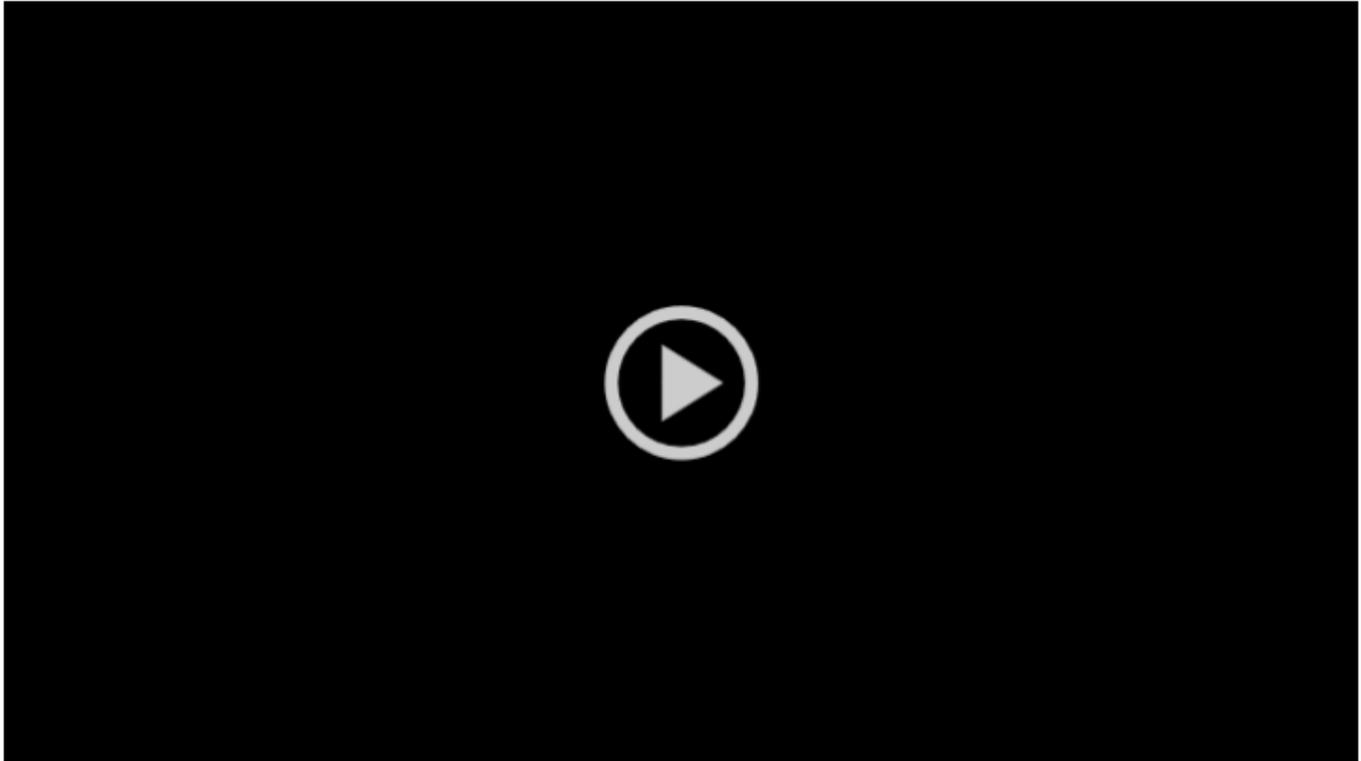


Southeast Community youths learn how to clean the bay during inaugural event



James Beckley of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality leads a demonstration for youths from the Southeast CARE Coalition to teach them about water quality at King-Lincoln Park Friday.



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NEWPORT NEWS — About 20 Southeast Community children, in elementary school through high school, gathered around James Beckley, of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Friday afternoon to look through a tube at water collected from the Hampton Roads harbor at King-Lincoln Park.

"Can you see the black and white disc at the bottom?" Beckley asked.

The children shook their heads to indicate "no."

They couldn't see it because the water had a high level of turbidity, or cloudiness caused by particles in the water.

"If the water is too cloudy, the plants at the bottom can't get enough sunlight to be able to live," Beckley told the children.

Turbidity continues to be one of the Chesapeake Bay's biggest issues, said Daina Henry, board president of the Peninsula chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists.

When sunlight can't get to the plants because of turbidity, it throws off the whole ecosystem, because when the plants die, the smaller fish lose their places to hide, Henry said.

The youths — members of All From One, which partners with the Southeast CARE Coalition environmental group — learned how to test the salt and pH levels of the water, through demonstrations from the DEQ, Virginia Master Naturalists and Hampton Roads Sanitation District.

The activity was part of an inaugural event titled "Fishing with Friends." It was hosted by local and statewide environmental groups at King-Lincoln Park Friday afternoon.



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"We find it really important to educate the young because hopefully they'll do a better job of cleaning up the bay," said Henry. "The bay took a long time to get this bad and it's going to take a long time to get back to where it used to be."

The children also went out in canoes and fished off the pier at King-Lincoln Park — an effort to inspire them to get interested in environmental causes.

"The National Wildlife Foundation sees fishermen, anglers and sportsmen as our first conservationists," said Mariah Davis of the Virginia Conservation Network.

Former Mayor Joe Frank provided the funds for all the children who attended the event to go home with fishing poles, said Angela Harris, youth coordinator for Southeast CARE Coalition.

Marquis Harris, 14, said he plans to fish more since attending the event.

"I like fishing because it's something to get outside of the house and enjoy the environment," Harris said.

Sade' Hunter, 15, a student at Heritage High School, said she learned a lot from the event Friday.

"I learned the ocean can get polluted by throwing in trash and dog poop," she said. "As I'm walking along the beach and I see trash, I will pick it up."

The event wasn't the first time the Southeast CARE Coalition had worked with the DEQ and HRSD to aid water quality issues.

The coalition has a citizen monitoring program, in which three volunteers – Dawud Muhammad, Evelyn Azeem and Raymond Wazeerud-Din – have been testing the water at 13 different sites in the Southeast Community for roughly the last two years, said Erica Holloman, coalition coordinator.

Out of the 13 sites, eight have been consistently high (with E-Coli) over the last two years, said Holloman.

"Before they got involved, we didn't have any volunteers monitoring it," said Beckley. "They've found high levels of E-Coli coming out of the storm drains or creeks that daylight."

The city and HRSD have been accessing the data, Holloman said, in order to fix leaks where they can and to try to identify if it's coming from animals or humans.

"It's a win-win when citizen monitoring can fill in the gaps in the areas where the city may not know about or may not be able to test," said Holloman. "We can help find those hot spots in the community."

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