



GIC News Release

Contact Information:

Jim McGowan, Planning Director
Accomack County

jmcgowan@co.accomack.va.us

(T): (757) 787-5726

Karen Firehock, Executive Director
Green Infrastructure Center

firehock@gicinc.org

(T): 434-975-6700, #222

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Study Calls For Thoughtful Planning of Accomack County's "Blue/Green Infrastructure"

Accomack County is blessed with some of Virginia's most highly-valued natural assets. To help preserve these natural resources, Accomack County and the Green Infrastructure Center (GIC) undertook a year-long green and blue infrastructure assessment of the county and are pleased to release the final report *Accomack County Blue/Green Infrastructure Study*. Blue and green infrastructure includes the connected natural systems that provide many critical functions such as rich soils for farming, habitat for wildlife, drinking water storage and filtration, and clean air. Blue/green infrastructure planning entails inventorying both natural and cultural resource assets and identifying opportunities for their protection or restoration.

The study is available to the public for free download at <http://gicinc.org/accomack.htm> and can be used as a guide for future planning and development decisions and for the county's 2013 comprehensive plan update. The study identifies opportunities for maintaining the county's connected landscapes to provide high quality wildlife habitat and for conserving its most value resources including critical forests, watersheds and wetlands, working agricultural and forest lands, and areas important for recreation, hunting, fishing, and wildlife conservation. Conserving these areas is also very important for tourism, especially since the Eastern Shore's motto is "You'll love our nature!"

The study took a year to complete and was informed by interviews conducted with residents, business owners, community organizations, county staff and elected officials who helped identify community concerns and natural areas most treasured by the community. A series of maps were created to depict the county's natural assets, identify areas at risk and inform future development decisions. The maps show the county's most significant forests, wetlands and marshes, and habitat corridors across the county. The largest intact forests are found in the northern and western areas of the county, while both the bayside and seaside zones contain critical habitats for nesting and

The Green Infrastructure Center Inc., 921 Second Street, SE, Charlottesville, Virginia, 22902

(T:) 434-975-6700 #222, (F): 434-975-6701

www.gicinc.org

migrating birds and other wildlife. The maps also highlight the areas where extra care will be needed to conserve the quality of the Yorktown Aquifer that supplies clean drinking water to the county.

The maps in the study were created using data supplied by the Virginia Division of Natural Heritage in the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF), Virginia Commonwealth University – Center for Environmental Studies (VCU-CES), the Coastal GEMS (Geographic Environmental Management System) data portal. The study also incorporates local data, such as the locations of community wells and groundwater recharge zones .

Identifying opportunities to conserve natural resources on the Eastern Shore is critical as Virginia faces challenges from growth and development in the future. The GIC's Director, Karen Firehock stated that "As we grow and develop, we need to do so in ways that maintain habitat connections and conserve the most critical elements of the natural landscape." Green infrastructure planning seeks to identify and conserve key landscape connections so that when developments are planned, they can maintain those connections and conserve critical environmental functions and recreation opportunities.

The study was funded by the U.S. Forest Service, the Virginia Department of Forestry, the Blue Moon Fund, the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The study serves as a model for other coastal zone counties who want to conserve their best ecological and cultural resources while contributing to healthy Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean.

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Founded in 2006, the Green Infrastructure Center Inc. <www.gicinc.org> is a nonprofit organization located in Charlottesville, Virginia that assists communities in developing strategies for protecting and conserving their ecological and cultural assets. The Green Infrastructure Center team is made up of staff from the GIC and E² Inc., which provides mapping analysis. The center has completed six projects in Virginia and two are now underway. The center is supported entirely through grants and donations. This project has been provided to Accomack County on by GIC and its funders on a pro-bono basis meaning that all services have been donated to the county. The Virginia Coastal Zone Program contributed resources to support the participation of county staff.