



CITIZENS FOR A BETTER EASTERN SHORE

SHORELINE™

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Tourism Season Is Upon Us – Is Everything Ready?

By Mary Miller

There's hardly a block in Cape Charles that doesn't have a ladder up against a house or a stack of building materials in a front yard. The crab traps stacked in the harbor all winter are moving to the water for the summer harvest. And the restaurants are gearing up for summer diners. After a banner 2017 year full of visitors from spring right through to the winter holiday season, businesses and vacation rental home owners are going full tilt to be ready in time for this year's peak summer crowd. New eateries are getting ready to open, shops are propping their doors open to welcome the first weekenders, and a second boutique hotel, a distillery tasting room and a new brewery will debut this year in this small, bustling 19th-century railroad town. A second block of condominium apartments is being built on Mason Avenue, and convenient parking for downtown shoppers has become a campaign issue as the town holds elections in May.

For 3 of the past 4 years, the Eastern Shore has been the fastest growing tourism region in the state. The latest report from the Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission indicates visitor spending increases, tax revenue increases, and tourism job and payroll increases. Website visits as prospective visitors check out what the Shore has to offer have increased an astounding 621% over the past 5 years. Print and



Cape Charles businesses hurry to finish construction before tourist season.

Charles, to Victorian home- and farm-based B&Bs, to mid-20th-century iconic motels built during the early days of Shore travel along Lankford Highway, there are new and old accommodations for every budget. And the growing number of vacation rentals – houses, cottages, yurts and cabins – expand the choices even more.

digital marketing, editorial features in national and regional publications, and state and regional marketing collaborations have helped make the Shore one of most popular vacation spots in Virginia.

Where to Stay...What to Do

Visitors to campgrounds in both counties swell the summer population by the thousands. Kiptopeke State Park and Cherrystone Campground in Northampton operate at peak capacity on many summer weekends. And both counties now have a nationally recognized KOA campground – the Sunset Beach Hotel and Beach Club-Resort and the Chincoteague Island KOA – both with various types of accommodations.

The Tourism Commission website (www.esvatourism.org/es_home/home.asp) lists 41 hotels and motels open and ready for business this summer. From award-winning, full-service hotels in Chincoteague to contemporary boutique hotels in Cape

Water trails, wildlife and hiking trails, golfing by the Bay, cycling quiet back roads, water sports in both counties, and a new water park in Chincoteague provide a wide variety of outdoor recreation. The Shore's towns host art and craft festivals, live music events, parades, Farmer's Markets, street fairs, car rallies, and theater and film weekends. From eco-tours and fishing charters out of Wachapreague, to Shakespeare in the Park in Exmore, to a ferry trip to Tangier from Onancock, to a

See Tourism Season, cont'd on p. 1

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work boat docking competition and Blessing of the Fleet in Cape Charles, to a competitive decoy carving festival in Chincoteague, the Shore's towns each have something special to offer.



Crab pots stacked at Cape Charles Marina wait to be placed in the Bay.

There are Garden Tours, artisan studio tours, holiday marathons, bike tours and fishing tournaments. There are music, theater, and art-filled weekends from spring to fall. There are more than 50 National Register of Historic sites in the two counties and

nine small museums, each preserving some aspect of four centuries of life and culture on the Shore.

Come for the Fun...stay for the Food

But what's the #1 interest of visitors coming for a Shore vacation? It's the food! The Tourism Commission website says it best:

Stop by a farmer's market or a roadside farm stand during the summer for locally grown produce sold by the people who grow it. Pick your own peaches and berries in season. Shop mom and pop retail seafood shops for just-caught delicacies to cook up at your vacation rental or take home. Raw bars, waterside restaurants, upscale bistros, retro diners, crab shacks, delis, cafes, bakeries and ice cream parlors dot the region. Be on the lookout for unique regional dishes like sweet potato biscuits made from local Hayman sweet potatoes. Just-caught seafood – whatever's in season – is on menus across the region. Over a dozen raw bars feature oysters with distinct tastes depending on the salinity of the local water they grow in. Buy fresh seafood at roadside markets and cook it up at your vacation rental.

In addition to all of the above, there are scheduled music and food events at a local winery on the Bay, and similar events at parks, shops, and galleries in the towns. There are seafood festivals, church and firehouse



Community oyster roasts keep bringing visitors back to the Shore.

regional food fundraisers, oyster roasts, pig roasts, crab feasts, and food trucks to be found by following the temporary event signs. And a refurbished, updated supermarket, which caters to the thousands of campers and Cape Charles area vacation home renters, has greatly expanded its selection of some popular vacation food and beverage items, and has even installed a wine chiller.

The 2018 Tourism Commission Report says that those hungry visitors are coming from Virginia Beach, Washington, DC, Norfolk, Suffolk, Chesapeake, Richmond, Charlottesville, New York City, and Newport News. They're on their way. And the Shore will be ready. 

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Errata

The April 2018 *ShoreFacts* included a reference to "572 million pounds of ammonia emissions each year." This should have read 15 million pounds. We apologize for this error. The article "Ready, Set, Go!" on Eastern Shore Farmers Markets in the April 2018 *ShoreLine*, did not include Parksley market and Wallops Island market (opening Thursday, May 3).



Want to See More?

Check out our Facebook page – www.facebook.com/CBES1988/ – to find out about events, share comments and photos with members and other Eastern Shore citizens, and let us know what you're thinking. Tell us if you like what we're doing, or if there are other issues we need to cover.

ABCRC Hires New Director

Submitted by Donna Fauber

In April, the University of Virginia (UVA) welcomed a new Site Director at the Anheuser-Busch Coastal Research Center (ABCRC) and Virginia Coast Reserve Long-Term Ecological Research project. Dr. Cora Ann Johnston is a marine ecologist who has spent the past 15 years studying coastal ecosystems throughout the U.S. and abroad. *ShoreLine* asked her to share more about her return to the Shore to continue her career in coastal ecology while representing UVA's coastal research efforts.

Why did you want to move back to the Shore and, specifically, to the ABCRC?

The short answer: I was offered my dream career in a location with unparalleled natural beauty. Spending the past decade exploring ecosystems as diverse as deserts in Nevada and islands in the central Pacific simply highlighted for me just how incredible our coastal barrier system is right here on the Shore. I have seen more bald eagles in my first 2 weeks at the ABCRC than I have seen across the rest of the United States in the past 15 years.

Also, during my scientific training, I became frustrated by purely academic scientific research that was not being linked to the places, people, and policies that could be informed by the findings. I joined the ABCRC because I am excited to participate in research that is so directly relevant to the lives and livelihoods of our neighbors. One of my primary goals as Site Director is to help reveal that relevance to the broader community through enhanced outreach. We also have big dreams of expanding our tradition of long-term and synthetic research in Oyster to become a nucleus of discourse on integrative science and resilient coastal ecosystems and communities.

In addition to the scientific research side of the ABCRC, do you have any plans for expanding community involvement at the center?

I am eager to expand our interaction with the community, which is a central goal of the ABCRC research group. Tucked away on a side road in Oyster, our lab has an incredible history of conducting world-class research. Yet many Eastern Shore residents are unaware of what we do. I look forward to expanding our outreach and community involvement in several key ways: 1) move our public seminars into town to make our findings more accessible; 2) develop opportunities, such as open houses, for the community to visit our research facilities; 3) work with The Nature Conservancy and other local collaborators to enhance place-based and scientific education for local students.

Outreach is an integral part of our operations: this spring we are offering coastal ecology and wetland art as

continuing education for teachers, and a public meeting with eminent researchers to discuss the implication of sea-level rise for coastal communities. We are always looking for new ways to contribute, so please find me at a local event if you have ideas to share.

What do you look forward to about returning to the Shore?

I grew up boating out of Wachapreague, so I am excited to get back out on the water and learn more about the southern barrier islands.

I'm also eager to reconnect with classmates and friends who have established careers on the Shore and to become involved in local initiatives, including CBES. Overall, I am just delighted that the University of Virginia's research initiative has given me the opportunity to continue my career in coastal ecology while living and working in a place as quiet, dark, and friendly as the Eastern Shore.

More about Dr. Johnston:

Cora graduated from Nandua High School and received her Bachelor of Arts from Hampshire College in Amherst, MA, where she studied tropical and coastal ecology in part through an internship at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science in Gloucester Point. In 2016, she received her doctorate in ecology from the University of Maryland, College Park, for work completed with the Smithsonian Institution along the Atlantic Coast of Florida. Her research has been published in the *Marine Ecology Progress Series* and *Biology Letters*, among others.



Dr. Johnston on the ABCRC dock in Oyster.

Eyreville Archaeology Seminar

Archaeology and Background Research of the 17th C. Eyreville House Site

Tuesday, May 1, 2018

7:00 - 8:00 PM

Anheuser-Busch Coastal Research Center
6364 Cliff Rd, Oyster, VA

Renewal of Ag-Forestal Districts in Northampton

An Overview By Arthur Upshur

On May 1, the Northampton County Planning Commission will take up a renewal of a huge number of Agricultural and Forestal Districts (AFDs). Then they will report their recommendation on approval or disapproval on to the Board of Supervisors for their meeting July 10, 2018, where the final decision on the renewals will take place.

As many of you may recall, in 2009 Northampton County got rid of land use taxation, where open farm land was assessed for tax purposes based on its value as farm land rather than its “best use” value. Given farm returns, often the land use value was dramatically lower than best use, particularly for waterfront land. CBES originally played an important role in moving to land use taxation, since we felt it was a practical way to encourage large rural holdings of farm land rather than taxing the land so heavily that it would be sold for development. The Board of Supervisors in 2009 felt that too much revenue was lost from the lowered assessment value of farm land and that the benefits of this lowered tax were going disproportionately to developers holding their land prior to development

and to off-shore investors who were renting the farm land out. They decided to end land use taxation in favor of moving many of these holdings into AFDs, which require a 10-year commitment. At that time, the belief was that developers and investors would not move land into an AFD, since that potentially tied their hands for too long a period. But the immediate result was that a large number of farms were immediately put into AFDs all at once and the Board of Supervisors ended up approving all the applications. It has now been 10 years and these AFDs are coming up for renewal.

There are many differences between putting land in an AFD and registering it as farm land in a land use program. The main one is that it moves the decision process to the discretion of the Board of Supervisors. One must petition the Board to move land in or out of an AFD. Every 10 years, each AFD comes up for renewal. Any new land approval requires that one pay fees (currently \$500/parcel added) to the County to advertise the public notices, etc. I served on a tax committee for the county a few years ago.

See **Ag-Forestal**, *cont'd* on page 5

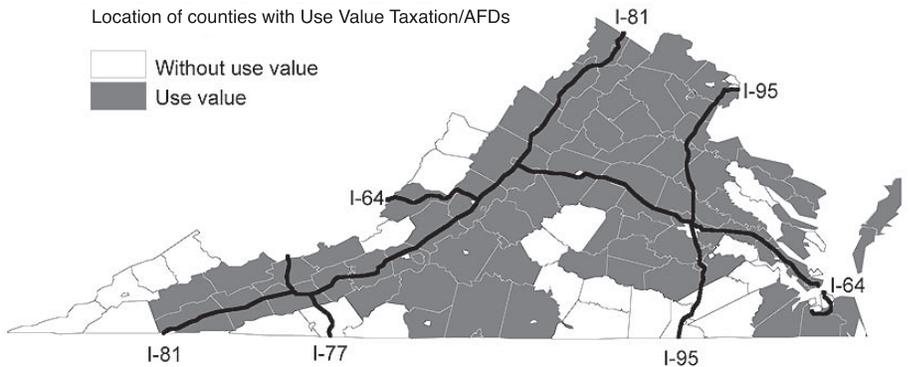
Method	Action	Duration	Outcome
Agricultural/Forestal Districts, AFDs – adopted by a small number of Virginia counties	County adopts Ordinance – Districts Established – Properties assessed at Agricultural Use Value	10 years (length determined by county, could be shortened) – must be renewed at each term	No non-agricultural development – Planning certainty for 10 years – land approved for removal from AFD by Board of Supervisors “for good and reasonable cause,” subject to payment of roll-back taxes
Conservation Easements (widespread use on Eastern Shore)	Property owner enters a deeded agreement to limit future land uses with an organization such as Eastern Shore Land Trust, which monitors and enforces agreement	Easement is permanent and is recorded in land records – property owner retains use	Tax benefits accrue to owner from permanent reduction in use value assessment. Planning certainty
Land Use Taxation – used by most rural counties in Virginia	With few local ordinance limits, eligible properties include Agriculture, Horticulture, Forestal and Open Space	No time limits – no limits on change of use	Land assessed at its “use” value – when land changes to more intense use, it is assessed at the new use. Planning certainty subject to continuation of Land Use Ordinance by Board of Supervisors

We had hoped that the Board of Supervisors would revise their process on AFDs to make it more predictable and less vulnerable to charges of favoritism, where only friends of Supervisors got their farms approved. That committee argued that we needed to create some way to rank the AFD applications based on criteria linked to the Board's priorities. For example, if the Board wanted mainly farmer/operators, they could favor those applications. Unfortunately, that recommendation was largely ignored, and so here we are with this large number of applications pending again and a real risk that the approval process will become arbitrary and unpredictable again.

The farming community in Northampton is worried as to how this will play out. Already some of the Supervisors have stated their discomfort with reducing the assessments, and therefore the taxes, on large land holdings. This has always been a dilemma in our county. It is true that many of our wealthiest citizens get a tax break from this program. But open land has an enormous value to Northampton County. We depend on that open land to create the rural atmosphere that fuels our tourism industry. We depend on undeveloped land to buffer the waterways and provide open shoreline for aquaculture. In short, these open lands are critical for our county's economic health.

County services for open land are very low (*vis-à-vis* residential or other land uses). Reducing open land for other purposes generally raises taxes because the cost of services on alternative uses is higher. In other words, while the assessment goes up with other uses, the services required almost always go up more, resulting in a net loss to the county and requiring higher taxes for all. But in a time when the county needs resources to fund schools and services, it is understandable that the AFD program would get increased scrutiny.

The key issue in any of these debates is what would happen if the taxes on these lands were raised back up to the "best use" value? No one really knows exactly what would happen. But it is clear that the way the land is held would certainly change over time. Some landowners have been clear that they could not afford the higher tax and would quickly put the land up for sale. Others have said they would at least have to sell the highest tax value land – principally any waterfront spaces. Others may move their land into a conservation easement – which gets the same lowered assessment as the AFD but is a permanent restriction on how the land can be used in the future. All owners who rent farm land, even the wealthiest investors, will be under pressure to adjust farm land rentals if the carrying costs of the land go up dramatically. If Northampton



County policies raise the cost of holding open land, farm rents will have to go up to compensate. If farm rentals cannot sustain the increase, we will see our open land moving to other uses that have more revenue per acre attached to them, such as more industrial farming techniques, more commercial land use, or more residential development.

My own experience tells me that the conservation easement is more likely to be a refuge of landowners who are not working farmers. Most farmers I know recognize that no one knows the future well enough to know if they will need to sell their land at full price some day. Selling the land is nearly always the solution of last resort, and most farmers cannot give that value away in a conservation easement.

This is a difficult decision because of the way an AFD works. Each AFD depends on a "core" parcel that forms a large portion of the land in the AFD. Other land holders around the core parcel are able to join if their land is contiguous or closely adjacent to the core parcel. Of course, the core parcels, due to their size, are usually held by our wealthiest citizens. But it is an all-or-nothing discussion because you cannot have AFDs without those core parcels, so the ability to fine-tune this policy is limited.

This is an important decision for Northampton County that will have many long-term consequences. We hope that our members will weigh in with both decision-making bodies in their meetings to make their thoughts heard and understood. As always, CBES believes that the more our citizenry weighs in, the more careful and thoughtful our elected officials will be in considering important decisions.

The Northampton County Planning Commission will meet on Tuesday, May 1, 2018, at 7:00 PM in the Board Chambers, located at 16404 Courthouse Road in Eastville.

The Northampton County Board of Supervisors will also conduct a public hearing on the above items on Tuesday, July 10, 2018 at 7:00 PM in the Board Chambers.

The writer holds his farm in an AFD which is currently up for renewal. 

Keeping Track

ESVA Natural Resources Protection Scorecard a dismal score for Shore natural resource protection

- ✓ The Interior Department rolls back protections for migratory birds.
- ✓ The Trump administration puts off-shore oil drilling back on the table (including in Virginia’s coastal waters).
- ✓ Congress inserts an exemption for industrial animal agriculture from reporting hazardous emissions like ammonia – into its omnibus spending bill.
- ✓ A Virginia Senate Committee takes a party line vote against protecting the Shore’s sole-source drinking water aquifer.
- ✓ Accomack County adopts industrial poultry regulations pre-approved by the industry.

Update: VPDES Approves Permits

As noted in the January 2018 *ShoreLine* (“Local Hearing Scheduled for CAFO Permits”), the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) held a public hearing on January 30 at Nandua High School to hear comments on draft Virginia Pollution Discharge Elimination System (VPDES) permits for 3 poultry farms, or CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations), that the EPA had flagged with discharges into nearby waterways. Thirty-seven Eastern Shore residents commented at the hearing; an additional 50 written comments were received. Of the 87 comments, 74 were in opposition to the permits as written (in addition to 67 written comments received during the initial comment period, all opposed to the draft permit).



On April 12, Neil Zahradka, of the DEQ Office of Land Application Programs, presented the agency’s final recommendations to the State Water Control Board (SWCB), which included increasing the frequency of visual water sampling from 4 to 6 times a year, and increased compliance monitoring. Zahradka said that quantitative analysis of water samples for pollutants, including nutrients and bacteria, was not practical because “stormwater patterns at each farm are more characteristic of non-point source pollutant sources,” with flows from adjacent fields, roads, and houses in addition to the CAFO, and it would be too difficult to isolate the source of any pollutants. The SWCB approved DEQ’s recommendation with a 5-0 vote.



CBES membership/support at www.cbes.org

End of an Era...And A New Beginning for CBES

CBES has been trying to sell our headquarters building in Eastville for several years. Finally, the old building has been sold. Originally purchased for office space for staff and for a meeting location, the CBES building served its purpose well for years. But times are a-changing. We found that most of our meetings no longer fit in that space. Our need for files and paper copies of everything has dropped away with the world wide web and the cloud to store documents.

It is the end of an era and a little sad, but the sale really helps move CBES forward by freeing up the resources we had invested in the building and removing the costs and risks associated with owning the building. And, as always, we are simply an e-mail or phone call away if you want to contact us in our new “virtual” office.

Update: Public Participation

As noted in the April 2018 *ShoreLine* (“Keeping Track: Citizen Participation”), the Eastern Shore of Virginia Ground Water Committee has curtailed public participation (at the end of the agenda) in recent meetings due to a lack of time. At their April 17 meeting, the Ground Water Committee voted to change their bylaws to move the public comment period to the first item on the agenda, with a full 15 minutes allotted. Although this does mean that citizens won’t be able to comment on what occurs during the meeting, we believe it’s a good first step, and applaud the Committee for taking the initiative.



The Day of the Asparagus

from The Kitchen Hive

Like Thomas Jefferson did in his journal, I mark the day in early April when the asparagus first arrives. It means spring – in so many ways. It comes every year, in the same place, at the same time, in the garden, at the Farmer’s Market, and in roadside stands – and always tastes like spring.



Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Virginians, Parisians, all shared the same joy. Some European restaurants and homes still serve an “asparagus course” in season.

Simple prep is all it needs: an old recipe says “steam briefly, toss with vinaigrette and serve *tiède* –at room temperature.” Topped with a poached egg, Hollandaise sauce, or with grated hard-boiled egg, the spears look and taste elegant. Or invent your own dipping sauce – a bit of plain yogurt/sour cream/mayonnaise, a splash of lemon juice, mixed with a favorite spice blend, wasabi, anchovy paste, etc. *Voila* – spring.

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Support Pedal to Protect the Eastern Shore

Annual State of the Waters Conference

**Co-sponsored by Virginia Eastern Shorekeeper
and Congressman Scott Taylor**

Thursday, May 31, 6:30 PM
Eastern Shore Community College

Join our panelists for an informative discussion on the latest scientific advances and regulatory updates to protect our waterways.

- Dr. Mark Luckenbach, Associate Dean of Research and Advisory Services, VIMS
- Battina Ring, Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry
- Matthew Strickler, Secretary of Natural Resources

**For more information, contact Jay Ford at
jay@shorekeeper.org.**

Clean the Bay Day 2018

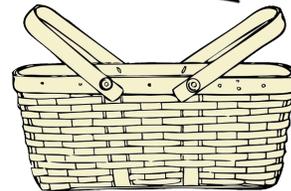
Join Team TNC/CBES in Oyster

Saturday, June 2, 9 AM-NOON

Wear long-sleeved shirt and pants, sunscreen, sunglasses and bug spray. Waterproof boots are a plus, but not essential. Bags and grabbers provided. Please visit the Chesapeake Bay Foundation website to sign up for this free event today:
cbf.org/events/clean-the-bay-day/

**Thank you so much. We look forward
to seeing you in June!**

NEW FOR 2018



CBES Annual Meeting PICNIC

Sunday, June 3, 2018, 4 PM

Spend a relaxing afternoon at Cherry Grove Farm's century-old barn near Eastville along the peaceful banks of Cherrystone Creek.

Enjoy the company of those who also love protecting our Shore home. Live music, too!

Picnic catered by *The Local* includes a dinner serving of BBQ Chicken, Pulled Pork, Baked Beans, Potato Salad, Cole Slaw & Corn Bread.

The **Suzanne Wescoat Award**, named in honor of CBES founding president, will be awarded to **Mary Miller** for her exemplary volunteer service to the community, including 29 years as a writer/researcher for *CBES ShoreLine*.

BYOB

Ice Tea/Water & Homemade Desserts Provided

Tickets \$25, purchase on www.cbcs.org or send check to: CBES, P.O. Box 882, Eastville, VA 23347

This event is not a fundraiser but a laidback, low-cost event open to all to encourage community fellowship. Bring a lawn chair/blanket. Tickets will be limited to 200 in respect to the private landowner.

Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore
P. O. Box 882
Eastville, VA 23347-0882

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INFORM, ENGAGE, EMPOWER!

SHORELINE

Community Calendar - May 2018

Note: Please verify times and places prior to attending meetings.

CBES and Other Activities		Accomack County		Northampton County	
May 1	Archaeology Seminar 7:00 PM, Oyster	May 2	Board of Zoning Appeals 10 AM, Sup. Chambers	May 1	Board of Zoning Appeals 1 PM, Conference Room
May 2	VIMS Public Seminar 7:30 PM, Wachapreague	May 9	Planning Commission (PC) 7 PM, Sup. Chambers	May 1	Planning Commission (PC) 7 PM, Sup. Chambers
May 10	Shorekeeper Meeting* 3 PM, Barrier Islands Center	May 15	School Board 6:30 PM, Sup. Chambers	May 8	Board of Supervisors 7 PM, Sup. Chambers
May 15	ES Ground Water Committee 10 AM, Accomac	May 16	Board of Supervisors 5 PM, Sup. Chambers	May 16	Wetlands Board TBA, Conference Room
May 15	CBES Board Meeting 7 PM, Eastville	May 22	PC Work Session 7 PM, Sup. Chambers	May 16	PC Work Session 7 PM, Sup. Chambers
May 31	State of the Waters Conference 6:30 PM, ESCC, Melfa	May 24	Wetlands Board 10 AM, Sup. Chambers	May 22	School Board 6:00 p.m., Machipongo
				May 28	BOS Work Session 7 PM, Old Courtroom

* Alternating between the ES Chamber of Commerce in Melfa and the Barrier Islands Center in Machipongo

www.cbес.org