Speak Up for Clean Water

When the General Assembly adjourned in March, the economy was thriving and budgets for clean-water programs—from upgrading wastewater treatment plants to reducing polluted runoff from farms and developed lands—were at an all-time high. Unfortunately, things have changed since then: Given the pandemic’s impacts, legislators are convening for a special legislative session beginning August 18 to make tough budget decisions.

Virginia’s leaders have to prioritize our health, safety, and wellbeing. However, we encourage legislators and the gubernatorial administration to remain committed to restoring our streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay by ensuring critical funding for water-quality efforts remains in place.

Virginia waterways are among our biggest assets. Thousands of jobs throughout the Commonwealth depend on them. As many have discovered during the current health pandemic, we find solace and we exercise along streams, rivers, and beaches, and many rely on fish they catch to feed their families. Our health depends on clean water to drink and wash our hands. Clean water is even more important to minority and marginalized communities that face disproportionate health risks from air and water pollution, as well as extreme heat and flooding from climate change. We ask legislators to ensure support for water quality remains an essential part of the solution for a better future for Virginia.

Your voice is needed now to remind legislators of the efforts being made to clean up Virginia’s polluted waterways. Virginia’s farmers, localities, and wastewater treatment plant operators all rely on state funding to help clean local waterways.

Clean water is critical for the health of our economy and our communities. Please visit cbf.org/take-action to let your representative know that keeping key clean-water programs funded is a priority.

Grazing Field Day a Success

In late July, 35 people joined member organizations of the Mountains-to-Bay Grazing Alliance for a field day at a farm in Bath County. Attendees learned how the operators developed a rotational grazing system that uses novel fescue technology to improve cattle performance. Seeing first-hand how a farmer implemented this grazing system allowed others to see how the practices could work on their operations.

The Mountains-to-Bay Grazing Alliance is a regional effort that brings together organizations in agricultural communities to support and encourage wider adoption of rotational grazing and related conservation practices that benefit water quality, improve soil health, and boost farm economies. Visit m2balliance.org for more information.

From the Desk of Peggy Sanner
Virginia Executive Director

Recently, the Chesapeake Bay Program released its 2019 Bay grasses assessment which found a 38 percent decline in underwater grasses between 2018 and 2019. This significant loss is a reminder that the Chesapeake Bay is still a system dangerously out of balance.

The precise cause for the decline is unknown, but increased precipitation in 2019 caused record-breaking river flows, which in turn caused high flows of fresh water to wash more pollution into the Bay, affecting water clarity and blocking sunlight that grasses need to survive. These extreme flows of polluted runoff are also clear signs that climate change is threatening the Bay’s recovery.

To restore underwater grasses and other critical habitats in the Bay, the Bay jurisdictions must accelerate efforts to reduce pollution and fully implement the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint by 2025. EPA must also hold them accountable.

Fortunately, many of the pollution-reduction strategies called for in the Blueprint, including forested buffers and air pollution controls on power plants, have dual benefits of reducing pollution to local waters while also mitigating greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. The time to act is now.

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Atlantic Coast Pipeline Project Canceled

In July, Dominion Energy and Duke Energy announced that they are canceling the Atlantic Coast Pipeline project. CBF was one of many in a broad and diverse coalition of advocates and organizations that opposed the project, which would have crossed steep mountainous terrain, fragmented valuable forests, polluted streams and rivers, and threatened vulnerable communities along a 600-mile path.

The pipeline raised numerous environmental concerns. Its construction and operation would have disturbed thousands of acres in Virginia. Its expected destruction of forests and disturbance of other sensitive lands would have diminished the ability of these vital regions to filter water, clean the air, and provide other essential environmental services. It also raised significant environmental justice concerns, especially the project's proposed Buckingham Compressor Station planned for the largely African-American community of Union Hill, located about 30 miles south of Charlottesville. Earlier this year, CBF and our partners successfully litigated to have the necessary air permit for the compressor station vacated.

The pipeline's cancellation not only reflects mounting legal problems but is also a sign of the changing economics around fossil fuel development. CBF hopes this signals a deepened commitment to renewable energy in the face of climate change.

Mobile Setting Unit Grows Oysters for First Time

This summer, CBF put our cutting-edge floating oyster restoration facility into full operation, transforming how CBF helps bring back Virginia's oyster population. Officially called the Prudence H. & Louis F. Ryan Mobile Oyster Restoration Center, the creative new facility sits atop two barges that travel to rivers where oyster restoration is taking place, dramatically increasing efficiency.

CBF restoration experts and volunteers loaded recycled oyster shells into large tanks on the facility on the Lynnhaven River at CBF's Brock Environmental Center in Virginia Beach. They then released nine million oyster larvae into these tanks, which will attach onto the shells. CBF volunteer oyster gardeners will raise these baby oysters for planting on sanctuary reefs. If you are interested in becoming an oyster gardener this year, check out the Calendar section for dates of our contact-free events.

This is the only mobile oyster restoration center operating on the Chesapeake Bay. The two linked barges hold six 850-gallon tanks filled with local river water where baby oysters attach, or "set," to recycled shells or concrete reef balls. These are then planted on nearby sanctuary reefs. Two cranes aboard the heavy concrete reef balls, which quickly build three-dimensional oyster habitat.

The new barges will allow the majority of CBF’s oyster-setting to take place on the very same rivers where restoration is occurring. Reducing travel time and using local river water in tanks will help ensure healthy, well-adjusted oysters.

This project is made possible thanks to generous support from Prudence and Louis Ryan, the Hampton Roads Community Foundation, and the Marietta M. & Samuel T. Morgan Trust.

CBF in the Community

Oyster Gardening: Contact-Free Spat Handouts
Saturday, August 15: Virginia Beach
Tuesday, August 18: Norfolk
Thursday, August 20: Hampton
Saturday, August 22: Eastern Shore
Tuesday, August 25: Gloucester Point
Thursday, August 27: Virginia Beach
Saturday, August 29: Tappahannock

Become an oyster gardener at one of this year’s contact-free events. For specific locations and times, and to register, visit cbf.org/oystergardening. Registration costs $25.

Oyster Shell Recycling

Locations throughout Virginia
With fewer people eating oysters in restaurants, CBF is losing a vital resource for our restoration efforts: recycled shells. If you are enjoying local oysters at home, please do not forget to recycle your shells at one of our public recycling bins. For a list of collection site addresses, please visit cbf.org/shellrecycling.

Advocacy

Urge State Legislators to Support Water-Quality Funding
Let your delegate and senator know how much clean water means to you by urging their support for funding vital state programs. Visit cbf.org/take-action to find more information.

Community

Brock Environmental Center Learning Series Webinar: Environmental Justice
Tuesday, August 11, 6:30–7:30 p.m.
Join Congressman Donald McEachin, State Majority Leader Cherpniele Herring, Advisor to Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources Meryem Karad, Nansemond Tribe Councilwoman Nikki Bass, and CBF Environmental Justice Attorney Taylor Lilley for a discussion on environmental justice issues in Virginia. To register, visit cbf.org/BECLearningSeries. CBF’s Brock Environmental Center Learning Series is presented with support from Jean Jenkins and Mike Newell.

Inside the General Assembly Webinar: Policy Process
Wednesday, September 16
12:00–1:00 p.m.
Join CBF’s Virginia Policy and Grassroots Advisor, Jay Ford, to learn how ideas become law in Virginia. Register at cbf.org/events/webinars.