



CITIZENS FOR A BETTER EASTERN SHORE

SHORELINE

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Does Northampton County Need Electronic Message Signs?

By Mary Miller

We see them along highways—flashing colors, changing messages, moving displays. Many rural counties don't include them in sign ordinances, considering them either too distracting for highway traffic or inconsistent with countryside ambience. Northampton County, which up to now has not permitted electronic signage, is currently reviewing its sign ordinance. Between the time the idea of reviewing signage was proposed by the County Administrator to the Board of Supervisors (BOS) in July 2022, and when the application for a Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) was submitted by the Board in November, the most significant change – by far – was inclusion of electronic sign language. The more than 600-word insertion included a definition and some requirements. This represents a substantial change to the Sign Ordinance, with potential for adverse impact on neighboring properties. Except for a Planning Commission Public Hearing legal notice, there was no outreach by the county to inform residents of this proposed change.

The new entry, called an “Electronic Message Center,” is described as a type of sign that uses computer-generated messages displaying changing copy and images. The displays can include lamps, light-emitting diodes (LEDs), liquid crystal, fiber optics, plasma display screens, and vertical or horizontal rotating slats that change messages, colors, and intensities of lights.

Messages and images may change every 8 seconds, and signs on adjoining properties may be separated by only 50 feet. They provide little

Messages and images may change every 8 seconds, and signs on adjoining properties may be separated by only 50 feet.

revenue for the county, and in the case of billboards, usually advertise off-Shore businesses.

Where Did This Idea Come From?

According to minutes from July 26, 2022, the Supervisors were advised by the County Administrator that “concerns from new and existing businesses regarding revisions to the existing (Sign) ordinance” had been received. “Concerns included provision for illumination of signs, placement of signs, and size.” The discussion ended with the understanding that Staff would “proceed with developing revisions to the text of the sign ordinance.” The proposed revisions do include reasonable changes and clarifications to the existing signage guidelines. But the insertion of an extensive new section called an “Electronic Message Center” had not been part of any noted public discussion.

Months later, in response to a request from the Planning Commission about the source of the proposed ZTAs, the March 7, 2023, meeting minutes indicate the Commission received the following response from the Planning Director: “Please note that I personally did not ‘fashion’ the

new ZTAs. The ZTAs were directed by the BOS and were drafted by the County Administrator, County Attorney, Director of Planning, Permitting, and Enforcement, and the Zoning Administrator.” In addition, “. . .the County currently does not have a planner with AICP (American Institute of Certified Planners) certification on staff and have [*sic*] not had success in recruiting said individual or having a consultant provide the consultation requested.” A planner with AICP credentials would have the expertise necessary to draft ordinance language.

It's clear who drafted the changes, but questions remain about how the inclusion of electronic signs came about. An April 28 memo of explanation to the County Administration from the Planning Director stated that Staff had “added electronic signage to modernize the ordinance.” An inquiry to the BOS and the County Adminis-

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trator was submitted by *ShoreLine* on June 7. In the interest of transparency, we asked:

- For specific, recorded requests by individuals or businesses to the county for inclusion of electronic signs in the Ordinance
- Which Staff member had generated the 600+ words in the Amendment
- If the signs were for on-site business advertising or off-site marketing, or both
- If the electronic sign standards applied to any permitted lighted sign, public or private, in any Zoning District
- Which of the 4 justifications required by the county's own Zoning Ordinance had been satisfied by the electronic sign language ("public necessity, convenience, general welfare, or good zoning practice")

A response has not been received, and the BOS has not yet acted on the Zoning Text Amendment – although it remains a Tabled Item on Agendas.

A Cautionary Tale

The Town of Eastville has some recent experience with electronic signs. The Town's land-use applications are processed through the county Planning Department. A health facility applied for an electronic sign. A former county Planning Department official approved

the application – *in violation of the Town's Zoning*. The Town ordered the sign turned off. The facility asked for reconsideration based on its \$50,000 investment in the sign. The Town agreed to the on-site electronic sign.

A second application for a Town zoning change to allow electronic digital billboards was proposed by a non-resident Eastville highway property owner. Comments at the Public Hearing were opposed to this new use. Written comment from the Town's Zoning Administrator indicated that VDOT appears to have "no required separation for digital signs so there could be a digital sign every 100 feet."

The Town Council felt that not enough information had been given to Eastville residents about electronic signs, and not enough feedback had been received. A survey was then included with town water bills, and 80% of the respondents were opposed to the use. In spite of that robust negative survey feedback, the Town Council vote resulted in a 3-3 tie. The Mayor voted "yes" to break the tie, and to permit electronic billboards. One Councilman stated that his "no" vote reflected the fact that 80% of the survey respondents, people he represented, opposed the signs.

Two questions remain unanswered – who or what business actually requested that electronic signs be allowed in Northampton County? And will the BOS seek feedback from residents and taxpayers on permitting electronic signs in the county before they vote to change the Sign Ordinance?

Ed. Note: All references are from publicly available sources.

Correction/Omission

The Cheesecake With Strawberry Sauce recipe in the June *ShoreLine* omitted when to mix in the listed 1/2 cup of sour cream –which is done just after mixing the cream cheese and sugar, before adding eggs and vanilla extract. We regret the omission.

Accomack Finds Middle Ground on Wetlands Mitigation

ShoreLine Staff

Wetlands mitigation has been much in the news lately (see December 2022 *ShoreLine*). Until recently, constructed wetlands, to offset wetlands destruction elsewhere, were permitted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), with no permitting required from the locality (other than land disturbance). The ACOE restricts these sites (both disturbance and mitigation) to the Atlantic region, which includes the seaside of Accomack and Northampton counties, and a sliver of the Atlantic shoreline in Virginia Beach; and the Chesapeake region, which includes the bayside of the 2 counties and a couple of areas on the western side of the Bay.

In March, the Northampton County Board of Supervisors (BOS) voted to require a special use permit for future projects, and to limit these projects to offsetting disturbances within the county.

At their May meeting, the Accomack BOS considered a similar move. CBES statement to the Board, presented by Sue Mastyl, argued that this would be counter-productive, and could lead to a net loss of wetlands. "With each county limiting these mitigation sites to their own county, the Army Corps will be further restricted in finding suitable sites," she argued. "That means that wetlands mitigation credits will sit unused for longer periods, and perhaps forever, which is tantamount to allowing wetlands disturbance with no mitigation. That's a net loss of wetlands, which is against federal and state law, and is to our own detriment."

After discussion, the Accomack BOS passed a modified alternative wetlands ordinance, which requires a conditional use permit but does not restrict the projects to impacts within Accomack County.

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New Report: Rethinking Bay Restoration Goals

By Sue Mastyl

This article is based on reporting by Karl Blankenship from the May 2023 and June 2023 Bay Journal issues. The full articles can be found at the links below.

A new report from the Chesapeake Bay Program's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee, "Achieving Water Quality Goals in the Chesapeake Bay: A Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response," suggests that major adjustments are needed in existing programs – and perhaps public expectations – to improve the Bay's health. The report reflects recent work to understand why progress has been slow, and how efforts could be improved.

The report indicates that, especially with climate change and changes in land use, achieving the water-quality goals of the program may not be possible in some parts of the Bay. A recurring theme is that the Bay of the future should be healthier than it is today, but it will not be the Bay of the past, so it may be time to stop thinking about "restoration." Only 27% of the Bay fully met clean-water goals (based on conditions in the 1950s) in the mid-1980s; that has only risen to the mid-30% range today. It is clear that the Bay Program's goals will not be met by the 2025 deadline; recently, they launched a "beyond 2025" planning effort to determine next steps.

Nutrient Reductions Alone Are Not Enough

The report indicated that existing programs to reduce urban and agricultural runoff are unlikely to achieve their nutrient reduction goals, even with increased funding. Instead, efforts may be more effective if directed to improving aquatic habitat, especially in shallower areas, as well as restoring wetlands and protecting shorelines.

Overall, nutrient reductions to date have not resulted in significant improvements in water quality, especially in deep areas of the Bay. It may be that reductions have not reached a tipping point to effect change, or that warmer water and increased rainfall as a result of climate change are offsetting any improvements. The computer modeling used to monitor progress may also be flawed – although the models show significant improvements in phosphorus reductions, for example, actual water-quality monitoring shows little change.

Alternative Approaches

Currently, nutrient reduction programs are focused on restoring water quality in the deepest part of the upper Bay, where conditions are poorest and are least likely to respond quickly. The report suggests switching to a "tiered approach," with greater emphasis on shallow areas of the Bay, both for nutrient reduction and other projects to improve habitat. These areas serve as more important habitats for fish and other aquatic life, and improvements would


likely be seen more quickly. Eventually, those improvements will cascade down to the deep channel.

The report cautions that this approach will take time: "Achieving improvements in a system as large, diverse, and complex as the Bay watershed and estuary calls for patience as changes are planned and implemented and the systems respond."

The Challenges for Agriculture

The largest source of nutrients is agriculture, which presents unique challenges. Blankenship has started a series of articles examining this relationship, "Ag & the Bay: Sowing a Conversation."

One factor that has been missing from discussions is the sheer magnitude of the effort required. The U.S. Geological Survey recently estimated that meeting the nutrient goals for the Bay could require taking approximately 44% of the region's 8.2 million acres out of production, or instituting dramatic actions that would affect farm income. And the current programs aren't enough – while nearly \$2 billion was spent by state and federal agencies from 2014 to 2022 to reduce farm runoff, the amount of nitrogen reaching the Bay has remained unchanged.

The reality is that the nutrient-reduction efforts have been offset by a ramp-up in production. During the same period, poultry and livestock numbers in the watershed have increased by about 13% by weight. Yields of corn have also increased, fueled by more nutrients. In this setting, it will likely take decades to reach the nutrient-reduction goals for the Bay. Farmers are under pressure to continually increase production, while their profit margins grow thinner. And developing individualized programs on a farm-by-farm basis will be a long process, with approximately 83,000 farms in the watershed. Zach Easton, a Virginia Tech agriculture professor, noted, "We can't have cheap food and a pristine Bay. They're incompatible desires." 

Sources:

Blankenship K. Bay cleanup faces difficult trade-offs with agriculture. *Bay Journal*, May 2023. https://www.bayjournal.com/news/policy/chesapeake-bay-cleanup-faces-difficult-trade-offs-with-agriculture/article_896365bc-e43b-11ed-beac-b396d2795ed7.html

Blankenship K. Scientists say path to a better Chesapeake Bay is a slow one: Major new report suggests refocusing efforts on watershed's vast shallow waters. *Bay Journal*, June 2023. https://www.bayjournal.com/news/fisheries/in-major-new-report-scientists-outline-path-to-a-better-chesapeake-bay-but-it-s/article_6234a9ec-ee68-11ed-a51d-a37fd2d6ab6d.html

Blankenship K. Should new Bay cleanup goals have a greater dose of reality? *Bay Journal*, June 2023. https://www.bayjournal.com/news/pollution/should-new-chesapeake-cleanup-goals-have-a-greater-dose-of-reality/article_2cdbc754-ffd3-11ed-a08b-33d3e308953d.html

The Bay of the future will not be the Bay of the past, so it may be time to stop thinking about "restoration."

Founder's Award Given to Senator Lewis

By Donna Bozza

A highlight of CBES 2023 Annual PICNIC@theBARN was the presentation of the Suzanne Wescoat Award to retiring State Senator Lynwood Lewis. It is not done annually, but usually when a person of exceptional Shore service approaches a milestone, as was the case with this year's recipient.

Founder and first president of CBES, Suzanne served our community with strength of character and respect for all. She didn't see anyone as being "on the other side," but as a neighbor. CBES believes she would be happy to know who was honored in her name this year.

Lynwood, Shore-born by way of Parksley, was Delegate Lewis from 2004-2014 before being elected our State Senator in 2014 and continuing to serve until his impending retirement at year's end.

With 2 decades of service, his list of legislative highlights and accomplishments is too long to do justice to them here. But it is notable that his work for us included protection of the Shore's natural resources:

- Wrangling the regulation of the menhaden fishery from the politics of the General Assembly to the more scientific focus of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, AND this year, establishing funding to study any localized depletion of this environmental linchpin in the Chesapeake Bay
- Restoring the health of the Bay has been a mainstay of Lynwood's efforts in Richmond with many successes, surely the reason he was recognized by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation as Legislator of the Year.

When your homeland is surrounded on 3 sides by water, you can appreciate all the work Lynwood has done to help mitigate coastal flooding and build resiliency into our transportation infrastructure, buildings, and businesses. He was the Special Assistant to the Governor on Coastal Flooding, resulting in a fully developed Coastal Master Plan that includes rural coastal areas like the Shore.

Lynwood has shared and implemented the CBES values of a *better Eastern Shore*:

- Through his efforts in funding broadband infrastructure and its expansion across the Shore, vital to the education of our children and growing businesses
- Through landmark economic development successes, such as the long-term plan and acquired funding that made the Commercial Space Flight Authority a reality, and other critical investments at Wallops.

Like CBES, our Senator has focused on improving the quality of life for ALL Shore citizens; here are just 2 examples:

- He sponsored the legislation that created the regional drug task forces, like the one on the Shore, to fight the opioid crisis.




Lynwood assures an enthusiastic crowd he will be staying on the Shore after retirement. Photo by CBES.

- And Lynwood fought for the expansion of Medicaid, creating new access to affordable healthcare for many Shore residents.

The Suzanne Wescoat Award, adorned with a photo of pearly-white ibises soaring above a verdant seaside marsh, was inscribed with:

Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore's Suzanne Wescoat Award is presented this day June 11, 2023 to Senator Lynwood Lewis who throughout decades of stalwart service represented the Shore people with dignity, equity, and heart.

Lynwood thanked CBES and encouraged folks to support the group. "This award, coming from this organization, is especially meaningful because in my early years at the House of Delegates, I got to work with Suzanne when she was a Northampton County Supervisor," he said. "There has never been a greater example of community service, community involvement, and positive action to make the Eastern Shore a better place to live." The crowd applauded when he announced plans to volunteer in the community: "I'm leaving politics – but not the Shore." 



A Clean the Bay crew of TNC, CBES volunteers, staff, and board members ready to hit the shoreline. (See page 7.) Photo by TNC

CBES Picnic Harkens Back to Former Pig Roast Days

By Donna Bozza

Warm breezes and the warmth of community made for a sunny CBES PICNIC@theBARN. On a Sunday afternoon, the sold-out crowd of nearly 200 gathered beside the century-old pole barn on Cherrystone Creek, thanks to the hospitality of John Wescoat and family.

Not designed as a fundraiser, the tickets are set at \$30 to help make the event more accessible while trying to cover costs. Many guests commented that the delicious BBQ and “fixins” from Small’s Smokehouse was reminiscent of the old CBES Pig Roast event held for many years at the same place – and with the same neighborly spirit.

Music by Heather & Nathan [Travis] with Jason Deans enabled plenty of socializing, while some took a spin on the field-turned-dance-floor.

And to those who helped make it happen: along with CBES Board members, we thank our wonderful volunteers Pauli Kaiser, Matt Perrie, Brooke Rogers, John Small, and Courtney Van Clief.

Desserts were enthusiastically devoured, thanks to the culinary talents of: The Bakery on Mason, Lynn Allison, Martina Coker, Zoe Colatarci, Eleanor Gordon, Sue Mastyl, Sarah Morgan, Barbara Mulligan, Barbara O’Hare, Matt Perrie, and Lee Peirson.

Those who missed this year’s event will certainly want to keep the second Sundays in June free from here on out.



CBES member and volunteer Donna Lawson twirls her granddaughter to the lively tunes of Heather and Nathan Travis and Jason Deans. Photo by Cecil Watts of Watts Photography.



Peach Cobbler

Down our way, late spring is divided into sub-seasons. We watch them unfold at the farm markets, the roadside farm stands, the restaurant menus, and the community picnics. First comes asparagus, followed almost immediately by strawberry season. Word of mouth, and the telltale line of cars, let us know which farms have picked that morning. Then comes the glorious peach season. Big boxes and baskets get loaded into backseats. And sometimes the dreaded sign goes up – “2 boxes per customer!” Canned peaches, peach ice cream, peach preserves, peach shortcake – we know how to enjoy our peaches. Peach cobbler, a classic Southern dessert – a hundred recipes from a thousand kitchens. Some recipes are rich with butter, roast peaches, rolled crusts, and heavy cream. Here’s an interesting one, found in many church and community cookbooks – simple and easy to put together. Follow directions carefully.

Filling:

- 4 cups of sliced peaches – peeled, pitted, and sliced
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tbsp orange marmalade
- 1 tbsp lemon juice

Batter:

- 1 stick butter
- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- 1 cup milk
- Grated nutmeg to taste

Set oven to 375°. Melt butter in 13" x 9" pan while oven heats – remove pan when butter is melted. Whisk together dry batter ingredients – add milk and mix until just combined. Combine peaches, remaining sugar, marmalade, and lemon juice in sauce pan. Heat to boiling over high heat, stirring constantly.

Carefully spoon batter over melted butter in baking pan, spreading gently. DO NOT STIR. Carefully pour hot peaches over batter, spreading gently. DO NOT STIR. Bake for 40 to 45 minutes at 375°. Top will be golden brown with darker patches when done. Cool a little before serving.

Mary Miller • The Kitchen Hive

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RECYCLING CORNER

By Sue Mastyl

Plastic Free July – Take the Challenge

This summer, you can join more than 100 million participants in a global movement, Plastic Free July (<https://www.plasticfreejuly.org/>), including weekly emails with tips to keep motivated and to get the latest plastic-free ideas. You can take the pledge to “Choose to Refuse” single-use plastics at home, in the workplace or school, and in shops and restaurants; target bags, bottles, straws, and cups; or go completely plastic-free for the month. Other motivators include a “31 Days of Plastic Free Choices” calendar, and a “Small Steps, Big Difference” social media campaign.



The website includes a “Pesky Plastics Quiz,” to track your usage now, and again in August to measure your success. It also includes resources for initial steps (“Getting started”), including plastic-free cleaning products; bringing reusable coffee cups to your local café; avoiding plastic packaging in buying fruits and vegetables, meat and fish, and bakery products; refusing plastic straws and plastic water bottles; and bringing your own shopping bags.

Examples include:

- Avoid using cleaning products altogether for some cleaning tasks; often, a cloth and some water will clean many areas of the home quite well. Save money by buying in bulk or using homemade cleaning products.
- Bring a reusable bread bag or container to your local bakery, farmers market, or supermarket for unpackaged freshly baked goods. If you forget, ask for a paper bag (unwaxed, so it can be recycled).
- Choose to refuse pre-packaged meat, fish, and deli products, particularly those sold on polystyrene trays. Find a local butcher, fish monger, cheese shop, or deli counter selling unpackaged items, and bring your own reusable container.

Additional ideas (“Next steps”) include alternatives for balloons and decorations, bulk food shopping, pet care, diapers, and refusing plastic cutlery and containers with takeout orders. There are specific suggestions for work, school, and events, and ways to advocate in your business, your community (how about a plastic-free picnic?), and your local government. There are also success stories from communities and businesses around the world.

Keeping Track

VIMS to Lead National Effort to Remove Ghost Pots

The Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) has been chosen to lead a nationwide program to remove derelict fishing gear. The Nationwide Fishing Trap Removal, Assessment, & Prevention (TRAP) Program will fund removal of derelict crab pots and lobster traps, and collect data to develop prevention and mitigation policies at state and federal levels.

The 4-year program will be funded by an \$8 million grant from NOAA. Much of this funding will be passed on to program partners through an annual grant competition. The grant is part of \$17.3 million for 6 Virginia projects under NOAA’s Climate-Ready Coasts Initiative, including \$2.2 million for 60 acres of eelgrass planting and release of 6 million bay scallops in Burtons Bay, managed by Coastal Zone Management.

About 10% of commercial traps are lost each year due to bad weather, strong currents, and vessel strikes. These derelict traps can be a hazard to navigation, and are a significant threat to marine life. A 2001 study found that 4 to 10 million blue crabs a year are killed in ghost pots; “just removing 10% of the traps from a hotspot area ... can increase a harvest significantly,” noted Kirk Havens, Director of VIMS Center for Coastal Resources Management (CCRM). In the Chesapeake Bay alone, over 40 species have been caught in derelict crab pots, including rock fish, flounder, and diving ducks.

A 2016 VIMS study estimated that the Bay program for pot removals increased baywide harvests by 38 million pounds, equivalent to an extra \$33.5 million. On a global scale, removing just 10% of derelict crab pots and lobster traps could increase harvests by almost 300,000 metric tons, valued at \$831 million, each year.

Donna Bilkovic, Assistant Director for CCRM, added, “It’s critical that these efforts are coordinated and standardized at a national scale, [which will] help us develop effective prevention measures.”



Chincoteague Horseshoe Crab Harvest Increases Among Controversies

A recent NPR report (<https://www.npr.org/2023/06/10/1180761446/coastal-biomedical-labs-are-bleeding-more-horseshoe-crabs-with-little-accountabi>) highlights an ongoing controversy in the blood harvest of horseshoe crabs. Since the 1960s, scientists have contracted with fishermen to catch the crabs by hand or with nets, for delivery to bleeding facilities. The crabs are bled alive for up to 8 minutes, which drains up to half of their volume of blue blood. This blood is used to detect bacterial toxins in vaccines, drugs, and medical devices.

See **Keeping Track**, *Cont’d on p. 7*

A synthetic alternative has been developed and is approved for use in Europe, although it has not gained approval in the U.S., where the blood harvest is actually growing. Five companies in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina drained over 700,000 crabs in 2021, double the number from 2004. The blood is used for more than 80 million tests around the world each year.

This practice harms 2 species – horseshoe crabs, which are considered moderately depleted along the Atlantic Coast, and the red knot (bird), which depends on horseshoe crab eggs during its spring migration. The red knot is designated as threatened, with a 94% population decline in the last 40 years.

Although best practices have been developed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), including not picking the crabs up by their tail, and only keeping male crabs in holding ponds, these are only guidelines and are not enforceable. State regulations vary. Several environmental groups have sued both Charles River Laboratories, one of the largest companies, and the state of South Carolina for their lack of protections. With a pause in the harvest for 2023 in the state, Charles River has turned to fishermen in other states, including Chincoteague, to make up the loss.

Although hard data are difficult to obtain, the ASMFC uses a figure of 15% for the mortality losses from the bleeding practice. This may be an underestimate, since studies have shown a decreased reproductive rate for female crabs after bleeding. The population has been declining in recent decades – the Delaware Bay population was estimated at over 1 million in 1990, while current surveys show a steady year-to-year figure of around 330,000.



Doing Our Shore Part in Clean the Bay

A heavy gray fog settled around the coastal bay of Oyster, but the mood was light as volunteers gathered for Clean the Bay Day on June 3. As in previous years, CBES teamed up with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in support of the statewide event by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) that began in 1989. It was not the only such effort on the Shore, as participation has increased annually up and down our peninsula.

With leader Margaret Van Clief, TNC Outreach & Education Coordinator, we rid the Oyster shoreline of 660 pounds of refuse. The crew felt good about our local impact, as well as being a beneficial part of a bigger team. CBF announced that this year, more than 3,000 volunteers gathered at about 200 sites across Virginia, cleaning an estimated 314 miles of beaches, parks, shorelines, streams, rivers, and lakes.

CBES encourages our members to make it Bay Day every day by helping to keep trash out of this critical watershed.

Wetland Tour a Glimpse Into the Future

CBES recently attended an information session by The Nature Conservancy at the Custis Farm Mitigation Bank project east of Route 13 just south of Exmore. We also visited an older mitigation bank in Accomack County on the bayside called Long Pond. Here are some key takeaways.

The Custis project is now planted with the first attempt to establish vegetative cover, although there has been some re-planting on the “berm” area because of erosion due to recent heavy rains. The site is a classic water-table ephemeral pond, which exists in late winter and early spring, but typically dries up sometime during the summer. During the winter, when vegetation is dormant, the water table rises all over the Shore. In low areas, if the water table rises above ground level, small ponds form that shrink or dissipate when the water table lowers again. The company building the wetland bank estimated the “right” level to leave the ground elevation to encourage standing water in early spring. Apparently, there are 2 issues of note so far. The first is that for the last 3 years, our winter rains have been far below average. This year was even lower, so all “spring-fed” or “water-table” ponds on the Shore were at very low levels this spring. That is why no water is standing in the new wetland this spring. It also means that the wetland plant species are still waiting for the right conditions for them to thrive.

The second issue discussed by the manager of the project is that the water table at this site is impacted by nearby agricultural water use; it is not clear whether that impact was allowed for sufficiently. Time will tell. The site will be closely monitored for the first 10 years and adjustments will be made if required. That 10-year period during the establishment of the wetland also limits public access, so it will be a decade before the public can visit.

We also learned that the surrounding berms serve no functional role in the wetland, since it is fed by groundwater levels, not surface waters. According to the builders, berms are a cheaper way to place the soil; it is costly to truck that much soil to a new location. The berms are not designed to contain or block water flows, since the feeding waters are below ground level.

The Level Pond mitigation bank, on the Accomack bayside, is also unusually dry. The monitoring phase has just ended after 10 years, and this year was very different, according to the staff who have been doing the monitoring, since the site usually has standing water in the spring and this year did not. At Level Pond, the trees are now 15 to 20 feet tall and are a mix of cypress, sycamores, and of course, sweet gum and pine. There is also a thriving mix of wild flowers and scrub and a lot of wildlife cover and sign. It is a pretty spot even without the water. The site shows how a created wetland can develop over time into a natural area, with little evidence of engineered disturbance.

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