

Shore Big Tree Implementation Plan

1 INTRODUCTION

The Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission (A-NPDC) established the “Shore Big Trees” program in 2013 in partnership with the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program (VCZMP), the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (VDCR), and the Eastern shore Soil and Water Conservation District (ESSWCD) as part of the successful *Plant ES: Natives: They’re Shore Beautiful* campaign. In 2014, three “Shore Big Trees” were planted and dedicated in public spaces on the Eastern Shore with financial assistance from NOAA and VCZMP. The dedication sites were chosen due to their location where previous ES Natives demonstration gardens were in existence and maintenance plans were already in place. Each site included an engraved stone marker which identified the tree, listed its expected height and lifespan, and recognized it as a tree native to the Eastern Shore.

While exploring opportunities to acquire funding necessary to further develop and implement the program, A-NPDC staff realized that additional site planning was necessary to meet the requirements of various applicable funding programs. As such, the A-NPDC set out to engage local entities interested in participating in the program and develop implementation plans for specific sites that would ultimately better position the program for various funding opportunities.

2 OUTREACH

The A-NPDC conducted surveys of local governments to gauge interest in the program. The pamphlet, which was distributed to two counties and nineteen incorporated towns, can be seen below. Out of these localities Accomack County Public Schools, Accomack County Public Works, Parksley, and Exmore responded and expressed interest in participating in the program. The only other locality to respond was Onley which indicated that they were not interested in participating in the program at this time. Considering the minimal number of returned responses, additional attempts were made to contact the following local entities whom had previously expressed interest in the program: Chincoteague, Eastern Shore Community College, NASA Wallops, Northampton County, and Cape Charles. Despite these additional efforts, no responses were received.

The next step for the interested localities was to create a site specific implementation plan with information necessary to seek grant funding. These plans can be seen in Part 3 of this report. The report includes locations for plantings, number of trees, tree species, and a maintenance plan.

We want your community to be the next to receive a Shore Big Tree on the Eastern Shore!

Plant ES Natives
They're Shore Beautiful!



The A-NPDC wants to make it easy for you and plans to do all the work! Please read the following and take a moment to complete the attached survey.

Many Eastern Shore residents can attest to knowing of and taking pride in the largest and oldest trees on our peninsula. These trees conjure up connections to our past and hold a special place in our communities. The "Eastville Willow Oak" and the "Accomac Bicentennial Sycamore" are familiar examples of trees that have achieved iconic statuses not only within our communities but on state and national tree registries. These trees are becoming increasingly rare and it is important that future generations have an opportunity to

experience these awe-inspiring trees that serve as cornerstones of our communities.

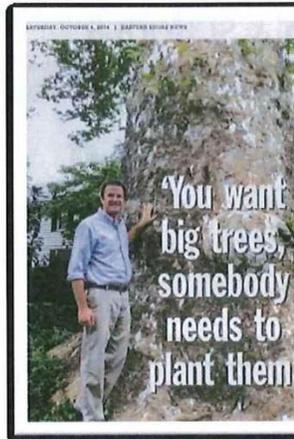
The *Shore Big Tree Program* is a new addition to the successful *Plant ES Natives: They're Shore Beautiful Campaign*. The program aims to raise awareness of the benefits of our largest and oldest native trees through education, outreach, and planting of native trees in public places with the intent that they will one day become "Shore Big Trees". The program was kicked off in 2014 with planting and dedication of a Shore Big Tree in town parks in Onancock and Wachapreague, and at the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission office in Accomac.

Once the planting location was identified by the partnering community/agency, the tree species was selected with advice from experts from the VA Department of Conservation & Recreation and the ES Soil & Water Conservation District. Each tree was dedicated with a customized stone marker indicating the species, planting date, and anticipated lifespan and size. The program kick-off was featured in an October 2014 edition of the *Eastern Shore News* (left and above).

The A-NPDC is seeking communities interested in planting and dedicating a Shore Big Tree as a community landmark that can be enjoyed for generations to come. The A-NPDC plans to pursue grant funds to cover costs for additional plantings but we need to have commitments and plans for design and maintenance in place to have projects in place and eligible to receive these funds.

What you need to know:

- Wachapreague, Onancock, & the A-NPDC office received the first Shore Big Trees during the Shore Big Tree Program's kickoff in 2014.
- The A-NPDC wishes to pursue grant funds for planting & dedicating more Shore Big Trees in public places. We need to know which communities desire their own tree in order to have planting & maintenance plans in place when applying for grant funds.
- **If interested, please take a moment to complete the survey on the backside of this paper & return using the stamped envelope provided.**



Submitted article

Ever wonder about all the big trees on Virginia's Eastern Shore?

So did Curtis Smith, director of planning for the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission (A-NPDC).

Around the corner from his Accomac office stands a sycamore tree dating to the late 1700s. The sycamore tree is on his "walking conference" route, where Smith sometimes strolls while discussing a project or program with a co-worker.

As he began noticing other big trees, a pattern emerged. Sycamores, white oaks, tulip poplars: the biggest trees were native to the area.

"It makes sense when you think about it. The trees best adapted to this area will probably have the longest lives because they are more resistant to disease and more acclimated to our climate and weather extremes," Smith said.

Smith said that people sometimes associate native plants with shrubs and ground covers. To help promote planting of native tree varieties and to celebrate the Shore's oldest and largest native trees, Smith established the "Shore Big Trees" program in partnership with the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program (VCZMP), the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District as part of the successful *Plant ES Natives: They're Shore Beautiful* campaign.

Thirty-five native tree varieties are listed in "Native Plants of Accomack and Northampton," a guide to native vegetation published through the VCZMP, including ten varieties of oak.

On Sept. 12, Smith joined A-NPDC Commissioner and Accomack District 7 Supervisor Laura Belle Gordy and A-NPDC staff to dedicate one of those on the list: a white oak on Cross Street which was installed behind the A-NPDC office.

A water oak was dedicated the following day in Wachapreague as part of a *Plant ES Natives* celebration day.

An engraved stone marker accompanies each, identifying the tree, listing its expected height and lifespan, and recognizing it as a tree native to the Eastern Shore. Funding for the markers was generously provided by the VCZMP and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"These trees have been planted with the intent that they will grow to one day become "Shore Big Trees" and hopefully these markers will help inspire Eastern Shore residents to appreciate these trees as cornerstones of our communities," Smith said.

He hopes to add another component to the project, which is to identify and map the Shore's largest and oldest trees.

"We are lucky to have several trees still in existence that are recognized on state and federal registries, but there are many others that need to be recognized," Smith said. Hopefully creating a registry focused on the Eastern Shore's largest and oldest trees will raise awareness on the importance of these trees, allow us to celebrate their existence, and maybe even create some friendly competition amongst locals who want to claim they have the Shore's biggest tree for a specific species."

Following the placement of the A-NPDC's oak tree, A-NPDC Executive Director Elaine Mell reflected on the tree and its potential, which probably won't be fully realized until all who were present for its planting are gone.

"If you want big trees, somebody has to plant them," she said.

Smith is accepting requests for installations at other prominent public locations. He can be reached at 257-787-2936, ext. 114.

A-NPDC BRACES
Curtis Smith with a white oak tree planted on Sept. 12 in Accomac. Above, Smith stands next to a sycamore tree in Accomac that dates to the late 1700s and was the inspiration for the Eastern Shore Big Tree program.

Educational hand out for Shore Big Tree outreach

3 IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 EXMORE

Location (City/Community): Exmore Town Park

Watershed: Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean

Owner of Property: Town of Exmore

Number of Trees: 3

Species: Willow Oak

Brief Description of Project: Exmore recently acquired a parcel of land adjacent to the Exmore Town Park that is currently being adjoined to the existing park with a gravel parking lot, community events building, open-air stage, and additional greenspace. The Town is interested in planting native trees along with native landscaping both within the recent addition and within the established park. Exmore wants to plant one tree in the park and two in planters within the parking lot. The tree will be maintained by the Town of Exmore Public Works Department which has many years of experience in landscape maintenance.

Funding Options: The town has committed to purchasing their own trees and are interested in leveraging these funds into additional trees and signage. The town also expressed interest in planting only natives at the park. Funding options rely on either donations by private entities or local concrete companies to donate the foundations for the educational plaques and markers.



Exmore Park Aerial

3.2 PARKSLEY

Location (City/Community): Parksley Town Park

Watershed: Chesapeake Bay

Owner of Property: Town of Parksley

Number of Trees: The Town has not made a decision regarding the number of trees, but it is anticipated that the number will be fewer than five. The park does have a number of mature trees and the number of trees and their locations is going to be contingent upon a site visit by either VDCR or ESSWCD staff and their recommendation.

Species: The Town has been provided a species list but has not made a decision yet.

Brief Description of Project: Parksley Park is an existing park near the downtown area. The tree will be maintained by the Parksley Public Works Department, which has historically been responsible for landscape maintenance in the town.

Funding Options: The Town could not commit to expending the necessary funds and are reliant upon donations and grants for both the tree and educational plaque.



Parksley Park Aerial

3.3 ACCOMACK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Location (City/Community): Accomack County

Watershed: Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean

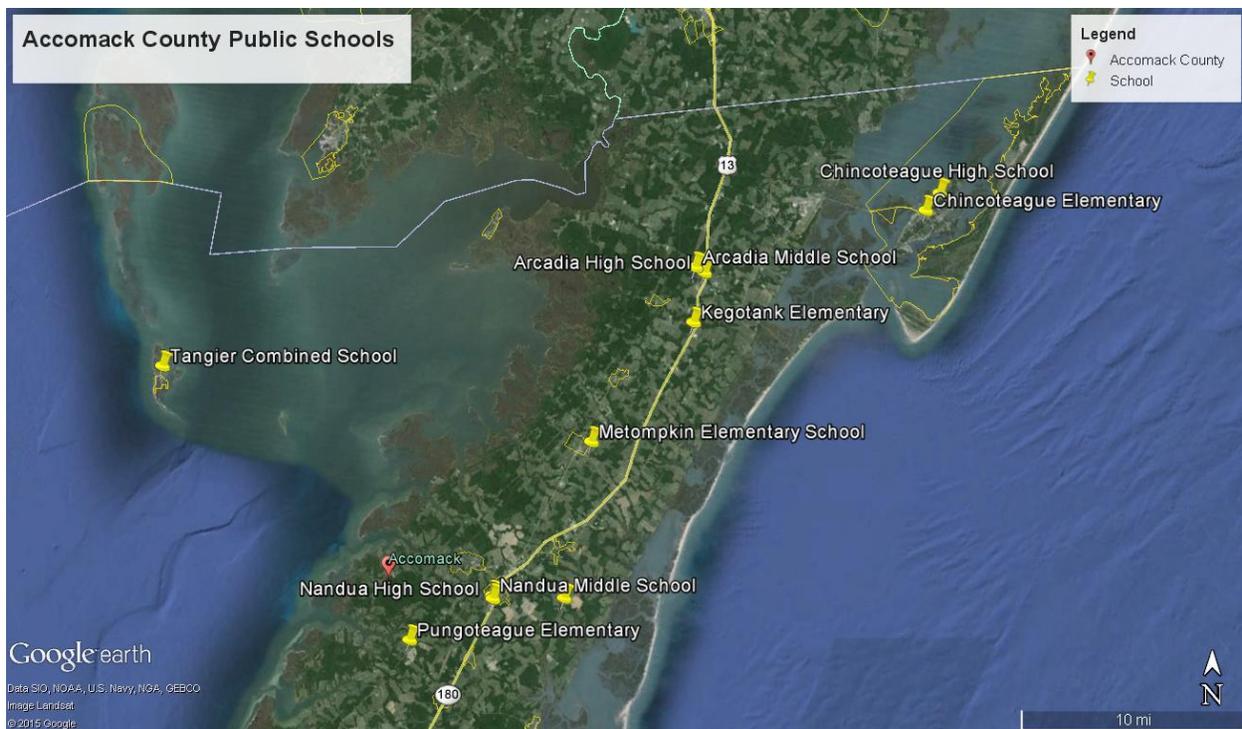
Owner of Property: Accomack County Public Schools

Number of Trees: 11 Trees Total with one tree per school property.

Species: NA, will vary by location. Site visits and recommendations from either VDCR or ESSWCD staff will be necessary.

Brief Description of Project: Accomack County Public Schools agreed to plant one tree at each location. The biggest limiting factor for grants for the schools is that the schools will not expend the funds on a maintenance plan.

Funding Options: Funding options include looking for grants that either omit a maintenance plan or provide maintenance options for Accomack County Public Schools. The School Board has informed the A-NPDC that maintenance varies by school, and the board cannot meet the match on purchasing the tree or its maintenance.



Accomack County Public Schools Aerial

3.4 ACCOMACK COUNTY CENTRAL PARK

Location (City/Community): Accomack County

Watershed: Atlantic Ocean

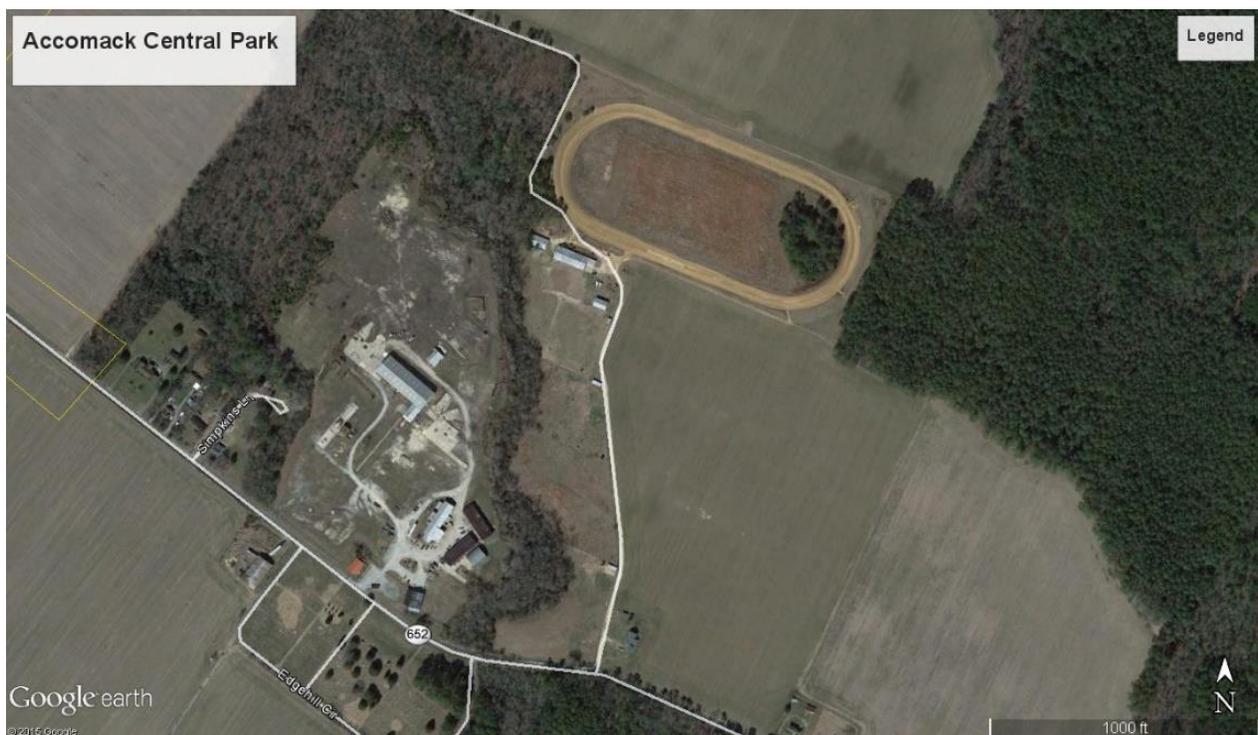
Owner of Property: Accomack County

Number of Trees: There is no specific number yet, depends on the match and grants available.

Species: No specific species have been chosen yet. Tree species will need to be chosen after a sight fit from VDCR or ESSWCD.

Brief Description of Project: Accomack County acquired 15.25 acres to accommodate recreational activities including a walking/biking trails that are ADA accessible, play areas, baseball fields, soccer fields, basketball fields, tennis courts, and other recreational facilities. The park is interested in planting both native trees and native landscaping in the park. All landscaping and trees will be maintained by the Accomack County Parks and Recreation Department and Public Works Department, which has many years of experience in landscape maintenance.

Funding Options: This project is large scale enough to hopefully be applicable for grants. The Clean Water grant only applies to woody trees and not landscaping and educational materials. This is a prime project for a large scale native plant effort if the funding becomes available.



Accomack County Central Park Aerial

4 NATIVE TREE OPTIONS

Dot Field of the VA Department of Conservation and Recreation provided a native tree list that interested localities can use to pick a tree:

- White Oak (*Quercus alba*),
- Southern Red Oak (*Q. falcata*),
- Northern Red Oak (*Q. rubra*),
- Willow Oak (*Q. phellos*),
- Water Oak (*Q. nigra*)
- Sycamore

All species listed are recommended for upland areas with any soil type in any sunlight condition. Sycamores are the only trees suggested for planting in flood-prone areas that regularly are inundated with freshwater. Options for trees that can tolerate saltwater flooding were not provided; however, the Shore Big Tree dedicated in the Wachapreague Town Park was a Water Oak and this was planted knowing that the site would experience tidal flooding at some point in the future which it could tolerate.

5 PLAQUE OPTIONS

There are two options available for educational plaques. One option is to pursue local donations from concrete producers and bolt a cheaper plaque purchased online. Total cost of this kind of plaque is around 100 – 200 dollars.



Example of a concrete base with a less expensive plaque

The other option is to use the more expensive plaques used in previous Shore Big Tree plantings. These plaques cost upward of 600 dollars.



Example of the more expensive plaque option used previously

The concrete base option is the most cost-friendly in that it's almost 400 dollars cheaper than the 600 dollar engraved stone. Localities will be given the option between both, and choose based upon their individual budgets and needs.

6 NEXT STEPS

It was determined that the state funding programs for native landscaping are prohibitive for smaller-scaled projects such as the ones developed here. Being such, it may be beneficial to pursue other avenues of funding and additional partnerships to leverage the materials and funds necessary for each site. Specifically, funding options for trees and signage could come from local nurseries, conservation groups, crowd source funding, and/or corporate sponsorships.

More cost effective options for signage could include exploring partnerships with local concrete manufacturers. Bayshore Concrete has donated materials for public works projects in the region historically and may be willing to provide the concrete foundations to be used for the educational plaques. If the materials for the foundations were donated, then the costs for the plaques would be relatively affordable.

While most localities interested in participating are willing to provide the long-term maintenance needed, additional options for maintaining trees at Accomack County Public Schools will be necessary to satisfy grant requirements.