

Hundreds of volunteers walked the high tide lines of coastal Virginia on Sunday as part of the third-annual Catch the King flood-mapping event.

The volunteers gathered more than 36,000 GPS data measurements of one of the coastal area's autumn king tides, bringing the three-year total for Catch the King to roughly 130,000 data points collected. The information is compiled in a database used by scientists to improve models for predicting tidal flooding.

Dr. Derek Loftis, an assistant research scientist at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, calculated preliminarily that roughly 300 people participated in this year's Catch the King, contributing data from more than a dozen localities, from Virginia Beach to the Northern Neck.

Loftis is one of the lead organizers of Catch the King, along with Skip Stiles, executive director of Wetlands Watch, and Dave Mayfield, a former environmental reporter for The Virginian-Pilot who conceived the project. Catch the King was recognized earlier this year by Guinness as the world's largest environmental survey.

Loftis noted that the high tide measured on Sunday was generally lower than the one measured in the 2018 and 2017 events, and said weather factors were the reason. Brisk winds from the south around the time of Sunday's tide played a part, he said. In addition, he explained that the strong Gulf Stream ocean currents were running farther from the Virginia Eastern Shore than normal.

Nevertheless, Loftis said, "the data our volunteers collected helped verify the degree of relevance and importance those atmospheric factors (coupled with astronomical factors) have on predicting the floods of tomorrow and beyond."

Catch the King's volunteer coordinator, Qaren Jacklich, said she was pleased with Sunday's turnout and encouraged those who participated to stay on with the project as it expands into a year-round tide-monitoring effort.

Dozens of Catch the King volunteers are now routinely mapping flooding tides. Catch the King's organizers aim to have at least six year-round teams in operation within the next few months. They're also developing plans to offer immersive, team-building tide-mapping programs for employers and membership organizations interested in learning more about coastal flooding and sea level rise.

Catch the King was sponsored this year by the Hampton Roads Sanitation District and AECOM, an international engineering firm. Catch the King's lead media and education partner is WHRO Public Media, which offers specially designed environmental science curricula to its 19 member school divisions.

The data map for Sunday's Catch the King tidal inundation event can be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/CatchTheKing2019>. More information about Catch the King is available at whro.org/kingtide or on Facebook under Catch the King.

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