



Bold step forward

First Living River Trust director comes home.

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After fifteen years of unprecedented success in river restoration and land conservation, The Living River Trust (LRT) welcomed its first full time Executive Director June 21. After a competitive national search, the Trust selected Elizabeth (Liz) Friel, a native of the area, to lead the organization.

“The Living River Trust has ambitious goals and with development pressure, time is limited. Liz comes to us with great experience in conservation and urban planning and her unique background lines up very well with LRT’s plans.” said Rob Robins, Chairman of the Living River Trust.

“Our recent achievements and the increased public demand for open space and water access made it clear we needed a dedicated full time professional to ensure LRT’s continued success,” stated Robins. “Liz was the perfect fit. Not only is she coming home but she also brings to this position a wealth of knowledge in conservation and urban planning,” emphasized Robins. Recent accomplishments for LRT include mitigation of the Money Point shoreline, awarded one of the Best Restored Shorelines in the United States, and funding and planning for the Paradise Creek river bottom cleanup kicking off next month. Land conservation efforts have resulted in a new park, Ferry Point Park in Virginia Beach, and 500 acres protected and added to the Dismal Swamp Refuge. Twenty additional conservation easements are pending, and LRT is also working on a pilot program to restore wetlands on frequently flooded wetlands.

The LRT began as part of a 2003 agreement with the Elizabeth River Project and federal and state environmental groups, whereby LRT took on the task of cleaning up polluted areas of the Elizabeth River. LRT is now also working to save the last remaining open spaces left in the region. LRT is at a critical juncture as it grows to accommodate demand for land conservation in the region as well as continuing its mitigation efforts. LRT’s goals also include water quality improvements, public access to water, pioneering protection of small urban waterfront lots, and identifying innovative solutions for neighborhoods threatened with flooding and sea level rise.

Liz was the Executive Director of the Northern Neck Land Conservancy (NNLC) for the past 6 years. Under her leadership NNLC conserved significant new land, obtained substantial grant funds, and grew community outreach and fundraising efforts. Her prior work with the Historic

Virginia Land Conservancy centered on land use, fundraising, and stewardship. One key accomplishment at both organizations was successfully leading the accreditation process with Land Trust Alliance. Liz also serves as a Board of Directors member of the statewide Virginia United Land Trust organization.

Liz had worked previously as a professional urban planner in Virginia for more than twenty years, working most recently as the Planning Director for the City of Falls Church. She headed comprehensive planning, urban forestry, and environmental planning at the city.

Liz spent her childhood in Hampton Roads, growing up in Virginia Beach and Hampton. Liz says that her connection to the environment stems from her family's love of the outdoors; they spent time birdwatching, canoeing, and hiking throughout the Chesapeake Bay region. "Coming home to help protect the environment and conserve the beautiful landscape here is a unique opportunity. The Elizabeth River Project and the Living River Trust are pioneers in environmental protection and I look forward to helping LRT grow to best serve the community and the environment."



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