



Chesapeake Bay

CHESAPEAKE AT A GLANCE

Big

The Chesapeake is the largest of more than 100 estuaries in the United States and third largest in the world. The Bay and its tidal tributaries have 11,684 miles of shoreline—more than the entire U.S. west coast.

The Chesapeake's headwaters begin as far north as Cooperstown, New York, and west to Blacksburg, Virginia. The Bay's watershed stretches over an enormous area of 64,000 square miles, crossing through six states and the District of Columbia. The Bay itself extends nearly 200 miles north to south and 30 miles at its widest point.

It spans a gradient of aquatic habitats, from freshwater at the Susquehanna River to brackish water to saltwater at the mouth of the Bay in Virginia. The Susquehanna River, the longest river on the East Coast, supplies 55% of the freshwater that flows into the Chesapeake Bay. According to the Chesapeake Bay Program, there are 150 major rivers and streams and more than 100,000 smaller tributaries. The Chesapeake Bay holds more than 18 trillion gallons of water.

Bountiful

There is an abundance of life found in the Chesapeake Bay and its waters, making it one of the most productive ecosystems in the world. The Bay's iconic species include the blue crab, oysters, striped bass, menhaden, sturgeon, ospreys, bald eagles, blue herons, and there's so much more wildlife to be found here. There are more than 3,600 species of plants and animals, including 348 species of finfish, 173 species of shellfish, and more than 2,700 plant species.

The Bay is also an economic driver for the region, and outdoor recreation in Chesapeake Bay states generates tens of billions of dollars each year.

The Chesapeake Bay Program reports that the Bay produces about 500 million pounds of seafood per year. Since 1990, commercial watermen have harvested more than 1.6 billion pounds of blue crabs from the Bay, although the commercial harvest has experienced a steady decline.

Diverse

According to the Chesapeake Bay Program, the Chesapeake Bay watershed contains three distinct geologic regions: the Atlantic coastal plain, the Piedmont plateau and the Appalachian province. The Chesapeake Bay and the lands and waters that make up its watershed provide diverse ecosystems for the variety of life found here: forests, wetlands and marshes, rivers and streams, beaches and tidal flats, aquatic reefs, open and shallow water.

There is also great diversity in the people and cultures, which have shaped the communities of the Chesapeake Bay. The watershed is home to 18 million people, with about 150,000 new people moving there each year.

This diversity of habitats, cultures and experiences offers endless opportunities for Chesapeake discovery and enjoyment.



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Third largest estuary in the world

11,684 miles of shoreline

18 million people

3,600 species of plants and animals environmental stewardship

