

Your Bay, Your Watershed

PATHWAYS TO THE BAY: THE CHESAPEAKE WATERSHED

All of us who live in the Chesapeake Bay watershed are linked to the Bay by many pathways. Whether we live right on the water or miles from the Chesapeake, our actions have a profound effect on the Bay.

Everything that goes on in the Chesapeake watershed will eventually affect the bay. Used oil dumped down a storm drain in Baltimore, pesticides from a Pennsylvania farm, sewage from an old septic tank in Virginia, or sediment from an Eastern Shore construction project, all end up in the Bay. So even those of us who live far from the Bay itself need to see how our actions affect it. We all can help the Chesapeake by cleaning up the pathways to the Bay.

The Chesapeake Bay watershed is the land area drained by the Bay. The Bay's watershed is made up of the thousands of smaller watersheds drained by the streams that crisscross our land and flow, by way of our rivers, into the Chesapeake.

The Bay watershed extends 64,000 square miles. Home to 13.6 million people, it includes the District of Columbia and parts of six states: New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, and West Virginia.

IN OUR CITIES AND TOWNS

Cities and towns place a tremendous strain on the Chesapeake Bay. Oil and grit from our roadways, litter on our streets, and runoff from construction projects all find their way from our cities and towns into the Chesapeake Bay. Storm drains are a pathway to the Bay. Pollutants from storm drains reach the Bay by way of local streams and rivers.

Wastewater treatment plants are a pathway to the Bay. They cleanse the water we have used before releasing it back into our waterways. These plants remove pollutants such as solids, oil, grease, and in some cases, nitrogen and phosphorus from the water they receive.

IN BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

As consumers, we've come to rely on power plants, industries and businesses for services and products that make our lives more comfortable. But providing each of these amenities exacts an environmental cost, and with it, responsibility for controlling the effects of our choices on the environment.

In Maryland alone, some 10,000 businesses pretreat their wastewater before releasing it to local wastewater plants. Another 600 industries are working to do their part by controlling the pollutants they discharge directly into our streams and rivers.

ON THE FARM

With more than 2.7 million acres of farmland in Maryland, farmers play an important role in protecting the Bay. Farm runoff containing fertilizers, pesticides, or animal waste can harm the Bay.

Farmers help the Bay by implementing soil conservation and water quality measures. Best management practices give farmers ways to control soil loss and runoff from their farms. These include contour farming, vegetated filter strips, and animal waste practices. Effective use of these practices helps protect groundwater and surface water from pollution.

AT HOME

In Maryland alone there are over one and one half million households, and millions more throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Whether you live in a house or an apartment, the choices you make every day affect the Bay. Toxics, cleansers, fertilizers, and pet wastes are a few of the pollutants from our homes that put the Bay at risk.

Careful water use, wise selection of household products, and sensible handling of household wastes including recycling are some of the ways individuals are helping to clean the pathways to the Bay.

The Chesapeake Bay And Its Watershed

Length

185 miles. 123 miles within Maryland

Width

Narrowest Point: 4 miles, near Annapolis Widest Point: 30 miles, at Point Lookout

Average Depth

21 feet

Water Surface Area

3,227 square miles. 1,726 in Maryland

Volume of Water

18 trillion gallons

Freshwater Facts

50 percent of freshwater flow from the Susquehanna

40 percent from the other western shore tributaries

10 percent from eastern shore rivers

Watershed Area

64,000 square miles. From Cooperstown, New York to Lynchburg, Virginia

Watershed Jurisdictions

New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, District of Columbia, Delaware, Virginia and West Virginia

Watershed Population

13.6 million people

Population Density

Over 200 people per square mile

Ratio of Land to Water

15 parts land to 1 part water. The same ratio for the Great Lakes watershed is 2 to 1.

This means that the Chesapeake must process much more land-based pollution than do other bodies of water.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

A healthy Bay begins with you. Here are some things you can do that will help the Bay.

Conserve Water

- Fix leaking faucets.
- Take short showers.
- Don't let water run while washing dishes or brushing teeth.

Save Energy

- Turn off lights, TV, and stereo when leaving a room.
- Minimize trips to your refrigerator especially in summer.
- Insulate your home and your hot-water heater.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Reject

REDUCE waste. Avoid disposable items. Pass along used items such as magazines, housewares, furniture, or clothing that may be useful to others.

REUSE what you can. Grocery bags, aluminum containers, and plastic bottles can be reused. Yard wastes and kitchen scrap except for meat products can be composted.

RECYCLE. Call 1-800-I RECYCLE for the number of your local recycling coordinator.

REJECT. Don't buy overpackaged or non-recyclable goods.

Protect Your Watershed

- Avoid overuse of chemical fertilizers.
- Plant trees, bushes, grass, and groundcover on your property to minimize runoff.
- Be a pooper-scooper. Protect your stream from the nutrient pollution caused by pet wastes.

Beware of toxics in the Home Use Alternatives

- Use alternatives to heavy duty toxics for household chores.
- Dispose of toxic household wastes properly.
- Recycle oil and other automotive fluids. Call 1-800-492-9188 for the location of your nearest oil recycling depot.