



# Wetlands Watch Fall Newsletter

Fall 2013

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## Wetlands Watch Hosts Statewide Meeting on Conservation Landscaping

For nearly two years, Wetlands Watch has been working on ways to bring habitat back into the

Chesapeake Bay cleanup, now that the primary focus is on stormwater pollution reduction. With the mandatory Bay cleanup in effect, we are focused on reducing stormwater runoff at all costs...in some cases at the cost of the shoreline habitat, especially in Virginia's built-out areas. With government budget cuts, you can restore the shorelines or deal with stormwater, but you cannot do both....or can you?

We have been looking at successful efforts by watershed groups like the Elizabeth River Project, Lynnhaven River Now, and many others to have property owners change their shoreline landscape. We started wondering how we could help expand these efforts, get local governments to recognize them, and help the private landscaping and nursery industry partner as well.

In 2012, we did a study for the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission on "conservation landscaping" in urban and suburban areas (first environmental non-profit to *EVER* get a contract from them!). ...Continued on Page 2

## Sea Level Rise Adaptation and the Private Sector

Wetlands Watch has been working on sea level rise adaptation for over seven years. We are the only environmental nonprofit in the nation working exclusively at the local level to get communities (and shoreline habitat) ready for sea level rise.

Early on we saw the private sector as the key to adaptation: their investments along the shoreline dwarf government investments and their political connections are key to moving adaptation. Last year we got

a grant from the Virginia Environmental Endowment to start working directly with the private sector.

To date this work has produced a better understanding of private sector needs and how to communicate with them on adaptation issues.

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## Conservation Landscaping...continued from page 1

We thought this work needed to move statewide, so we partnered with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, University of Virginia, Virginia's Coastal Zone Program, and lots of private sector sponsors including Filtterra Biopave™ to hold a statewide summit.

With funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation we brought nearly 200 people to Williamsburg for a day and a half "summit" to figure out how to expand these conservation landscaping efforts throughout Virginia, allow localities to take credit for them in their Bay cleanup requirements, enlist the private sector to help fund the

work, and strengthen the watershed groups on the ground...and also move habitat back into the forefront of the Bay cleanup.

We're looking to sustain this enthusiasm and get a statewide collaboration going. The reports we have done are available electronically, so get in touch at [info@wetlandswatch.org](mailto:info@wetlandswatch.org).

## A Collaborative Summit

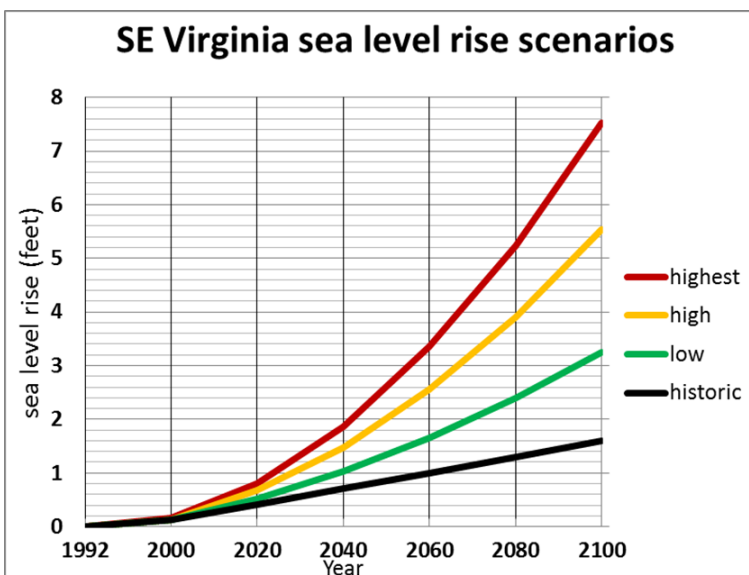
## Virginia Institute of Marine Science Flooding Study Released

The State of Virginia has lagged behind many other states in dealing with sea level rise. There has been progress recently in the form of a study, requested by the General Assembly, on the state of flooding and impacts of sea level rise in Virginia. State

Senator Ralph Northam and Delegate Christ Stolle moved a provision through the legislature last year authorizing the study and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) delivered it this year.

The study is the first update since the 2008 report from the Virginia Commission on Climate Change on sea level rise impacts and adaptation steps needed. It validates those earlier recommendations and increases the urgency for action: our earlier report has us planning for a 2-5 foot sea level rise over 100 years; this report ups that to 4-6 feet at a minimum!

In recognition of our work at the local government level, Wetlands Watch was asked to contribute to the study and we are a co-author of the report.



## Sea Level Rise and the Private Sector...continued from page 1

It has also produced the first-ever ground level look at the role private insurance may play in coastal adaptation.

The full insurance study is available electronically from us, but to let you in on a couple of our conclusions:

- Private homeowners insurance is not currently reflecting the increased risk from man-made climate change impacts – and it would be difficult for a homeowner to tell, even if it did.

- Insurance is an imperfect driver for change along the shoreline and will likely produce some unexpected and adverse changes, such as the “gentrification” of the coast.

Our next task is to look at federal flood insurance, which will bring big changes along the shoreline.



## Wetlands Watch in the Press

Over the last year or so we have elevated the conversation on sea level rise, working to get national attention on Virginia’s needs. In the course of our work, we have been featured in many daily and weekly publications and broadcasts, including (among others):

- New York Times
- Washington Post
- NPR
- PBS
- Mother Jones
- New Republic
- Richmond Times Dispatch
- Virginian Pilot
- Inside Business
- Bay Journal

Governor's  
**COMMISSION on  
CLIMATE CHANGE**



## Virginia Climate Change Website Finds New Home... With Wetlands Watch

When you do an internet search on “Virginia Climate Change Commission,” the first hit is not a “Virginia.gov” site, it is our website. When we saw the Commission’s full website start to blink on and off of the state server, we got in touch with the folks at our Department of Environmental Quality and had them send us a copy of the website. We then set about reconstructing the full Commission proceedings on our server.

So now, if you want to see what went on in 2008, the last time Virginia officially deliberated on climate change and sea level rise, you still can.

We felt it was important that Virginia’s citizens see the full extent of the Commission’s deliberations and that they continue to have access to the same information we did on the Commission (Skip was honored to be appointed as a member of the Commission in 2008).

# WETLANDS WATCH



Protecting and  
Conserving Wetlands

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## A Typical Month with Wetlands Watch

A lot of our work at Wetlands Watch involves helping folks protect wetlands from encroachment and connecting them with conservation resources. In the last month we have worked with:

 A landowner in Caroline County who, together with his neighbors, has about 3,000 acres of non-tidal wetlands that were cut up over the last 150 years. They want to restore the wetlands and put them into a conservation easement. The problem is that with federal budget cuts, the US Department of Agriculture wetlands programs are out of money. What worries this landowner is the pending extension of commuter rail to the county and the development pressures that will follow. We are working to connect these landowners with public and private funding sources to

see if we can protect this large area of wetlands.

 A homeowners association in Henrico County downstream of the development of a property with wetlands. Development will impact the wetlands and increase runoff and flooding. We hurriedly worked with the residents before a pending planning commission meeting, offering arguments and advice on how to push back on the development and strategies for involving the broader public. Unfortunately the residents failed to halt the development or significantly alter the development plans.

 A citizens group in Virginia Beach was upset that an organization wanted to put a water park recreation facility for disabled citizens in an adjacent property covered with wetlands. Despite its laudatory goals, this is clearly an unwise use of a fragile wetland that will get wetter with sea level rise. We are advising the citizens group and the matter is still unresolved.

