



“We are literally polluting ourselves off the face of the earth. It’s no wonder today’s young people are fighting the ecological battle. It’s their world of tomorrow that we are destroying today.”

—THE VIRGINIA BEACH SUN, DECEMBER 1, 1970

1970s

Similar conditions nationwide, including major oil spills and river fires, culminated in the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on December 2, 1970.

Two years later, Congress enacted amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act collectively known as the Clean Water Act. This remarkable legislation created national guidelines and standards for water quality and established funding for sewage treatment infrastructure.

The Dawn of the Clean Water Act

With late 1960s activism as the backdrop, the first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970, as a symbol of the importance of “ecology” and protecting natural resources. A public embrace of “environmentalism” was also aided by Apollo astronauts transmitting from space translucent aqua images of Planet Earth.

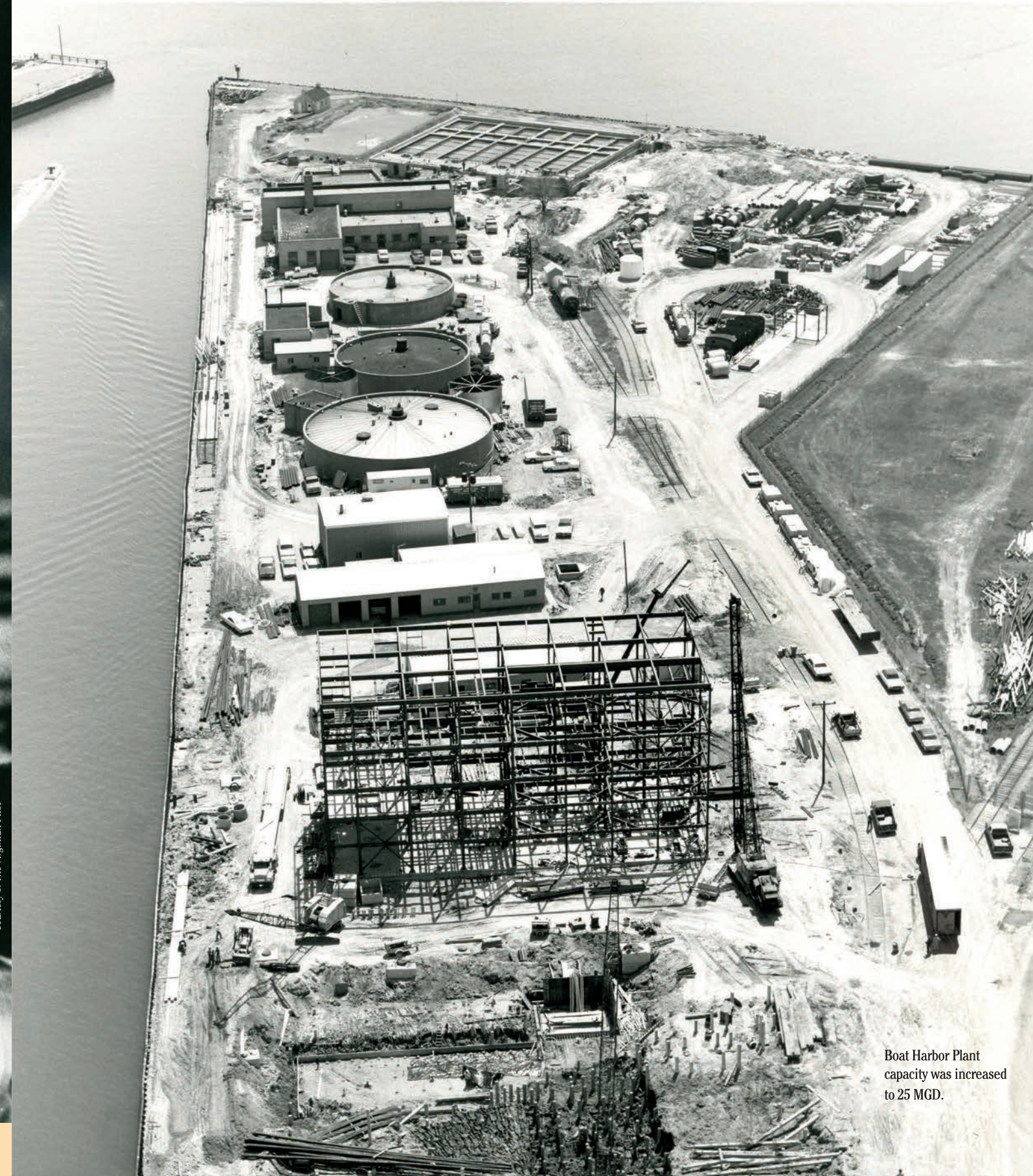
Also compelling this new consciousness was an increasing awareness of pollution of all types infecting our local waters. Kepone, detergents, chlorine and other toxic chemicals resulted in algal blooms, fish kills and other maladies that harmed not just the environment, but the local economy as well.



Hampton Roads sports fans, in the early 1970s, celebrated the triumphs of the Virginia Squires, a regional American Basketball Association franchise whose home arenas included Norfolk Scope and the Hampton Coliseum. Among the team’s talented players was Julius Erving, who became known as “Dr. J” for the way he “operated” on the court.

“Sports in the 1970s were rife with tragedy and triumph. Tragedy was marked most notably by the 1972 Summer Olympics where terrorists invaded the Olympic grounds and killed 11 Israeli athletes and coaches.”

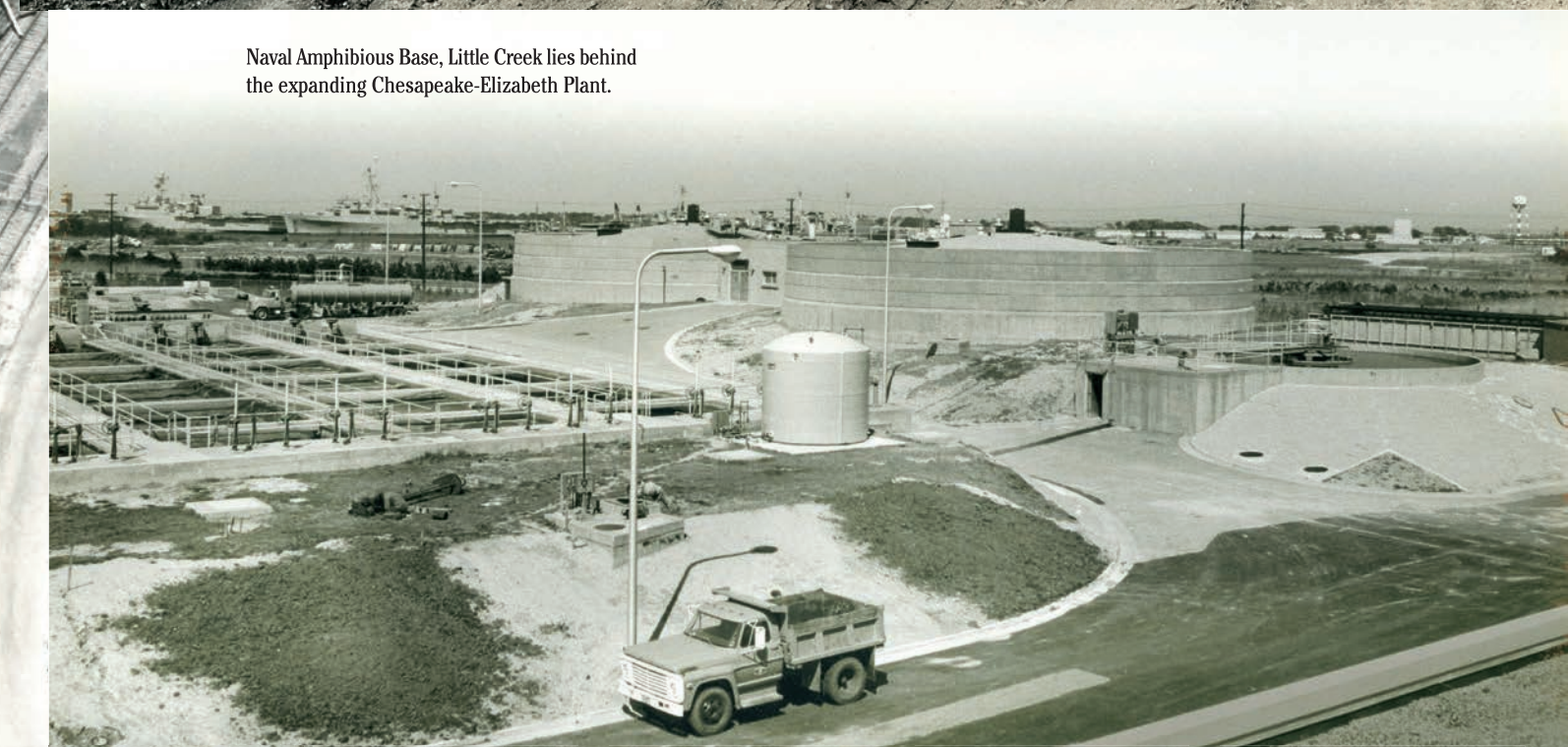
—RETROWASTE BLOG



Boat Harbor Plant capacity was increased to 25 MGD.



The decked SS United States can be seen through rebar work during construction of aeration basins at the Army Base Plant in 1973.



Naval Amphibious Base, Little Creek lies behind the expanding Chesapeake-Elizabeth Plant.



THE WILLIAMSBURG PLANT OPENS

In late April 1970, HRSD unveiled a construction program through the year 2000 that would handle the needs from Virginia Beach to Chesapeake and Suffolk to York County. Funding was projected to come from federal and state grants, fees and revenue bonds. The most urgent immediate need was expansion of the Chesapeake-Elizabeth Plant, barely a year old, but already reaching capacity.

Two years after opening in 1969, HRSD was already working to triple capacity to 24 MGD. Bids were received in October 1970 for the Williamsburg Plant to be built on property purchased near Carter’s Grove on the James River. The plant, designed to serve the new Anheuser-Busch facility and the surrounding area, was placed in service just over a year later in December 1971.

- 1971** William J. Love was named General Manager.
- 1971** The Williamsburg Plant was placed in service as a 9.6 MGD secondary treatment facility.
- 1972** HRSD hired its first female engineer, Mardane McLemore.
- 1972** The Clean Water Act established a system to regulate pollution and fund sewage treatment.
- 1973** The Construction Department was established with James R. Borberg as Director.
- 1974** Chesapeake-Elizabeth Plant capacity was expanded to 24 MGD with secondary treatment.

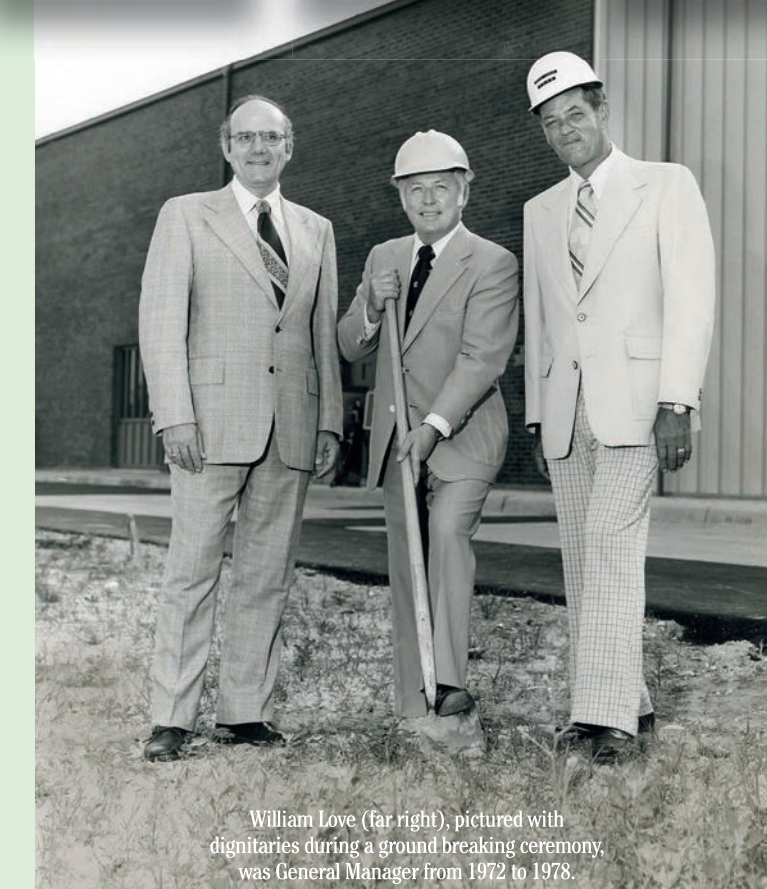


Environmental Disasters Challenge HRSD

Though a pioneer in protecting local waterways, major storm water challenges created by northeasters, tropical storms and hurricanes caused several plants on different occasions to discharge millions of gallons of sewage into the James and Elizabeth rivers, Hampton Roads and the Chesapeake Bay.

Subsequently, the State Water Control Board ruled that when plants reach 80 percent of capacity for three months, they must within 90 days submit plans to expand capacity. Fortunately, federal investment dramatically increased as continued population growth pushed plants to capacity sooner than anticipated.

Meanwhile, other environmental issues cropped up. Massive fish kills remained a problem into the mid-1970s. Other challenges included oil, phosphorus, silts, clays, dredge spoil and wastes from ships and boats.



William Love, (far right), pictured with dignitaries during a ground breaking ceremony, was General Manager from 1972 to 1979.

- 1974** HRSD’s Water Quality Department was created with the hiring of D. R. Wheeler as Director.
- 1976** HRSD moved into a consolidated operations office complex in Virginia Beach.
- 1977** Improvements to increase Army Base Plant capacity to 18 MGD with secondary treatment began.
- 1978** Boat Harbor Plant capacity was increased to 25 MGD with secondary treatment.
- 1978** James R. Borberg became General Manager.
- 1979** Construction of the Atlantic Plant began.

Plans Progress for Three New Plants

In 1976, HRSD was awarded \$48 million toward construction of three new plants: Nansemond, York River and Atlantic.

Land was purchased from Tidewater Community College’s Frederick campus for the Nansemond Plant, which would serve Suffolk, Western Branch, the Churchland section of Portsmouth and a portion of Northwest Chesapeake. It also had the capability to include the Rt. 17 corridor in Isle of Wight and Smithfield.

On the Peninsula, after a decade of study, Seaford was selected as the best site for the York River Plant. This planned 15 MGD facility was expected to cost \$20 million and relieve pressure on the James River Plant by serving Poquoson, York County and nearby localities.

The proposed Atlantic Plant, to be located on 90 acres at Dam Neck in Virginia Beach, faced scrutiny from city council, planning staff and local innkeepers. These groups sought assurances that there “were adequate pollution safeguards” in place for a facility that would be pumping treated effluent into the Atlantic Ocean, just six miles south of the resort strip.

By 1978, the Virginia Beach Innkeepers Association “reluctantly and apprehensively” approved the Atlantic plant. “We consider it a necessary evil.”

The Mid-1970s Show Major Gains

By the mid-1970s, HRSD owned and operated nine treatment plants, 57 pump stations and 259 miles of pipelines. It served an area of 1,695 square miles across 13 municipalities, with a budget topping \$14 million. It had 180,000 accounts serving 750,000 people, with a treatment capacity of 110,000 MGD.

Its ambitious expansion plans called for three new treatment plants, with service to an additional quarter million people. But the construction program also included projects totaling \$26 million for the Army Base system, \$30 million for the Boat Harbor system and \$40 million for the Lamberts Point system.

The largest expenditure, over \$83 million, was slated for the Atlantic system. By the 1976 Bicentennial Year, HRSD’s construction program totaled \$269 million.

Jockeying and a Compromise for Funds

Although \$18 billion had been appropriated under the Clean Water Act, money was not flowing to Hampton Roads as quickly as anticipated. Meanwhile, population growth continued to push plants to their capacity levels earlier than expected. The James River Plant was expanded to 15 MGD in 1976, but capacity again was threatened, making the York River Plant a priority.

With immediate needs on both the Peninsula and South Hampton Roads, against unsteady and uneven funding for Nansemond, a compromise was reached locally. Three million dollars of federal money slated for the York River Plant and \$6 million from the Atlantic Plant was diverted to the Nansemond Plant.

With groundwork and financing largely in place, HRSD would bring three major new treatment facilities online in the next decade, just in time for a new era of explosive growth.

In 1976, HRSD was awarded \$48 million toward construction of three new plants: Nansemond, York River and Atlantic.