



# Landscapes

A VES Land Trust newsletter

Summer 2019

## Art reflects student perception and observations

### Second grade nature walk

Cora Johnston, Site Director for Virginia Coast Reserve LTER (VCR LTER) in Oyster, reached out to VES Land Trust last fall with an idea to study whether outdoor experiences make children better observers. *“We were excited for the opportunity to measure some impacts of our second grade nature walks,”* said Executive Director, Hali Plourde-Rogers.

The field trips took place last November. VES Land Trust staff and volunteers led close to 160 students from Accawmacke and Occohannock Elementary schools on a walk at Brownsville Preserve. The students walked through high marsh, upland forest, low marsh, early successional habitat, and past manmade ponds. They completed a scavenger hunt to help them identify differences between the habitats and what animals and plants might be found in each.



An example of one student’s before (left) and after (right).

Since science and art are both based in observation, the study used a before and after drawing activity to measure outcomes. Students drew using the same template before and after the nature walk.

The report, recently completed by VCR LTER, looked at art from 98 students and found two outcomes:

1. The changes in number and use of color reflected autumn conditions of marsh and forest.
2. Fantasy elements declined. Trees and other nature based elements became more prevalent.



Laura Vaughn and Jerry Doughty from the Barrier Islands Center with Kiptopeke Second Grade, May 2019

The pilot study concludes, **“...their art became more realistic and reflected the seasonal conditions of the wetlands and forest they visited. The experience clearly drew their attention to details they hadn’t otherwise associated with a wetland landscape – a sign of heightened observation.”** In addition, the after drawings provide an insight into what elements are most interesting to the student observer.

On the most recent spring field trip, students enjoyed observing fiddler crabs in the marsh and seeing milkweed up close after a classroom lesson on Monarch butterflies. Wildlife sightings continue to be cause for celebration at all ages.

Visit <https://www.abcrc.virginia.edu/siteman2/> and select the Outreach and Involvement tab for the full report.

## Planning for the future

### *A conservation legacy*

Several years ago Nancy Petersen attended the Backyard Habitat Workshop along with fellow Master Naturalists and nature admirers. Nancy carried her binoculars ready to spot a favorite bird while exploring the habitat they rely on.

In addition to bird watching, Nancy loved reading and had a lifelong passion for the environment. As an active community member who was generous with her time, she served on the board for Friends of the Accomac Library and the Academy for Lifetime Learning (ALL). She was a Master Naturalist and a member of the Bird Club.

*"Anything she joined, she was in charge of something,"* remembered Carolyn McGavock of ALL.



A collage of photos shared at Nancy's service

Originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Nancy moved to Onancock in 2011. In her short time on the Shore, she developed strong friendships, shared a wealth of knowledge on the environment and politics, and gave countless hours of volunteer time.

In 2017, Nancy passed away. But her generosity and passion live on through planned giving. Nancy left 90% of her estate to nonprofits including a lasting gift to VES Land Trust. Her gift will inspire the next generation and care for the rural, wild nature of the Shore including habitat for the birds she loved to watch.

You too can leave a legacy through conservation. Visit [www.veslt.org/donate](http://www.veslt.org/donate) and scroll down to Planned Giving to learn more.

## Protecting working lands

### *How agriculture, forestry, and conservation work together*

If you head down any road on the Eastern Shore, you will be greeted by acres of forests and farms. You might see new growth after a clear cut, the grasses, shrubs, and usually blueberries or blackberries thriving. Or you'll pass a mature forest with the branches creating a cathedral over the road. The farms might roll past bright green in winter wheat or golden yellow in fall soybeans. These are iconic vistas to our rural landscape.

Agriculture and forestry when properly managed provide a variety of conservation benefits. Conservation practices increase the health of these resources creating more value for the landowner and benefit wildlife and the community. Conservation easements are one of the tools that protects these rural landscapes.

### *Agricultural conservation practices*

*"Farmers are conservationists at heart,"* began Jenny Templeton, Soil Conservationist with Natural Resource Conservation Service. *"They rely on the land for their livelihood. So, the better the care and stewardship, the more the land produces and the more value a farmer receives."* But conservation practices must also make financial sense. Fortunately, many practices that increase crop yields have conservation benefits. *"The practices that increase yields, like no-till and precision nutrient management, also benefit water quality and soil health. Because they increase yields, they also positively affect the bottom*



*line,*” Jenny further explained. Keeping conservation practices affordable ensures their benefits will be realized.



**Farm field at Jacobus Farm, a VES Land Trust easement**

Jenny offered the example of a farmer implementing no-till practices. No-till reduces the risk of erosion, combats soil compaction, conserves fuel and lowers costs by running less equipment, increases water holding capacity of the soil and reduces irrigation needs, and makes nutrients more available to plants which may decrease the amount of nutrients added to the land (also lowering costs).

Taking the land out of production for a spell can also provide conservation value and act as an investment in soil health. *“Incorporating a perennial into a crop rotation allows the land to rest, which can lead to increased soil organic matter, decreased erosion, and resistance to pests and diseases,”* Jenny remarked. Perennials can also be planted to provide important habitat for at risk pollinators like bees and monarchs, as well as other wildlife species of interest to the landowner. In addition, landowners may be eligible to receive incentive payments through a variety of sources to implement conservation practices.

### ***Forest management practices***

*“Forest stands are really dynamic systems. They’re always changing,”* noted Robbie Lewis, Senior Area Forester with the Department of Forestry. Properly managed forests have a myriad of benefits and can meet a wide variety of landowner goals and

objectives. Forestry can be practiced to support growth for timber production, enhance wildlife habitat, establish new forest stands, protect and establish species at risk, protect soil and water, and help abate storm water. Forests and soils also store carbon.

Forests are managed on the individual property level. *“When sound forest management practices are conducted, the differing effects spread out over the landscape and create a patchwork of different cover types and habitats. This varied landscape sustainably meets the needs of wildlife by providing food and cover and the needs of people by providing food, wood, soil and water conservation, and recreation,”* explained Robbie. Having a diverse system of forests across the landscape ensures multiple benefits for the whole community.

Forestry practices include tree planting, herbicide release, precommercial and commercial thinning, prescribed burning, and different harvest methods. *“The best practice is the one that helps the landowner meet his or her land management objectives,”* Robbie continued. This is why Robbie recommends always keeping the full toolbox of forest management practices available. *“Prescribed burning might be needed to control invasive species or improve hunting areas, thinning might be needed to improve an overstocked stand, or clearcutting might be necessary to control an insect or disease infestation,”* he explained.



**Forestry Tour with Robbie Lewis, December of 2018**

Forest management practices provide additional benefits. Robbie clarified, *“A clear cut, while removing a mature forest canopy, allows sunlight to reach the ground causing the germination of new plants. This early succession growth of grasses, sedges, blackberries, and others attracts and benefits species like quail and eastern wild turkeys.”*



**Forest regeneration at Nickawampus, a VES Land Trust easement**

### *Conservation easements and working lands*

Of the 14,000 acres under easement with VES Land Trust, farmland makes up just over 30% and forests are more than 40% of the total acreage. While easements place restrictions on development, they support well managed farms and forests that adhere to best practices like those mentioned previously and leave buffers along streams, creeks, and bays to protect and restore water quality.

**Conservation easements are written to conserve and support farming and forestry.** VES Land Trust easements allow farming structures up to 3,000 square feet. Larger structures may be approved by the Board. Roads, utilities, and wells to serve farming operations are also allowed. Both farming and forestry must use Best Management Practices. All forest operations require a Forest Management Plan that is updated every 10 years. A one-hundred foot buffer must be maintained on all wetlands and waters.

*“The VES Land Trust easement language allows and supports farming, forestry, and conservation. This*

*ensures that the land is being protected as well as continuing to provide food and fiber and livelihood to local farmers and landowners,”* affirmed Jenny.

## **You're invited!**

### *Paint the Shore*

**October 11, 2019, 6-8 p.m. at the Barrier Islands Center in Machipongo, Virginia**

Paint the Shore is a four-day plein air event and art exhibit designed to bring conservation to the public through visual art. Artists will paint on private and public preserved land. Their work will be displayed in an exhibit at the Barrier Islands Center. All paintings will be for sale at the reception. 35% of proceeds from painting sales benefit the VES Land Trust and its mission.



**Artist Laura Craig painting in plein air.**

### *Call for artists*

We will begin accepting artist applications this summer. Artists will paint in plein air Monday, October 7<sup>th</sup> through the morning of Thursday, October 10<sup>th</sup>. VES Land Trust will provide additional details in the application and upon acceptance. Artists will be accepted on a first come first serve basis.

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Keep checking [www.veslt.org/calendar](http://www.veslt.org/calendar) for more information on applying.



## Twelfth Annual Oyster Roast Dinner



Above: Photos from the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Oyster Roast Dinner at Ingleside Farm.

Below: Volunteers clean up the beach at Savage Neck for this year's Clean the Bay Day. After delaying the start time due to thunderstorms, this amazing group picked up 200 pounds of trash.



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## Mission

*VES Land Trust seeks to conserve rural lands, which will best preserve the farms, forests, wetlands, waters and heritage of Virginia's Eastern Shore for the benefit of future generations*

## Stay in touch

Are you interested in programs, hikes, events, and conservation news? Sign up for our e-newsletter and follow us on Facebook. We never share our mailing list, so your privacy is protected.

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