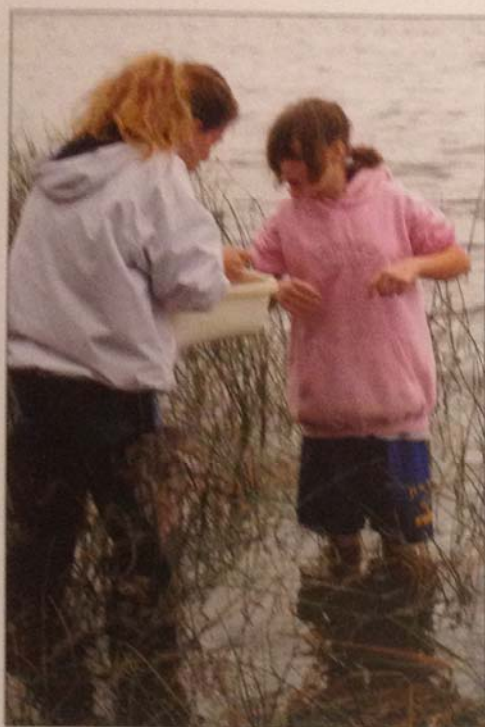




One of the most innovative is the "Coastal GEMS" (Geospatial and Educational Mapping Systems) program. Available to anyone, Coastal GEMS was designed to educate users about the well-being of our coastal resources. Information is broken down into data layers that cover various aspects of the coastal environment, including water, land, and wildlife. Outdoors enthusiasts can refer to Coastal GEMS for information on everything from scenic tours and bird watching to public boat access, and conservation planting ideas are available for anyone ready to lend a green thumb.

Continuing to promote sustainable practices, DEQ has partnered with state organizations to spearhead the Virginia Green initiative. Virginia Green advances stewardship through four tenets: recycling, waste reduction, energy conservation, and water conservation. The "Total Maximum Daily Load" plan (see page 35) is a way for DEQ to protect the health of our waters by restricting the amount of pollutants that can be released into rivers and streams. Public notices, alerts, and RSS feeds are other online tools that DEQ uses to relay environmental information in a timely fashion. When you need to know, drought condition updates, air quality forecasting, and water quality monitoring are just a click away.

DEQ works in concert with Virginia citizens to keep our environment clean and safe, and there are all kinds of ways to help the cause. We all know that carpooling cuts down on harmful emissions and the X Gen has been reciting "Reduce. Reuse. Recycle."

since they could toddle. But Virginians today are taking a much more active role in environmental issues. The citizen water quality monitoring program gives volunteers the opportunity to contribute valuable data to the state by collecting water samples from private ponds and streams (or from nearby public waters) and sending in the results for analysis. The Virginia Master Naturalist program offers participants a rigorous education and the tools necessary to help conserve natural resources, and residents of the Chesapeake Bay coast can participate in reef restoration by growing their own "oyster gardens."

As we move into the 21st century, technological advances make it easier than ever to stay informed. The evolution of the internet into a worldwide network provides an efficient platform for information sharing. And Geographic Information Systems continue to improve—mapping wildlife habitats, providing recreational information, and keeping citizens informed.

Since its inception, DEQ has been working with Virginians to preserve the beautiful state we live in, and those efforts will keep going right into the new century. Your grandchildren deserve to drink clean water. Your children deserve to breathe clean air. And you deserve to know who is seeing to that. When we work together, our environment can only improve; DEQ will be there to make sure that it does. After all...this was only the first 20 years.

This article was contributed by Matt Treacy, who serves as the public information and outreach writer for the Department of Environmental Quality.



**We Are
"People"
People**

Take a walk beside the James River. Breathe in a gust of Afton Mountain air. Gaze over the rolling hills of the Shenandoah Valley. You have to admit...Virginia truly is a beautiful state. Since 1993, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality has paid tribute to that beauty by working to improve our natural environment.

Still, enhancing Virginia's air and water, preserving coastal zones, revitalizing contaminated land, and enforcing state regulations are just part of the job. Looking after Virginia's environment means looking after the people who live in it. After 20 years, DEQ still recognizes the most important environmental truth: Virginia is our home, but Virginians will always be our priority.

Giving citizens the tools to participate in environmental stewardship is paramount to success; today, Virginians can use online resources to communicate and collaborate with DEQ to do so. The Geographic Information System, for example, is an interactive mapping tool designed to inform citizens about agency policy and operations, using a variety of online features.

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Photo courtesy of Beau Beasley