

# Plant ES Natives Campaign Background

When Eastern Shore residents visited their local garden centers to buy plants in the spring of 2009, a new marketing campaign encouraged them to buy Eastern Shore natives. The Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program worked with a multi-partner Eastern Shore Plant Natives Team to develop this social marketing campaign to increase the use of plants native to Accomack and Northampton counties.

An increase in native vegetation will provide water quality benefits critical to maintaining a potable water supply on the Shore, help maintain optimal water quality for Virginia's shellfish aquaculture industry and provide critical habitat for millions of migratory birds that rely on Virginia's Eastern Shore.

Design of the new "Plant ES Natives" Campaign was guided by research conducted on the Shore in late 2008 through interviews, focus groups and a written survey of private and public landowners, garden centers, nurseries, landscapers, and others. This research identified barriers that have inhibited planting of natives, benefits landowners perceived they would get if they increased their use of natives, and what multi-media approach would be most effective in reaching an Eastern Shore audience. The major barriers discovered were a misperception that native plants are scraggly, weedy and unattractive; a lack of understanding about which species are native to the Shore; and a lack of availability of natives at local garden centers due to limited demand.

Based on this research, the campaign focuses on the beauty of natives (the slogan is "They're Shore Beautiful!") and the habitat value of natives (the hugely significant role the Shore plays as a rest stop to migratory birds each spring and fall). The Team's research was met with great enthusiasm. Seven focus groups were convened and over 40 people participated - individual homeowners and representatives of community organizations, schools, and local government. 300 written survey forms distributed through the Eastern Shore News in November were returned. It was clear to people in both counties that this campaign can be a winning effort for the environment, the residents and local plant providers on the Shore. Nevertheless, the Team and the campaign's current partners understand that we need a multi-year effort to overcome these barriers and make using native plants on the Shore the social norm.

The first phase of the "Plant ES Natives" campaign ran from April 1 through June 30, 2009. Feedback from residents on the Shore has been very positive. A fall '09 phase will be launched in September and will continue through November encouraging residents to plant in fall, especially native trees and shrubs.

## Multi-media components of the campaign:

- **Campaign Website** – <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/coastal/go-native.html>
- **"Celebrate ES Natives Launch and Media Event"** - April 24, 2009, Arbor Day, in Willis Wharf Harbor. Local government officials and community leaders from Accomack and Northampton counties were invited to help begin planting a new native plant demonstration landscape at the wildlife observation deck built in 2008 with Virginia CZM Program funds.
- **Radio Ads** – run in rotation on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday on WESR 103.3 "The Shore" in spring and fall 2009. Each ad urges listeners to "Look for the Eastern Shore native plant tag on (their) next visit to an Accomack or Northampton garden center."
- **"Shore Talk" Interview** - conducted on the "Show Talk" on Monday, April 20 (8:35 – 9:00 am) with members of the "Plant ES Natives" Campaign Planning Team.
- **News Advisory and Articles** – News Advisories and articles will be sent to local publications and gardening publications throughout the campaign.
- **Northampton and Accomack Native Plants Guide** – a new guide to Accomack/Northampton native plants is in production. A guide specific to the region does not currently exist and many resource managers and members of the public have noted the need for one. Until this guide is produced, a list of plants will be available at gardens centers and distributed at public events.



- **ES native landscape demonstration sites** - demonstration landscapes will be installed as funding allows using Accomack and Northampton county native plants, provided by local garden centers and nurseries, to showcase the unique beauty of ES native plants. Three sites now available in Willis Warf (harbor), Chincoteague (along the Island nature Trail) and the eastern Shore of Virginia National wildlife Refuge (in front of the visitor center and office).
- **Decal** – a decal with “Plant ES Natives” logo and slogan is being widely distributed to help market the campaign.
- **Lapel pin** - a lapel pin is being distributed to community leaders knowledgeable about ES native plants and the campaign and its goals to identify and recognize them publicly.
- **Exhibit** – a campaign exhibit is circulating at public and other events.
- **Signage** - plant identification markers and interpretative signage will be installed at demonstration landscape sites. Later in the campaign, if funding permits, signage will be provided to residential landowners acknowledging their native plant landscape.

### Point of Sale Items –

*Identifying and encouraging the use of natives at points of sale will be critical to the success of the campaign. Garden centers will help measure the success of the campaign by tracking the increase in native plant sales at their centers.*

- **Banner** – a banner was distributed to garden centers to identify them as ES native plant providers and “Plant ES Natives” campaign partners.
- **Plant Tags** – native plant tags are distributed to garden centers to identify plants as ES native.
- **Posters** – a series of posters highlighting the value of natives will be produced and provided to garden centers.

### **Plant ES Natives Campaign Partners**

*(Current) - Accomack Ornamentals, Accomack County, Accomack-Northampton County Planning District Commission, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay\*, Applesseed Nursery, Barrier Islands Center\*, Bloomers Garden Center, Eastern Shore Alliance for Environmental Education\*, Eastern Shore Nursery of Virginia, Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge, Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District\*, Environmental Protection Agency, Garden Art, Hermitage Farm Nursery, Hortco Garden Center and Nursery, In Full Bloom Landscapers, Ivy Farms, Maplewood Gardens \*, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Northampton County, Southeastern Expeditions, Tankard Nursery, The Nature Conservancy\*, Thomas Gardens, Town of Chincoteague, Town of Willis Wharf, University of Virginia Anheuser Busch Coastal Research Center\*, Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program\*, Virginia Cooperative Extension\*, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation - Eastern Shore Regional Office\*, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality-Office of Environmental Education\*, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries\*, Virginia Eastern Shorekeeper, Virginia Master Gardeners \*, Virginia Master Naturalists \**

*(\* campaign planning team)*



### **Role of the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program**

The Virginia Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Program is coordinating the campaign and providing almost 100% of the funding (thanks to our annual grants from NOAA) through the Virginia Seaside Heritage Program. The 6 year, \$2.6 million Seaside Heritage Program built ecotourism infrastructure and restored eelgrass, oyster, marsh and beach-nesting bird habitat in and around the barrier island-lagoon system. The “Plant ES Natives” campaign is designed to protect that investment.

Given the many virtues of native vegetation, the Virginia CZM Program and its partners, have been working for 20 years to increase native vegetation on the Shore. It began with a songbird study in 1989 which documented the critical importance of the lower Delmarva Peninsula as a major “stopover” or rest stop for neo-tropical migratory songbirds.

In 1991, the Virginia CZM began working with Northampton County on the Northampton Special Area Management Plan (SAMP). One goal of this SAMP was to protect bird and fish habitats by maintaining maximum native vegetative cover. In 1993, as part of the educational component of this SAMP, the Virginia CZM Program created and funded the annual Eastern Shore of Virginia Birding and Wildlife Festival to demonstrate that there could be economic benefits from ecotourism, if the native vegetation so critical to birds were protected. Through the SAMP, a Sensitive Natural Resource Area Overlay was introduced and nearly adopted in Northampton County in 2003 which would have restricted the amount of existing native vegetation that a property owner could remove in order to protect water quality and quantity for humans, shellfish and birds.

Even though the SNRA Overlay District was not adopted, interested landowners were given a guide to what they could do on their land to provide better water quality and bird habitat. One educational guide produced through the Northampton SAMP and still used today, *Migratory Birds of the Lower Delmarva: A Habitat Management Guide for Landowners*, contains landscape design ideas and a list of native plants beneficial to migratory songbirds.

The Seaside Heritage Program has been very successful but human activities on the land could jeopardize this investment that supports sustainable industries such as shellfish farming and ecotourism. We hope the “Plant ES Natives” campaign will help ensure not only the continued success of seaside restoration efforts but also an excellent quality of life for Virginia’s Eastern Shore residents and visitors.