

CHESAPEAKE BAY FACTS

(www.livingclassrooms.org/shipboard/pages/students/cbay/facts.html)

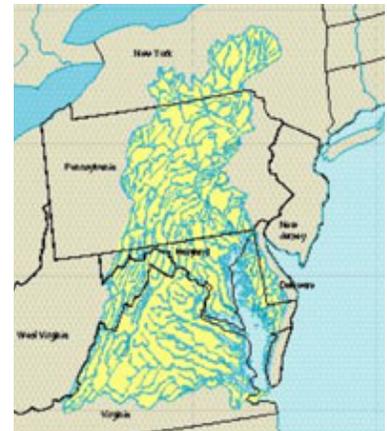
The Bay

- The Chesapeake Bay is an estuary, a body of water where fresh and salt water mix. It is the largest of 130 estuaries in the United States.
- Formed about 12,000 years ago as glaciers melted and flooded the Susquehanna River valley, the Chesapeake Bay is North America's largest estuary and the world's third largest.
- The Bay is about 200 miles long, stretching from Havre de Grace, Maryland, to Virginia Beach, Virginia.
- The Bay's width ranges from 3.4 miles near Aberdeen, Maryland, to 35 miles near the mouth of the Potomac River.
- The Bay holds more than 15 trillion gallons of water.
- The Bay is surprisingly shallow. Its average depth, including all tidal tributaries, is about 21 feet. A person who is 6 feet tall could wade through over 700,000 acres of the Bay and never get his or her hat wet.
- A few deep troughs running along much of the Bay's length reach up to 174 feet in depth. These troughs are believed to be remnants of the ancient Susquehanna River.
- Two of the five major North Atlantic ports in the United States—Baltimore and Norfolk/Hampton Roads—are on the Bay.
- The Bay and its tidal tributaries have around 11,684 miles of shoreline—more than the entire U.S. West Coast.
- The surface area of the Bay and its tidal tributaries is 125 billion square feet, or around 4,480 square miles.
- The Bay supports more than 3,600 species of plants, fish and animals, including 348 species of finfish, 173 species of shellfish and over 2,700 plant species.
- The Chesapeake is home to 29 species of waterfowl and is a major resting ground along the Atlantic Flyway. Every year, one million waterfowl winter in the Bay region.
- The Chesapeake is a commercial and recreational resource for the more than 16 million people who live in its watershed.
- The Bay produces about 500 million pounds of seafood per year.
- "Chesapeake" derives from the Native American "Tschiswapeki," which loosely translates into "great shellfish bay."



The Bay Watershed

- The Bay receives about half its water volume from the Atlantic Ocean. The rest drains into the Bay from an enormous 64,000-square-mile watershed.
- The Chesapeake Bay watershed includes parts of six states—Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia—and the entire District of Columbia.
- The Susquehanna River provides about 50 percent of the fresh water coming into the Bay—an average of 19 million gallons of water per minute.
- The Bay watershed is home to more than 16.6 million people. About 170,000 new people move into the Bay watershed each year.
- There are about 150 major rivers and streams in the Bay watershed.
- Everyone in the watershed lives just a few minutes from one of the more than 100,000 streams and rivers that drain into the Bay. Each of these tributaries can be considered a pipeline from communities to the Bay.
- Water also enters the Bay through underground waterways. Water that does not drain into streams and rivers instead seeps into the soil and becomes part of the groundwater system that leads into the Bay.



Bay Restoration

- The Chesapeake Bay was the first estuary in the nation to be targeted for restoration as an integrated watershed and ecosystem.
- Everything we do on the land—including the use of automobiles, fertilizers, pesticides, toilets, water and electricity—affects our streams, rivers and the Bay.
- To restore the Bay, everyone has to make changes in the way we live in our own communities, homes and backyards.
- The leading threat to the health of the Chesapeake Bay is excess nitrogen and phosphorus pollution that destroys habitat and causes fish kills. Top sources of these pollutants include agriculture, sewage treatment plants, runoff from urban and suburban areas, and air pollution from automobiles, factories, and power plants. Other threats to the Bay's health include sprawl, toxic pollution, and poor fishery management.
- Since colonial times, the Bay has lost half of its forested shorelines, over half of its wetlands, nearly 90 percent of its underwater grasses, and more than 99 percent of its oysters. During the 350 years between 1600 and 1950, approximately 1.7 million acres of the Bay watershed were developed. During the 30 years between 1950 and 1980, the Bay watershed lost an additional 2.7 million acres to development.
- The landmark Chesapeake Bay Agreement (a voluntary pledge to Save the Bay signed by the governors of Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania as well as the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and the mayor of Washington, D.C.) serves as the blueprint for restoring the Bay's health.

