells so CBF can use them in our restoration efforts. Visit cbf.org/shellrecycling for more information and for a list of shell drop-off locations. Interested in volunteering to collect used shells from local restaurants? Contact Heather Lockwood at hlockwood@cbf.org. We are especially in need of volunteers to collect shells from Saltine in Norfolk and Captain George’s in Williamsburg.

Reef Ball Construction
Tuesday, March 17, 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.
Wednesday, March 18, 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.
Thursday, March 19, 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.
Virginia Institute of Marine Science
1363 Greate Road, Gloucester Point
Help CBF and other volunteers to construct concrete reef balls to be used as hard surfaces for baby oysters to settle on and grow. For information or to register, contact Jackie Shannon at jshannon@cbf.org.

Advocacy
General Assembly Advocacy
As we enter the final weeks of the Virginia General Assembly session, we need your voice to succeed! Please monitor our 2020 legislative priorities at cbf.org/VaSession to stay up to date with the ever-shifting landscape of the General Assembly, especially as senators and delegates deliberate on the state’s next biennial budget. Then contact your representatives to tell them you support clean-water budget priorities. To find out your legislators’ contact information, visit the General Assembly website at whosmy.virginiageneralassembly.gov.

Community
Great Bridge Fisherman’s Association Fishing Flea Market
Saturday, March 14, 8:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m.
Chesapeake Conference Center
700 Conference Center Drive, Chesapeake
Help CBF staff a table at this fishing festival. To volunteer, contact Tanner Council at tcouncil@cbf.org.