



Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program Semi-Annual Success Story ("Section C")

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Helping Meet the Need for Public Access

THE PROBLEM: Virginia is blessed with over 5000 miles of shoreline along the 29 counties, 17 cities and 42 incorporated towns that constitute our coastal zone. Although this area makes up only 29 percent of the Commonwealth's land area, more than 60 percent of our citizens call it home. An on-going challenge for localities, state and federal agencies, and the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program, is to provide public access to these outstanding coastal resources. A key to building support for coastal zone management is to make sure that citizens value those resources and can access them for their enjoyment. Providing new access points is a challenge because of the fiscal constraints faced by government at all levels. Keeping existing access facilities open also presents challenges because of not only normal wear and tear, but because of the damage caused by the apparent increase in storm frequency and severity. Many older facilities also were not designed to meet the needs of all citizens that are now required through the Americans with Disabilities Act. And finally, public access points provide a great opportunity to educate the public on important coastal resource management issues and techniques, but few sites are actually designed to reach out to citizens who use the sites.

THE FIX: Based on feedback from the Virginia CZM Program's Coastal Policy Team, the Program issued a request for proposals from coastal planning district commissions (PDCs) in 2014, 2015 and 2016. The intent of these grants was to provide PDCs with an opportunity to address one or more of five priority topics: water quality, coastal resiliency, working waterfronts, habitat restoration, and public access. During this period, several public access projects were selected for funding by the Coastal Policy Team and approved by NOAA. Four of those, which have been recently completed, are highlighted here. In addition to providing public access, some of these projects also provided habitat restoration (with public education components), improved coastal resiliency, and provided access for citizens with disabilities.

THE IMPACT: Four recently completed public access projects:

Richmond Regional PDC: Brown's Island Dam Walk Habitat Restoration / Native Plant Demonstration Project. The Potterfield Memorial Bridge is a new ADA accessible pedestrian bridge across the James River in downtown Richmond which has dramatically improved public access to the River. A Virginia CZM-funded habitat restoration project on the southern end of the bridge created a native plant demonstration area that also functions as a rain garden. Funds were used for the purchase and installation of 185 native plants including trees, shrubs, and ferns, along with the design, fabrication, and installation of an interpretive sign about the value of native plants and their importance. The project has been very well received since opening in early December 2016, and drew 35,000 visitors in its first month.



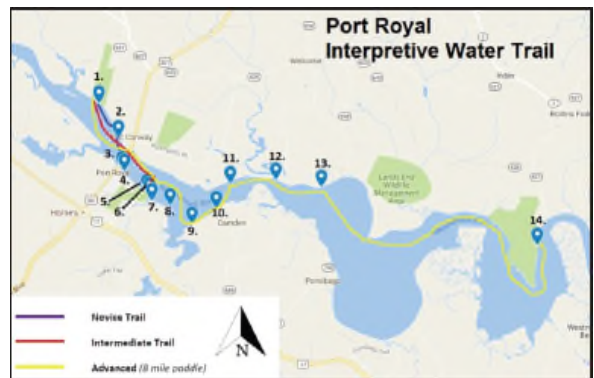
Hampton Roads PDC: Carrollton Nike Park Canoe / Kayak Launch. Located in Isle of Wight County along a tidal creek that adjoins the James River, the park provides direct access to the water for visitors via a fishing pier and newly constructed canoe and kayak launch. The original water access structures were damaged by Hurricane Irene in 2011. Although the pier was partially restored, the full landing was only recently replaced with assistance from the Virginia CZM Program. The completed project provides ADA-accessibility to the pier and launch and additional space for fishing.



Hampton Roads PDC: Lavalette Ave. Fishing Pier, Canoe / Kayak Launch and Habitat Restoration. Although dominated by its shoreline, the City of Norfolk has relatively little public access to the water. In addition, its long history and level of urbanization has resulted in degraded riparian areas with lost or reduced ecosystem services. This project, a combined canoe/kayak launch and fishing pier, addresses both issues by providing a new access point for the public to view and enter the water and by restoring a stretch of shoreline which has been damaged over the years by shoreline fishing. The new facility, located near the Virginia Zoological Park on the Lafayette River, helps implement the city's long-term goals of improving public access and restoring its riverfronts.



George Washington Regional Commission: Port Royal Interpretive Water Trail. The trail offers three tracks along the Rappahannock River beginning at the Town of Port Royal Canoe/Kayak Launch. The three tracks overlap but are designed for novice, intermediate and advanced paddlers. The Port Royal trail features sites of interest including the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge and James Madison's birthplace. An interactive app was created to guide guests through the three difference options of interpretive trails. The trail includes an app featuring all points of interest along the trail.



MORE INFORMATION: To see short articles on each of the four public access projects described here, along with more illustrations, please visit the Virginia CZM Program website and see the fall 2017 issue of the Program's magazine (available late fall, 2017)
<http://www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/CoastalZoneManagement/ReportsPublications/VACZMMMagazine.aspx>

PARTNERS: The Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program works with its network of agency and locality partners to identify public access priorities and to provide funding for these projects. For local projects such as these, the eight regional planning district commissions provide a key link between the Virginia CZM Program and its local government partners. In this case, the Hampton Roads PDC, Richmond Regional PDC and George Washington Regional Commission were the key partners.

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