

# HEADWATERS

News & Notes From the Virginia Office of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation

OCTOBER 2021

## CBF and Farmers Support Clean Water

In September, the state Farm Bureaus of the Bay watershed's six states, including Virginia, sent a letter urging the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to devote nearly three quarters of a billion dollars to reducing agricultural pollution in the Chesapeake Bay and the local creeks, streams, and rivers that feed into it.

The letter calls on Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to create a program called the Chesapeake Bay Resilient Farms Initiative (CRFI) to direct \$737 million in conservation assistance to farmers.

The watershed states' agriculture secretaries also wrote a similar letter to Vilsack last month urging the creation of the CRFI program. The CRFI would provide financial and technical support to farmers who want to implement conservation practices but lack the necessary capital or need technical assistance.

Time is running out for the watershed states to adopt the Bay restoration practices and policies they committed to in the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint. State-developed clean-up plans require 80 percent of the remaining pollution reductions come from agriculture by the 2025 deadline.

Conservation practices such as planting



CBF's Matt Kowalski speaks about clean water and sustainable farms at a recent Fauquier County Farm Bureau meeting.

forested buffers and rotating where livestock graze are among the most cost-effective ways to achieve those reductions. They also help mitigate climate change by sequestering carbon and boost local economies by creating jobs and generating business in the community.

Locally, CBF staff in Virginia are encouraging the adoption of agriculture conservation practices. Earlier this fall, CBF Virginia Watershed Restoration Scientist Matt Kowalski and CBF Senior Regional Ecosystem Scientist Chris Moore presented to the Fauquier County Farm Bureau about the benefits of clean water and healthy soils to both the farmers' bottom-lines and their communities.

From the Desk of  
**Peggy Sanner**  
VIRGINIA EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR



In September, Omega Protein, a Canadian owned seafood company, spilled more than 400,000 dead menhaden fish into Hampton Roads waters. Menhaden are a key food fish for striped bass, osprey, whales, and many other animals. Omega Protein catches more than 70 percent of all menhaden harvested on the East Coast, grinding them up for fish-oil pills, fertilizer, and animal feed. The company uses planes to spot large schools of fish, then encircles them with nets that are pursed tight. Unfortunately, when these nets tear, they result in major fish spills.

In 2019 Omega Protein violated a harvest cap on menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay, leading the U.S. Department of Commerce to threaten the company with a harvest moratorium. The Virginia Marine Resources Commission noted that Omega Protein is nearing the harvest cap this year and reminded the company of the potential consequences of taking more menhaden than allowed.

CBF also is concerned that the company won't count the recent fish spills in the harvest cap, therefore exceeding the Bay harvest limits. If Omega exceeds the harvest limits, we once again risk a complete shutdown of all menhaden fishing in Virginia's waters due to non-compliance with the harvest quota.

*Peggy*

## Oyster Gardening Season Wraps Up

This summer, CBF hosted 11 oyster gardening events. Volunteers came out to pick up their spat-on-shell oysters (baby oysters attached to recycled shells) and two cages to grow them in. More than 465 oyster gardeners from 218 families and organizations are fostering 401 batches of oysters from now until next summer. At the same time, last year's gardeners dropped off the oysters they have been nurturing for a year. We collected 95,994 adult oysters which were planted in local rivers by CBF and our partners.



Volunteers place gardened oysters on a protected reef this summer.



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Saving a National Treasure

## Localities Pass Plastic Bag Fees

During the 2020 Virginia General Assembly session, CBF and many partners advocated for passage of legislation to help limit plastic bag waste. The bill authorized localities to adopt a five-cent fee on each disposable plastic bag (with some exceptions) used by grocery stores, convenience stores, and drug stores.

On September 14, after holding a public hearing and listening to concerned citizens, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors adopted an ordinance to levy a five-cent fee on disposable plastic bags. Since then, Arlington, Alexandria, and Fredericksburg have all adopted similar ordinances. These localities now join Roanoke in having a plastic bag ordinance on their books.

The five-cent fee should motivate consumers to use reusable bags. The first plastic bag law in the United States was adopted in 2007. Since then plastic bag laws have been expanded to all corners of the country, with at least 354 municipalities in 25 states adopting bans and/or fees.

These ordinances will help address the growing problems with plastics. For example, it takes hundreds of years for a plastic bag to degrade in a landfill and it won't break down completely. Instead, it becomes microplastics



An osprey flies with a plastic bag around its talons.

that absorb toxins and continue to pollute our local rivers and streams, as well as the Bay, and harm wildlife that call these waterways home. Thousands of marine mammals and sea birds die each year after ingesting or becoming ensnared in plastic debris.

We all know that plastic bags are everywhere. They get caught in our trees, clog up our sewers, and blow around our streets. CBF considers the passage of these ordinances good first steps toward reducing plastic waste. We encourage all localities to review and pass plastic bag ordinances as quickly as possible.

## Greening Southside Richmond One Tree at a Time

In the first half of the 20th century, Richmond and cities across the country were rife with "redlining," a discriminatory lending practice that effectively denied mortgages and other investments in predominantly Black neighborhoods. One legacy of this practice is more heat-absorbing concrete and asphalt and fewer trees. Today, some of these neighborhoods can be up to 16 degrees hotter than tree-covered parts of the same city, causing increased health-related illnesses.

To help remedy this problem, CBF received a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, administered by the National Fish

and Wildlife Foundation, to collaborate with community organizations like Southside ReLeaf and Groundwork RVA, as well as the City of Richmond, to plant more than 650 new trees in targeted neighborhoods.

We are preparing for our fall activities now! Southside ReLeaf is canvassing Richmond neighborhoods to get volunteers for our tree planting at Hickory Hill Community Center. We are also advertising our tree giveaway for local residents. And if you live in Richmond, be on the lookout for our utility billing insert about the benefits of trees, which should be included in your October bill.

## Virginia Waterways See Many Algal Blooms



Filamentous algae in the North Fork of the Shenandoah River prevented recreation this summer.

Unfortunately this summer, Virginia waterways saw a proliferation of harmful algal blooms. Algae colored the water reddish-brown in Hampton Roads, and harmful algal blooms have led to health advisories for parts of Lake Anna and a 50-mile stretch of the Shenandoah River's North Fork.

These algal blooms can threaten the health of people, pets, fish, and shellfish. For example, at Lake Anna this summer, the Virginia Department of Health issued an advisory due to cyanotoxins created by algal blooms, which can lead to nausea, vomiting, blisters, and pneumonia.

On the North Fork, mats of algae have clogged the river in recent years, ruining plans for fishing, tubing, and swimming on the river. Blooms can make waterbodies undesirable, hurting local businesses such as outfitters and fishing guides.

Algal blooms are fueled by nitrogen and phosphorus pollution that heavy rains wash into rivers and the Bay. The mixture acts as fertilizer, causing the algae to grow explosively in warm, still water. Climate change is creating better conditions for algal blooms by increasing both temperatures and rainfall.

When the algae die and break down, they create oxygen-depleted dead zones in the water where fish, crabs, oysters, and other aquatic life cannot survive. In some cases, the algae themselves can be toxic to oysters and other wildlife.

These algal blooms occur most summers and are an unfortunate reminder that we still have a lot of work to do to ensure clean, healthy waterways. To address the problem, we must meet the pollution reductions under the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint.



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