Impact

WINTER 2025 NEWSLETTER

Erin Spencer '14 at a safety stop in Hawaii while on the E/V Nautilus. *Photo credit: Jennifer Berglund.*

WILLIAM & MARY'S BATTEN SCHOOL OF COASTAL & MARINE SCIENCES | VIRGINIA INSTITUTE OF MARINE SCIENCE

$50M HISTORIC GIFT FUELS SCHOLARSHIPS IN COASTAL AND MARINE SCIENCES AT WILLIAM & MARY'S BATTEN SCHOOL & VIMS

ALUMNUS PROVIDES LARGEST SCHOLARSHIP GIFT IN UNIVERSITY'S HISTORY; INVESTMENT IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF SCIENTISTS AND LEADERS COMES AT A TIME OF GLOBAL CRISIS

William & Mary's largest scholarship gift – the biggest ever for a school of coastal and marine sciences and the first of its kind nationally – will empower the next generation to tackle the world's most pressing environmental challenges.

The $50 million gift from Dr. R. Todd Stravitz '82 and the Brunckhorst Foundations comes at a time when global crises – such as rising seas, eroding coastlines and environmental degradation – are disrupting billions of lives.

The R. Todd Stravitz Scholars Program will provide full tuition support for students pursuing the new bachelor's degree in coastal & marine sciences at W&M's Batten School.

"We are deeply grateful to Dr. Stravitz and the Brunckhorst Foundations," said President Katherine A. Rowe. "This gift removes financial barriers, allowing the brightest minds to access the learning and tools needed to address our planet's urgent problems. These future trailblazers will craft solutions that safeguard ecosystems, economies and the communities that depend on them around the globe."

The announcement builds on the momentum of a $100 million gift from Jane Batten HON '17, L.H.D. '19 in July 2024 to establish the Batten School of Coastal & Marine Sciences.

This transformational gift coincides with W&M & the Batten School's launch of Virginia's first public undergraduate degree in coastal & marine sciences, recently approved by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. The first cohort of selected students will begin their studies this fall, kicking off with the major's inaugural immersion semester experience, in which students will take classes on the Batten School & VIMS campus.

"This gift is about funding tomorrow's problem-solvers," said Derek Aday, dean of the Batten School and director of VIMS. "At William & Mary, we equip students with the skills to craft applied solutions to some of the biggest challenges of our time. This investment ensures our students can lead where the world needs them most."'

"When I was a student, a degree like this didn't exist, and I want to create the pathway for today's students to experience the best of William & Mary so they are prepared

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>A William & Mary undergraduate student assists in vaccinating trout in the lab of Batten School & VIMS Associate Professor Andrew Wargo. Soon, more W&M undergraduates will have opportunities to engage in education and research at the Batten School.

IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

PURPLE CRABS CLOBBER BLUE CARBON

Millions of purple marsh crabs are churning through salt marshes along the East Coast, significantly disrupting the storage of carbon within these ecosystems. The small crabs' constant burrowing and consumption of the cordgrass lead to erosion and a 40-70% loss in carbon, according to the results of a study by a team of marine ecologists and coastal geologists at the Batten School & VIMS.

Serina Wittyngham led the study as a postdoctoral researcher working in the lab of coauthor Matthew Kirwan, coastal geologist and professor at the Batten School & VIMS. She notes that blue carbon, or carbon captured by oceans and coastal systems, is considered an important factor in meeting future climate goals. However, the impact of animals on carbon cycling in coastal ecosystems is not well documented.

"Most researchers who study blue carbon cycling stop at the plants, but we asked, 'what about the creatures removing the plants?'" said Wittyngham, who leaned on the marine ecology expertise she gained while earning her Ph.D. at the Batten School of Coastal & Marine Sciences under the guidance of academic advisor and study coauthor David Samuel Johnson. "Part of what made this study unique was how we combined the expertise of the coauthors to look at carbon cycling in a way that hadn't been fully considered before."

The impact of the small invertebrates on salt marshes is visually dramatic and can be seen in satellite imagery. Known as consumer fronts, the grazing crabs leave expansive, fan-shaped mudflats as they burrow into the marsh and consume large swaths of cordgrass.

The researchers identified consumer fronts in Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia, evaluating four distinct sites in each state. They measured carbon loss, gain and recovery by calculating the aboveground biomass of the plants and taking 30cm-deep core samples of sediment in disturbed and undisturbed areas.

The scientists also used a remote sensing technique developed by coauthor and former Batten School & VIMS Postdoctoral Researcher Yaping Chen to track the long-term movements of the crabs. Chen identified 50 additional consumer fronts using high-resolution aerial images taken between 1993-2019.

The team found that all three states experienced a net loss in carbon stocks when comparing ungrazed and recovering areas. Estimated times for carbon recovery varied significantly between states. Salt marshes in South Carolina were estimated to take approximately five years to recover their carbon losses, while Georgia marshes recovered in 17 years and Virginia marshes may never regain their lost carbon. The remote sensing data showed that the rates of consumer front movement are accelerating, with an approximately 30% increase in their formation and movement since the early 1990s.

The different recovery periods are thought to be caused by the elevation of the salt marsh and the amount of water that moves in and out during a tidal cycle. Salt marshes in locations featuring higher elevations and greater water inundation better facilitate the growth of cordgrass.

>Purple marsh crabs are native to salt marshes throughout the East Coast. They consume marsh grass above the surface and underground as they burrow. Photo credit: Virginia Sea Grant.

"What's happening is that the crabs are lowering the elevation of the marsh through sediment loss as they burrow and consume the grass. This causes more water to flood the marsh, which is good for the grass but causes the crabs to move to higher ground," said Johnson.

"Our findings are a great example of why, when possible, science must account for regional variability when considering the impacts of various factors on ecosystems," said Wittyngham. "Additionally, salt marshes are incredibly resilient and an exciting takeaway from our study is that the marshes themselves always recovered. Whether or not they regained their lost carbon, the plants always grew back."

>Serina Wittyngham studies the impacts of purple marsh crabs on salt marshes along Virginia's Eastern Shore. Photo credit: Virginia Sea Grant.

>The impacts of purple marsh crabs on salt marshes can be viewed from space. The crabs leave expansive, fan-shaped mudflats as they burrow into the marsh and consume large swaths of cordgrass. Photo credit: Virginia Sea Grant.

PARENTS' PRIDE LEADS TO NEW UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH ENDOWMENT

As an expression of parental pride in their daughter, Taylor Spencer '83 and Martha Spencer recently established an undergraduate endowment at the Batten School & VIMS. The Spencer Family Student Research Endowment (5618) supports students conducting field research, removing financial barriers that often prevent undergraduates from engaging in hands-on science. This generous gift honors their daughter, Erin Spencer '14, one of the early W&M students to earn a minor in marine science through the Batten School & VIMS, in collaboration with W&M Arts & Sciences.

Originally intending to leave a gift posthumously, the Spencers reconsidered when they felt the urgency to make a more immediate impact in light of global change. "We need these students to do the research they're doing," said Taylor. "Even more now, it's so important that they're focused on the environment and the degradation that's happening."

The enthusiasm among the Spencers about the endowment is palpable. "I'm thrilled for my parents, and I'm really excited for this gift," said Erin. "Everyone is so jazzed that it's hard to get across just how excited we are."

A POSITIVE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE INSPIRES GENEROSITY

Martha is effusive about the quality of education her daughter received at W&M and the Batten School & VIMS. "One of the reasons we were so strong about wanting to support undergraduate research is due to the opportunities she had, like being a Monroe Scholar, participating in the D.C. Summer Institutes [at the Washington Center] and being accepted to National Geographic grant programs. Supplementing what she was learning throughout the academic year was critical for her."

>Erin was introduced to William & Mary at a young age, and the family frequently visited campus and Colonial Williamsburg. From left to right: Erin Spencer '14 and Taylor Spencer '83. Photo credit: Martha Spencer.

>Taylor and Martha Spencer recently created an undergraduate research endowment in honor of their daughter, Erin. From left to right: Taylor Spencer '83, Erin Spencer '14 and Martha Spencer. Photo credit: Martha Spencer.

"Going to William & Mary was the single most important thing for my career," said Erin, who designed her own major in ecology, undergirded by the newly formed undergraduate minor in marine science. "Everything I got to do after undergrad was directly tied to something I had done at William & Mary and at VIMS."

Since graduating, Erin has earned a master's degree in ecology from UNC-Chapel Hill, earned a Ph.D. in biology from Florida International University, appeared on television several times for National Geographic and published two marine science children's books. She currently works for the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.

Unsurprisingly, Taylor and Martha are immensely proud of their daughter—and the appreciation is mutual. "My parents are so wonderful and so generous, and they don't give themselves enough credit," Erin said. "The only reason I was able to do any of this work was because they supported me. And that's why we decided to put the money where we did. It was very important to them that this gift was intentionally applied to help give students a positive experience at VIMS, because I had such a positive experience."

A PURPOSEFUL FINANCIAL COMMITMENT

Erin was instrumental in helping her parents direct the endowment fund. "The idea was to provide support for students to do summer research," she said, "and not only add to their resumes, but also find out if they enjoy research, learn how to do research and discover the types of topics that they're interested in themselves."

>Erin Spencer '14 in a submersible in the Bahamas. Footage of the expedition, including shark tagging for Spencer's Ph.D. research, is included in the National Geographic show "OceanXplorers."

Direct support for students was incredibly important to the Spencers, having seen the positive impact of hands-on undergraduate research in Erin's own life. "So many doors to grad school, jobs and other opportunities were opened to me because I had independent research experience as an undergrad; it set my resume apart," said Erin. "But it costs money, and a lot of research grants aren't available to undergrads, so it can become an obstacle that cuts off many students who can't afford to do unpaid work."

The desire to remove those financial hurdles and make an immediate impact for undergraduate students led the Spencers to make additional pledges to the research endowment. "To start, we've committed to further contributing to the fund for another two years, just so VIMS can start helping students now, instead of waiting for the endowment to build up money," said Taylor. "As far as we're concerned, this is only the start, and we will continue to give to support this endowment going forward. And it's kind of fun to know that this is something that will outlive us, that Erin has had a hand in crafting."

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Erin's advice for students benefiting from the endowment is clear: "Don't be afraid to fail; part of the experience is learning how to do, and how not to do, research... Ask as many questions as you can of the people around you;

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HONORING A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

THE JOHN T. WELLS OUTREACH ENDOWMENT

To commemorate the remarkable contributions of John T. Wells, Emeritus Dean of the Batten School & Director of VIMS, an endowment fund was established by the VIMS Foundation Board in his name. The John T. Wells Outreach Endowment (4969) is dedicated to ensuring that the Batten School & VIMS continue our critical mission of reaching and educating the public with our scientific research.

Outreach was a cornerstone of Wells's 17-year tenure, expanding the Batten School & VIMS' ability to engage and educate tens of thousands every year, from students and educators to policymakers and marine enthusiasts. "Reaching out and connecting people to the science is part of our DNA at VIMS," said Wells, who continues to be passionate about making research accessible to the public.

Through Marine Science Day, After Hours lectures, community events, online educational resources and more, the Batten School & VIMS create meaningful connections that inspire learning and stewardship of our waterways. The new endowment will provide lasting support for these efforts, enabling faculty and staff to continue public programs, educational events and digital outreach initiatives.

"Our understanding and appreciation of coastal and marine systems is the base we need for protecting and restoring these treasured environments," said Wells, "for us, our children and our grandchildren."

Wells and his wife, Patsy, have already demonstrated their commitment by making a personal estate gift to the fund. Now, we invite you to join in recognizing his legacy. Your contribution to the John T. Wells Outreach Endowment will help ensure that the Batten School & VIMS continue to share world-class research with local communities and all who hope to learn about coastal and marine sciences.

>Emeritus Dean & Director John T. Wells talks with Justice Sandra Day O'Connor on the VIMS campus in April 2007.

To donate or learn more about how you can support this transformative initiative, please visit **VIMS.edu/giving** or contact the Advancement Office at 804.684.7043. Together, we can continue Wells' vision "to bring marine research out of the scientific journals and into people's lives."

$50M historic gift fuels scholarships in coastal and marine sciences at William & Mary's Batten School & VIMS, continued from page 1

for the greatest challenges of their generation," said Stravitz. "Our best hope for solving the environmental crises we face is educating young people to care for and improve our planet. Programs like this are critical to our future, and I'm honored to support this vital mission."

The Brunckhorst Foundations are dedicated to advancing important global causes, including medical research and environmental sustainability. With a focus on innovative solutions and initiatives, the foundations have been an important partner in supporting the Batten School & VIMS' efforts to promote resilience, conservation and education for the last several years.

"Generations of students will benefit from this tremendous gift," said Provost Peggy Agouris. "It paves the way for emerging scholars to deepen their expertise in these critical research areas and become part of the vibrant academic community at W&M's Batten School & VIMS. Thanks to the generosity of Dr. Stravitz and the Brunckhorst Foundations, there are incredible opportunities ahead."

This gift coincides with the start of William & Mary's Year of the Environment, which brings the entire community together to deepen W&M's shared commitment to safeguarding the environment and the communities that depend on its health. The yearlong observance will focus on advancing sustainability and conservation efforts on campus and furthering the university's impact around the world.

>William & Mary undergraduate students explore Parramore Island, including a shipwreck from the 1800s, during the two-week undergraduate field course at the Batten School & VIMS' Eastern Shore Laboratory.

>An abandoned spiny lobster trap off the coast of California. Derelict fishing equipment can continue to trap and kill animals, harming marine ecosystems and competing with actively fished gear. Photo credit: Shutterstock.

NATIONAL TRAP PROGRAM FUNDS LARGE-SCALE CLEANUP OF DISCARDED FISHING GEAR

A massive cleanup of derelict fishing gear in U.S. coastal waters is set to begin now that the Batten School & VIMS has awarded $1.4 million to fund 11 projects under the National Fishing Trap Removal, Assessment and Prevention (TRAP) Program.

From diving in waters up to 130 feet deep to retrieve lobster and crab traps in protected ecosystems to the removal of debris in tribal fishing grounds, this initial round of projects facilitates removal efforts in California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, New York, Washington and the Freely Associated State of Palau, in addition to supporting ongoing efforts through the Virginia Marine Debris Program.

The funding for the removal projects stems from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Marine Debris Program through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Following a rigorous review and selection process, the Batten School & VIMS received an $8 million, four-year grant from NOAA in 2023 to administer the National TRAP Program. In addition to distributing approximately $1.5 million annually to fund regional cleanup efforts in years 2 through 4, this project aims to standardize data collection practices and establish a national database to evaluate the environmental and economic impacts of these efforts and inform future policies.

"This is a special program because it allows local communities to tackle the issues that impact their environments and livelihoods the most, all under the same overarching goal," said Kirk Havens, who directs the Center for Coastal Resources Management (CCRM) at Virginia Institute of Marine Science, which administers the TRAP Program under the direction of co-principal investigators Professor Donna Bilkovic and Associate Professor Andrew Scheld. "The Batten School & VIMS is uniquely positioned to lead these efforts thanks to our nearly two decades of experience tackling this issue in the Chesapeake Bay."

Coastal waters in the U.S. and around the world are littered with fishing equipment that has been lost, abandoned or otherwise discarded. It can harm ecosystems and economies by trapping and killing animals, damaging marine habitats and competing with actively fished gear. Beginning in 2008, VIMS partnered with the Virginia Marine Resources Commission and local watermen to establish the Virginia Marine Debris Removal Program, which ultimately led to the removal of more than 34,000 derelict crab pots between 2008 and 2014.

> Stacks of derelict crab traps collected from the Chesapeake Bay as part of the Virginia Marine Debris Removal Program. Photo credit: Center for Coastal Resources Management.

The NOAA Marine Debris Program was involved in these initial efforts, funding ongoing research by CCRM evaluating the ecological and economic impacts of the derelict gear. A 2016 study estimated removal efforts over the six-year period in Virginia and Maryland increased blue crab harvests in the Chesapeake Bay by 38 million pounds, putting an extra $33.5 million into the pockets of local watermen. An additional 2016 report revealed that removing just 10% of derelict crab pots and lobster traps on a global basis could increase landings by 293,929 metric tons—a yearly value of $831 million.

"The TRAP Program is innovative in the way it combines a multitude of regional cleanup projects with data collection and analysis to guide national policies and future efforts. This approach can serve as a model for solving global issues related to marine resources and the resilience of coastal communities that rely on them," said Derek Aday, dean of the Batten School and director of VIMS.

Funding recipients will begin their cleanup efforts in January 2025 and will be required to submit standardized data on their progress. The data will be analyzed by the Policy Innovation Lab, a partnership between the Batten School & VIMS and the University of Georgia Carl Vinson Institute of Government, to explore drivers of derelict trap abundance, bycatch and other ecological or economic variables. This information will help inform state and federal policy recommendations to improve derelict trap prevention and mitigation.

In the spring of 2025, the Batten School & VIMS will solicit proposals for funding in 2026. Those interested in becoming engaged are encouraged to visit trapprogram.org for more information on the TRAP Program and associated removal projects.

"We are proud to support these projects with the Batten School & VIMS," said Amy Gohres, acting director for the NOAA Marine Debris Program. "This partnership helps to ensure that Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding is benefiting fishing communities, economically important species and habitats at the local level."

GIVING SOCIETIES ARE MAKING WAVES FOR W&M'S BATTEN SCHOOL & VIMS

MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR COASTAL & MARINE RESEARCH

The Batten School & VIMS are committed to advancing scientific discovery, training the next generation of marine researchers and advising policymakers. Our friends and supporters play a critical role in ensuring the Batten School & VIMS continue to lead in marine research and education. By joining one of our giving societies, you become a partner in better understanding and safeguarding our coastlines and waterways for generations to come.

JOIN A GIVING SOCIETY AND MAKE AN IMPACT

"Our giving societies recognize and honor our supporters who invest deeply in the vital work of the Batten School & VIMS," said Crystal Booker, assistant director of donor relations, stewardship and alumni engagement. "This an inspiring group of people whose passion for our mission is immense. Each level of support provides unique opportunities to engage with our community, learn about groundbreaking research and enjoy exclusive events that celebrate their commitment to marine science."

Society induction is based on giving in a fiscal year, with the exception of the Pathfinder Society, which is based on lifetime giving.

Navigator: $1,000+

Navigators help the Batten School & VIMS stay the course by ensuring current projects move forward without disruption. This vital support sustains ongoing research, student initiatives and advisory efforts. As a Navigator, you'll be invited to a casual seafood feast on our Gloucester Point campus, where you can enjoy fresh local fare while taking in scenic views of the York River.

Explorer: $2,000+

Explorers provide resources to investigate new opportunities and develop innovative projects that address our coasts' most pressing needs. By stepping up to this level, you'll gain access to an exclusive event—to be announced later this year—a unique experience that will immerse you in the exciting work being done in the field and on our campus.

Innovator: $5,000+

Innovators drive discovery by keeping the Batten School & VIMS at the forefront of conducting science for solutions. As an Innovator, you'll receive an invitation to the annual **Pathfinders Dinner**, a prestigious event that celebrates those making transformational investments in marine science.

Visionary: $10,000+

Visionaries are instrumental in ensuring the long-term protection of our waters. By investing in the critical intersections where rivers meet oceans and shorelines seek the sea, your support fuels our essential work in the Chesapeake Bay and beyond. Visionary level donors receive an exclusive invitation to the **Pathfinders Dinner**, where we honor those who are shaping the future of coastal and marine science.

>The upcoming Pathfinders Dinner celebration will be held at the Freight Shed event venue at historic Yorktown Beach. Photo credit: Jenny McQueen.

Pathfinder: $100,000+ (Lifetime Giving)

Pathfinders are our champions of marine science, providing the resources necessary for the Batten School & VIMS to address global challenges. Their generosity transforms data into policies, students into leaders and research into real-world impact. Pathfinder donors receive:

- An invitation to the annual **Pathfinders Dinner**
- The distinguished **Pathfinder Society Award**
- Additional recognition for extraordinary contributions

Join a giving society today and be a part of a legacy that preserves and protects our coastal waters. And if you're already in a giving society, consider making an investment to move to the next level and maximize your impact. Visit **VIMS.edu/giving** to make a gift, join a society and support the future of marine science.

>Batten School Dean & VIMS Director Derek Aday addressing attendees at the 2024 Pathfinders Dinner celebration. Photo credit: Jenny McQueen.

Parents' Pride Leads to New Undergraduate Research Endowment, continued from page 3

there is such an incredible amount of brain power between VIMS and William & Mary."

The Spencers, soon to be honored at the annual Pathfinders Dinner, also hope that their gift inspires others to give, a process they assure was far easier than they initially predicted. "We had been warned by our financial advisor that some universities are not always willing to help structure donations the way you might want," said Martha, "but that's not what we found with [the VIMS Advancement Office] at all. We were really, really pleased with how they worked with us to structure it in a way we were comfortable with."

Erin also encourages others to give. "Just a little bit goes a long way. Students can do a career-changing amount of research over a summer with relatively smaller gifts. Opening that door for undergraduate students can be so impactful as they continue in the field."

"There's no amount that's too small," Taylor agreed. "Whatever support families can give, and particularly if it's going to help students one way or another, I think it's a great use. We're very pleased, very pleased to have done this."

FOR ASWANI VOLETY PH.D. ´95, A LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE FLOURISHED AT W&M'S BATTEN SCHOOL & VIMS

The following is a preview of one of the many new alumni profiles recently published on our website:

Aswani Volety, a distinguished alumni of William & Mary's Batten School & VIMS, exemplifies the transformative power of academic mentorship and intentional networking. His remarkable journey from a young marine scientist in India to Chancellor of the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) underscores the global impact of the Batten School of Coastal & Marine Sciences & VIMS.

Volety's career began when he completed his bachelor's and master's degrees at Andhra University and worked for India's National Institute of Oceanography, studying the impacts of pollutants on coastal areas. When considering Ph.D. programs, he found the Batten School & VIMS' focus on coastal areas over open-ocean research was an ideal match. "VIMS is one of the preeminent institutions for graduate research in coastal areas," Volety said. "I was thrilled to be accepted and even more thrilled to be working with my advisor, Fu-Lin Chu, who at the time was working on oysters."

He explained that while oysters are an important economic industry, "for ecological reasons they are even more important." Alongside Chu Ph.D. '82, P '97, P '12, Volety focused on the complex interactions between marine organisms and environmental stressors, especially how contaminants affect host-parasite dynamics in oysters. "Given my interest and background, it was a perfect fit. In addition to that, it is an amazing school in terms of research advisory services for the state, and that interested me."

>Aswani Volety Ph.D. '95 used his Batten School & VIMS education to embark on a remarkable journey of academic leadership. Photo credit: Aswani Volety.

To read Aswani Volety's full alumni profile, as well as profiles of many other fascinating graduates of the Batten School & VIMS, visit **VIMS.edu/academics/alumni-profiles**.

PREDICTIVE MODELS MAY OVERESTIMATE FUTURE CHESAPEAKE BAY DEAD ZONES

A study led by scientists at the Batten School & VIMS has demonstrated surprising variability in the results of different modeling methodologies for predicting future hypoxic, or low-oxygen, conditions known as "dead zones" in the Chesapeake Bay. The findings suggest current approaches may overestimate future hypoxia by not fully accounting for environmental variability caused by climate change.

Published in *Scientific Reports*, the study performed the first continuous simulation of environmental conditions within the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed from 1980-2065, requiring more than 40 days of supercomputer efforts. The researchers' goal was to compare the continuous methodology to less computationally demanding methods.

While the continuous method predicted an 11% increase in mean annual hypoxic volume, the delta method—the most common approach used by regulatory agencies and the Chesapeake Bay Program, which manages Bay restoration efforts and establishes management goals—showed a 19% increase. The researchers determined the delta method failed to accurately account for changes in future precipitation caused by climate change.

"The results were surprising and call into question the reliability of future scenarios that use the delta methodology," said Kyle Hinson, who led the study while earning his Ph.D. at the Batten School & VIMS. "The good news is that if we continue our progress and reach the goals we've already set, we will more than offset hypoxia increases due to climate change."

>An exceptionally dense algal bloom along the north shore of the York River. These blooms are caused by excess nutrients entering the Bay and contribute to dead zones that suffocate marine life. Photo credit: Wolfgang Vogelbein.

NEARLY $1M RAISED TO CATALYZE VISITOR CENTER TRANSFORMATION

In 2024, the Batten School & VIMS were presented with a unique grant opportunity: if $400,000 could be raised by the end of the year, then a local charitable foundation would match that philanthropy with their own contribution toward renovating our 40-year-old Visitor Center in Watermen's Hall. The challenge was met with overwhelming support from 115 enthusiastic donors who exceeded the goal and secured the generous gift.

The funds, over $900,000 overall, will begin the modernization of the Visitor Center, helping to provide meaningful and memorable experiences that empower coastal communities to explore and protect critical resources.

An architectural design firm has been selected following a rigorous proposal process and funding for the Visitor Center renovation has since been further propelled by the recent and historic gift from philanthropist Jane Batten, which is helping to catalyze a larger transformation of the Gloucester Point campus.

For those interested in supporting improvements to our campus, contributions can be made to the **Batten Coastal & Marine Sciences Capital Fund (5552)**.

VIMS | William & Mary
Virginia Institute of Marine Science

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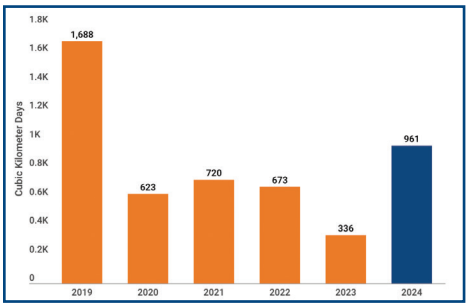

2024 CHESAPEAKE BAY DEAD ZONE NEAR AVERAGE SIZE BUT SHORTER DURATION

The Batten School & VIMS' annual report of "dead-zone" conditions in the Chesapeake Bay indicates that hypoxic, low-oxygen conditions in 2024 were somewhat larger than the long-term average from 1985-2023, but had a slightly shorter duration. When nutrients enter the water through polluted runoff, they feed algae and drive the growth of algal blooms, which eventually die and decompose, removing oxygen from the waters faster than it can be replenished. This creates a dead-zone of low-oxygen—or hypoxic—conditions at the bottom of the Bay that limit habitat for crabs, oysters, fish and other wildlife. "The past few years of near-or below-average, Bay-wide hypoxia levels are a positive sign that Chesapeake Bay nutrient management actions are working," said Batten School & VIMS Professor Marjorie Friedrichs, "but such reductions must be continued if we are to outpace water quality degradation due to climate change."

UPCOMING BATTEN SCHOOL & VIMS EVENTS

CBNERR-VA Discovery Labs
Marine Fossils: Histories that Rock
Wednesday, March 19, 6pm-8pm
Plastic Oceans
Tuesday, April 15, 6pm-8pm

After Hours Lectures
Beautiful Swimmers: Blue Crabs in the Chesapeake Bay
Thursday, March 20, 7pm-8pm
Searching for Sturgeon
Thursday, April 24, 7pm-8pm

One Tribe One Day
Wednesday, April 2

Osprey Festival*
Saturday, April 12, 9am-4pm
Colonial Beach, VA

Earth Day Event*
Saturday, April 19, 6:30pm-8:30pm
New Quarter Park, Williamsburg, VA

Northern Neck Sail & Power Squadron's Spring Fling & Boat Show*
Saturday, April 26, 10am-3pm
Kilmarnock, VA

A Scientist Walks into a Distillery
Wednesday, May 7, 6:30pm-8pm
Copper Fox Distillery, Williamsburg, VA

Marine Science Day
Saturday, May 31, 10am-3pm

**Visit our exhibit at these public events.*

All events take place on the Gloucester Point campus, unless otherwise noted.
Visit www.vims.edu/events or call 804.684.7061