

# NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Julia Webster  
804.788.1414  
[jwebster@hodgespart.com](mailto:jwebster@hodgespart.com)

## James River Ecology School Planned for Presquile Island

*James River Association announces “Wet Feet” campaign to build a James River Ecology School on Presquile National Wildlife Refuge. Challenge grant awarded by Mary Morton Parsons Foundation.*

**Richmond, Va., Nov. 19, 2010** – Seeking to give school children life-long memories and lessons about the James River – *and get their feet wet* – the James River Association today announced plans to construct an education facility in partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Presquile National Wildlife Refuge, a 1329-acre, uninhabited island in the James River between Richmond and Hopewell.

Nearly \$1 million will be needed to construct the James River Ecology School, funded in part by a \$125,000 challenge grant from the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation.

Plans for the “Wet Feet” campaign include the renovation of an existing ranger house on the island (which will include a kitchen, dining hall, meeting room and staff quarters) as well as the construction of a bunkhouse for up to 30 people, a wetlands walkway, classroom pavilion and canoe launch.

“Our vision for the James River Ecology School is to spark in students a connection and passion for this wonderful river resource that flows through the heart of Virginia,” said Bill Street, executive director of the James River Association, a nonprofit conservation, education and advocacy organization. “As our society, particularly our children, become more detached from the natural world, we want to provide opportunities for our youth to experience the outdoors and learn how to become responsible stewards of their environment.”

As envisioned, the James River Ecology School will introduce thousands of students each year to the wonders of the James River and increase their knowledge

and understanding of environmental issues. Through three-day, two-night visits to Presquile, students will learn about the ecology, wildlife habitat and the river's rich history – all topics consistent with Virginia's Standards of Learning.

JRA has raised \$548,000 of the \$923,000 needed to make the school a reality, including generous grants from the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and numerous other donors.

In announcing federal support of the project, Daryle Lons, Regional Refuge Supervisor for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, said "Environmental Education is a public use priority. The James River Ecology School is an essential component in forwarding our education and conservation goals within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. We are pleased to be part of this unique public-private partnership that is making this a reality. Educating young people about the wonders and benefits of the environment is a critical ingredient toward ensuring that our natural resources are respected and preserved."

JRA hopes to complete the Wet Feet campaign by the Spring of 2011 and complete the school in time to start running trips in the Fall of 2011.

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#### **About the James River Association**

The 340-mile James River runs from its headwaters in the Appalachians into the Chesapeake Bay, making it one of the longest rivers totally contained within one state. Called "America's Founding River" for the role it played in helping provide for the Jamestown settlers, the James River has a rich history, sustains a vibrant and diverse ecosystem and is a source of life and recreation for millions of Virginians.

The James River Association is a nonprofit conservation organization that serves as the primary "voice" of the James River, helping to ensure its health and vitality for more than 30 years.

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