



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION
Save the Bay

habitat

pollution

State of the Bay 2001

people

fisheries



State of the Bay 2001



Poor Water Quality Inhibits Chesapeake Bay Improvements in 2001

CBF Staff

“How’s the Chesapeake Bay doing?” It’s a question we are frequently asked. Our answer is that the Bay remains a system dangerously out of balance. The Chesapeake operates at barely more than one-fourth of its potential because water pollution primarily from excess nitrogen and phosphorus inhibits overall improvements to the system.

In the past year, continued poor water quality, the accelerating rate of land development, and threats to the Bay’s crab population contributed to an overall decline in the health of the Chesapeake Bay. Shad and forested buffers showed slight improvements. But on a scale of 0 to 100, the Bay’s health rates a 27, one point less than it scored in CBF’s 2000 State of the Bay Report.

Water pollution from excess nitrogen and phosphorus inhibits overall improvements to the Bay’s system.

“The State of the Bay Report illustrates how interconnected the Bay’s components are,” says CBF President William C. Baker. “Unless we dramatically reduce nutrient and sediment pollution, additional gains in underwater grasses will be impossible. Restoring underwater grasses by improving water quality is critical to bringing back the Bay’s blue crab population.”

How we create our report

The health of the Chesapeake relies on intricate natural systems that filter water and provide habitat for diverse and abundant life. CBF scientists measure its health by observing key components of these systems. They examine the best available historical and current information for factors in three categories: pollution, habitat, and fish and shellfish. Although they seek advice from other Bay scientists, ultimately the best professional judgment of CBF scientists determines the value assigned each factor.

The Bay we know today is measured against the healthiest Chesapeake we can describe—the rich and balanced Bay that Captain John Smith recounted in his exploration narratives of the early 1600s. Smith explored the Chesapeake when clear water revealed meadows of underwater grasses,

prodigious oyster reefs that posed a threat to navigation, and abundant fish. Modern science confirms many of Smith's observations. Smith's Bay rates 100 and is our benchmark.

A blueprint for Bay improvement

When CBF first asked the citizens of the watershed to help save the Bay more than 35 years ago, our estuary was in trouble. Even as we worked to make improvements, the Bay's health declined, bottoming out in 1983 with a rating of 23. The work of public agencies, private groups, and tens of thousands of volunteers has improved the system slightly since then. But progress is far too slow. If the Bay is to be removed from the Environmental Protection Agency's list of impaired waters by the year 2010, dramatic action must be taken to reduce the nutrients that pollute the Chesapeake. *The Chesapeake Bay Foundation's immediate top priority is to help the Bay achieve a score of 40 by 2010.*

Chesapeake 2000, the new Chesapeake Bay Agreement signed in June 1999, provides a strong blueprint to raise the Bay's score significantly over the next two decades. CBF is building a diverse coalition and working with federal, state, and local officials to secure \$8.5 billion in federal, state, and local funding to implement the agreement. As this report demonstrates, real Bay-saving progress occurs slowly. But if Bay states and the public unite to turn the agreement's promises into action, the Bay's health has the potential to improve dramatically.

The State of the Bay Report provides a reference for how far we have fallen from Smith's Bay and how far we must go to reach a "saved" Bay. A saved Bay is resilient enough to withstand the storms of nature and of humankind, and it is rich enough to nurture diverse cultures and contribute abundantly to our economy. We will never again see the Chesapeake restored to its pristine state of four centuries ago, but we believe a Bay with an index of 70 is achievable by 2050. We must remember how rich our Chesapeake Bay was, even 40 years ago, and not settle for a small fraction of what we know it can be.



CBF Staff

State of the Bay 2001

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AVERAGE

27



Habitat



WETLANDS 42 [no change from 2000]

Despite a new law and regulations governing wetlands in Virginia, losses continue to occur, offsetting promising gains from increasingly widespread restoration projects.

OBSERVATIONS: Virginia's regulations implementing its state law governing nontidal wetlands went fully into effect in October 2001. Nevertheless, local court decisions have allowed continued destruction of wetlands despite the new state law, and large projects such as the King William reservoir threaten hundreds of additional acres. Restoration efforts, such as CBF's partnership with Ducks Unlimited, have begun to show success, supported by federal and state funding. Because wetlands so effectively reduce nutrient loads to the watershed, restoration efforts must be increased in the next decade.



FORESTED BUFFERS 54 [+1 from 2000]

CBF estimates that riparian forests buffer 54 percent of the watershed's 110,000 miles of streams and shorelines.

OBSERVATIONS: More than 1,000 miles of streamside buffers have been restored throughout the watershed through programs such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. Maryland announced that it has already reached its initial 2010 buffer goal and Pennsylvania has devoted significant funding for restoration efforts. The extent of buffers lost to development, however, remains unknown and of concern. The Chesapeake Bay Program leadership needs to set aggressive new goals for 2010, and sound restoration programs must be coupled with strong Smart Growth programs to achieve a significant increase in the forested buffers index.



UNDERWATER GRASSES 12 [no change from 2000]

Again this year, underwater grasses showed no substantial improvement Bay-wide, with increases in some areas and declines in others. Underwater grasses remain at 12 percent of their historic levels and below their recent peak in 1994.

OBSERVATIONS: After increases in grasses in the late 1980s and early 1990s, overall underwater grass acreage appears to have leveled off recently. Grasses in Tangier Sound and the upper Bay continue to do well, while areas in the mid-Bay region are recovering from last year's large declines. Unless we dramatically reduce nutrient and sediment pollution, additional gains in underwater grasses will be impossible. Restoring underwater grasses by improving water quality is critical to bringing back the Bay's blue crab population.



RESOURCE LANDS 30 [-3 from 2000]

Recent government estimates, although not universally accepted as accurate, indicate that the annual rate of open land loss in the watershed has increased substantially beyond the 90,000 acres estimated by CBF in past reports. Although the USDA estimates the loss at 128,000 acres, CBF believes it is probably less. Due to the lack of consensus, we have reduced the index only slightly.

OBSERVATIONS: Recent estimates suggest that the loss of resource lands in the watershed is accelerating at the fastest rate in history. Consequently, land that used to filter pollution is now funneling it into waterways and the Bay. In the Chesapeake 2000 agreement signed last year, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia agreed to reduce the annual loss of forest and farmland to harmful sprawl by 30 percent by 2012. Programs to accomplish this goal, and to permanently preserve 20 percent of the watershed from development by 2010, need to be given the prominence that this threat to the Bay's health warrants.

Pollution

TOXICS **30** **[no change from 2000]**

Despite encouraging actions, including a strong new permit reducing toxic pollution from the Bethlehem Steel plant in Baltimore, a large amount of toxic materials continue to enter the Bay watershed. Therefore, CBF's index remains at 30, which indicates a degraded Bay.

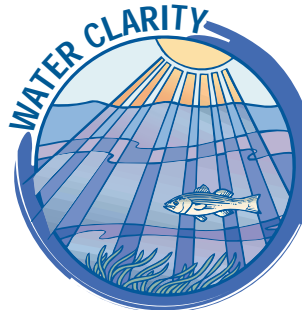
OBSERVATIONS: Harmful toxic chemicals continue to flow into our waterways through stormwater drains and industrial discharge pipes. The groundwork for improvement has been laid by the Chesapeake 2000 agreement, but implementation is proceeding slowly. The commitments in the agreement must be taken seriously by government and industry if the ultimate goal of a toxics-free Bay is ever to be met.



WATER CLARITY **15** **[no change from 2000]**

Water clarity remains seriously degraded. New U.S. EPA analyses of status and trends in the Bay and its tributaries show widespread poor water clarity—with many of the major tributaries still getting worse.

OBSERVATIONS: Without clear water, sunlight cannot penetrate strongly enough to the Bay's bottom and give underwater grasses the energy they need to grow. Without progress in the area of water clarity, it is no surprise that underwater grasses have not increased. Reductions in nitrogen and phosphorus pollution, as well as sediment pollution, are vital to improve water clarity.



PHOSPHORUS 15 NITROGEN 15 **[no change from 2000]**

In a year of average rainfall, nitrogen and phosphorus pollution remained at the high levels of the recent past, with the resulting algae blooms and fish kills occurring at what has become "typical" levels. Monitoring data continue to show no significant improvements in the Bay's nutrient levels.

OBSERVATIONS: A cornerstone of the landmark Chesapeake Bay agreement of 1987 was a commitment to reduce nutrients by 40 percent—a goal that was not met. New estimates from the EPA indicate that nutrients must be reduced by roughly 50 percent from today's levels if we are to reach our 2010 goals for water clarity, dissolved oxygen, and underwater grasses. Finding the political will and resources to achieve these reductions is the single biggest challenge facing the region at this time.





DISSOLVED OXYGEN 15 [no change from 2000]

The Bay's "dead zone," although not as large and notorious as that in the Gulf of Mexico, was evident again this year and does not appear to have shrunk. Fish kills from low oxygen levels occurred in "typical" numbers.

OBSERVATIONS: There has been no improvement in the watershed's average dissolved oxygen levels. Fish kills, an obvious result of low oxygen levels, occurred in a number of areas this year, indicating the widespread nature of the problem. Reductions in nitrogen and phosphorus pollution from all sources are absolutely essential to restoring adequate oxygen levels.

Fisheries



CRABS 42 [-4 from 2000]

An increasing amount of scientific information, as well as another year of extremely low harvests, indicates that the crab population is in even more trouble than previously thought, leading to a four-point decrease in the score for 2001. Intense fishing pressure and extremely low levels of underwater grasses, especially in areas critical to the crab's life cycle, continue to depress the abundance of crabs.

OBSERVATIONS: Poor habitat and excessive effort by recreational and commercial crabbers continue to depress the blue crab population, resulting in yet another year with extremely few crabs. In the long run, a healthy Bay crab population depends on the restoration of underwater grasses and a reduction in crabbing pressure. Efforts led by the Bi-State Blue Crab Advisory Committee are underway to reduce fishing pressure significantly over a three-year period, but it is too soon to evaluate their effectiveness.



ROCKFISH 75 [no change from 2000]

A vibrant Chesapeake Bay fishery is offset by continuing concerns that there are too few large, old fish. In addition, it is increasingly apparent that the population is kept down by limited abundance of its food supply, particularly menhaden.

OBSERVATIONS: Rockfish numbers in the Bay continue to be high, but the population still lacks sufficient numbers of large, old fish. In addition, concerns persist that the Bay's food web is out of balance, with too few menhaden and other small fish available for the rockfish to eat. While the coastal management plan for rockfish needs to build the numbers of older fish and maintain overall abundance, fisheries managers need to focus even greater attention on managing the species on which rockfish depend.



OYSTERS 2 [no change from 2000]

Restoration efforts continued to move forward this past year, but population levels are still exceedingly low by historic perspectives, keeping the index at two.

OBSERVATIONS: Although the rating for oysters did not change, last year held many positive developments for this keystone species. Spurred by the Chesapeake 2000 commitment to increase oyster populations tenfold by 2010, significant additional funding was secured from federal, state, and private sources. Major new sanctuary reef projects are underway and more

citizens than ever are committed to growing oysters and returning them to reefs. In addition, CBF started its own oyster aquaculture operation in Virginia, which is raising more than one million oysters each year to help jump-start the state's reef construction program.

SHAD

6

[+1 from 2000]

Record shad numbers returning to the Susquehanna River, as well as strong runs in other systems, are responsible for the increase this year. Still, the Bay's shad population remains at only a fraction of its pre-colonial level.

OBSERVATIONS: In the spring of 2001, shad and other anadromous fish migrated up the Susquehanna River to spawning grounds in record numbers. The opening of the new fish ladder at the York Haven Dam in 2000 means that hundreds of miles of Susquehanna spawning habitat are available for the first time in over 100 years. We must ensure that the five-year plan to phase out the ocean fishery is implemented effectively so that the population continues to have the opportunity to grow.



People



David W. Harp

FUTURE BAY STEWARDS

The watershed's residents will ultimately decide the future of the Chesapeake Bay. CBF's outdoor field education program reaches more than 35,000 elementary, middle, and high school students and teachers each year by highlighting local natural resources. In addition, our *Chesapeake Choices and Challenges* middle-school curriculum reaches 200,000 students in classrooms throughout the Bay watershed. The result is an informed and inspired constituency that values the Bay and its watershed as a living, connected system.



Shannon Bishop

BAYSAVERS

Adult citizens also play a key role in ensuring that we leave a healthy Bay for our children. For ways that you can help, see page 13.



The Land's Effect on the Bay: What is a Watershed, Anyway?

Saving the Bay involves looking well beyond the shorelines, to all the land that drains to the Chesapeake. What happens on that land is crucial to the Bay's future. The Bay's drainage basin, or watershed, covers 64,000 square miles, the largest on the eastern seaboard. The District of Columbia and parts of six states drain to the Bay: New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia.

All this land drains into a surprisingly small amount of water. The average depth of the Chesapeake Bay is only 21 feet. If the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed were reduced to the size of a football field, the depth of the water would on average be the thickness of three dimes. What happens in the watershed, even hundreds of miles from the Bay, has a significant impact on the Bay itself.

The bottom line is that pollution from an enormous amount of land drains into the Chesapeake, and the Bay has a relatively small amount of water to absorb that pollution.

If the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed were reduced to the size of a football field, the depth of the water would on average be the thickness of three dimes.



David W. Harp



Yuri Huta



David W. Harp



Geoff Oxnam



Dirty Words We All Need to Know: A Chesapeake Bay Pollution Glossary

***Since when are nutrients
something we want to avoid?***

***And how do cars and sewage
treatment plants affect the Bay?***

***CBF hopes this glossary will
help readers understand the
varied types and sources of
Bay pollution.***



CBF Staff

Nutrients: Nitrogen and phosphorus are good things in that they support the bottom of the food chain. But the Chesapeake is getting too much of a good thing, to the point where excess nutrients represent the Bay's top pollution problem. Excess nutrients create large blooms of microscopic plants called phytoplankton, or algae, which cut off light to underwater grasses. These grasses are critical to the Bay because they provide habitat and filter the water. But pollution has reduced these grasses to only 12 percent of historic levels. A second problem occurs when this algae dies and decomposes. The decomposition process removes dissolved oxygen from the water, turning large sections of the Bay into dead zones where nothing can survive.

Toxic substances: These include heavy metals like mercury, cadmium, copper, lead, zinc; they also include pesticides, dioxins, polychlorinated biphenols (PCBs), polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and many other chemicals. By definition, toxic substances are poisonous to humans and other living things and can cause a wide range of health effects.

Sediments: Erosion results in massive amounts of soil entering the Bay. This sediment destroys habitat, clouds the water, and suffocates finfish and shellfish.

Point-source discharges: Sewage treatment plants, industrial facilities, and food production and processing facilities discharge nutrient- and toxic-laden wastes, often through pipes, directly into the water. Many point-source dischargers have made progress in reducing the amounts of pollution they dump into the water, but far too many nutrients and toxics continue to enter the Bay from this source.

Stormwater runoff: When rain falls on hardened (impervious) surfaces in urban and suburban areas, it flushes off the land at a much faster rate and in much greater volumes than rain falling in a forest or wetland. As it flows, gathering speed and volume, stormwater collects fertilizers, animal wastes, soil, pesticides, and countless other pollutants and carries them into the Bay. Polluted stormwater runoff has become a much bigger problem as land around the Bay has changed from the natural filters of forests and wetlands to the funnels of poorly managed farmland, construction sites, city streets, suburban communities, and other hardened surfaces.

Air pollution: Nitrogen and phosphorus, as well as acid rain and other toxics, continually drop from the skies over Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. Mobile sources of air pollution like cars, trucks, boats, and lawn mowers produce millions of tons of pollution in the Bay region each year. Stationary sources, such as power plants and factories, some hundreds or even thousands of miles from the Bay, do the same. Pumped into the air, these various pollutants eventually settle out directly into the Bay or on land where stormwater eventually flushes them into the Bay.

Groundwater: A significant amount of subsurface water, equivalent to the flow of a major river, reaches the Bay each year. This water is often contaminated by pollutants from leaking landfills, malfunctioning septic systems, and heavily fertilized cropland.



David Owen Hawxhurst

Forests, wetlands, underwater grasses, and oysters all provide important habitat for numerous Bay creatures. At the same time, they are invaluable filters, cleansing the Bay of the nutrients, toxics, and sediments generated by human activities.

Unfortunately, at a time when human population in the watershed is growing and creating more and more pollution that damages the Bay, we are removing the very filters that can help absorb significant amounts of pollution and prevent them from harming the Bay.

Wasteful land use practices, including sprawl development patterns and poorly managed farming lands, have turned the filters of forests and wetlands into the funnels of roads, city streets, extensive parking lots, intensively farmed and eroding fields, construction sites, farm fields, scattered large-lot development, and suburban lawns. Combined with discharges from pipes, this runoff from the land has polluted the water and destroyed hundreds of thousands of acres of underwater grasses. Overharvesting, pollution, and recent diseases have wiped out nearly all the Bay's oysters. In sum, the Bay watershed has lost half its forests, 60 percent of its wetlands, almost 90 percent of its underwater grasses, and nearly 98 percent of its oysters. The result is that we have stripped the Bay of its natural habitats on the land and in the water, as well as stripping it of its ability to filter out pollution.

CBF is actively working to restore the Bay's filters. Last year our volunteer Oyster Corps planted more than 2 million oysters on sanctuary reefs, and working with partners we completed 326 habitat restoration projects within the Bay watershed, including 1,175 acres of wetlands and upland buffers and 121 miles of riparian buffers. And in 2001 through our innovative "Bay Grasses in Classes" and "Bay Grasses for the Masses" programs, volunteers grew and planted 40,000 underwater grass plants in the Bay.

Habitat & Resilience: How the Bay Can Filter Pollution, Naturally



David W. Harp





Improving the Bay's score to 40 by 2010 would remove the Chesapeake from the "impaired waters list" and provide tremendous benefits to the plants, animals, and humans that depend on the Bay.

40 by 2010: The Pursuit of an "Unimpaired" Bay

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency currently lists the Chesapeake Bay among the nation's "impaired waters" because of nutrient pollution problems that compromise the entire Bay ecosystem. In 2000, the Chesapeake Bay Program partners signed a new guiding agreement called Chesapeake 2000, which set as a primary goal reducing nitrogen and phosphorus pollution so that in 2010 the Bay would be healthy enough to once again support a broad range of species. Reaching those goals would remove the Bay from the "impaired waters" list. It would also raise the State of the Bay score to 40 by 2010 and provide tremendous benefits to the plants, animals, and humans that depend on the Bay.

According to Chesapeake 2000, the critical path to these improvements requires us to reach several land protection and water quality objectives. Specific water quality actions may include sewage treatment plant upgrades to drastically reduce nitrogen and phosphorus pollution and a variety of initiatives to reduce pollution from agricultural and urban runoff.

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation is working with other Bay leaders to develop strategies to achieve the ambitious goals outlined by Chesapeake 2000. The price is substantial: CBF estimates that we will have to convince members of Congress, governors, and Bay state legislators, local governments, and private organizations to appropriate at least \$8.5 billion for specific land preservation and pollution abatement programs over the next decade. To build support for these programs, all watershed citizens, and, indeed, all Americans who value the Chesapeake as an estuary of global significance, will need to rally around this effort. The campaign is a massive undertaking, but no less than the Bay's future is at stake.



How You Can Help

- 1 Commit to drive at least 10 percent less. Car pool, take public transit, walk, or ride your bike to reduce traffic congestion, air pollution, and pressure for new roads. If you are buying a new car, consider a hybrid vehicle that significantly reduces pollution from auto emissions.
- 2 Make your voice heard by joining CBF's Chesapeake Bay Action Network, which links thousands of citizens, by e-mail, to elected officials whose decisions impact the Bay's health. Join the network on CBF's website at savethebay.cbf.org.
- 3 Participate in CBF's hands-on restoration efforts to increase oyster population, restore wetlands and riparian buffers, and grow more under-water grasses.
- 4 Become a CBF member and support our watershed-wide efforts to protect and restore the Bay.



David W. Harp



CBF Staff



Bill Goldsborough

Together, we can help the Bay reach a score of 40 by 2010 and put it on a path toward truly being "saved."



Help CBF Turn a Slogan into Reality

CBF is motivated by the vision of a vital Bay that nurtures our culture and our economy and provides breathtaking examples of nature. With your help, we can and will Save the Bay.

Save the Bay. For all of us at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, it's more than a slogan. It's our mission and an objective that we know can be achieved.

But as our State of the Bay Report shows, the challenge that lies ahead is daunting. The Bay is a complex tapestry of life, and for too many years, threads have been pulled from it. Today's Bay has only a small fraction of its historic levels of oysters, about 12 percent of its underwater grasses, 40 percent of its wetlands, and 50 percent of its woods. These oysters, grasses, wetlands, and forests are the Bay's natural filters. When they become diminished, we are left with poor water quality—and a tapestry that continues to unravel.

CBF is helping to restore the tapestry that is the Bay through a series of interconnecting initiatives. The students who canoe through marshes with our educators grow into oyster gardeners, scientists, Bay advocates, and caring citizens. Our work to promote "smart growth" improves water quality for Bay species, protects green spaces, and reduces the flow of pollution to the Bay. Oysters raised by volunteers replenish reefs created by our scientists and partners.

We hope this report reminds you of the important role that you can play in saving the Bay. Maybe it will motivate you to drive less, or to use water more efficiently, or to call your legislators to support Bay initiatives. And, of course, we hope you'll also decide to become a CBF member. You'll be joining a group that is motivated by the vision of a vital Bay that nurtures our culture and our economy and provides breathtaking examples of nature. With your help, we can and will Save the Bay.

Please join CBF today and help turn the tide in favor of a healthy, saved Bay. Use the postage-paid envelope enclosed with this report and join the ranks of dedicated members. Together we can Save the Bay.



Geoff Oxnam

More than 93,000 CBF members are working to pass on a better, healthier Bay watershed to future generations. Won't you join us?

Just as the simple act of planting a tree can filter pollutants and prevent erosion, simply joining the Chesapeake Bay Foundation can make a real difference. Your \$25 membership is enough to help us plant underwater grasses on one square meter of the Bay's bottom. That's enough to shelter dozens of baby blue crabs! A \$50 membership is enough to grow and transplant 1,000 oysters onto sanctuary reefs. A gift of \$100 provides a day's learning for four students on one of our "Floating Classrooms."

**When you join CBF,
you'll get everything you need to play
a role in saving the Bay.**

- CBF's quarterly newsletter, *Save the Bay*, featuring critical Bay information.
- 20 percent discount on "Bay Discovery" field trips.
- Opportunities to volunteer and participate in hands-on projects.
- FREE "Save the Bay" bumper sticker.
- A chance to sign up for our online advocacy network and influence our leaders and elected officials.
- CBF's "Year-In-Review" Update.

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- Yes! I want to join CBF and help Save the Bay.
Please accept my tax deductible membership contribution.
- I want to volunteer for CBF restoration projects!
Please send me information about events in my area.
- I want to receive e-mail action alerts (e-mail address listed at right)
about important Bay legislation. Please sign me up for CBF's action network.

Account Number _____ Exp. Date _____

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Make our Bay a little bit better. Join the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.



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ACQ-SOTB-LMUN

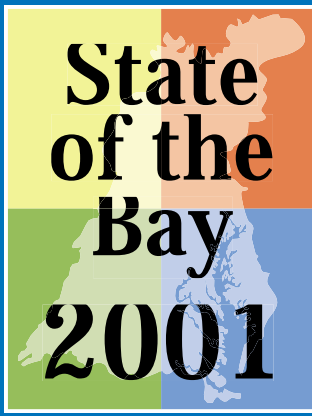
My check is enclosed:

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A copy of our financial statement is available to Maryland residents through the State (Charitable Division, State House, Annapolis, MD 21401; 410-974-5534), or to Virginia residents through the division of Consumer Affairs (P.O. Box 1163, Richmond, VA 23209; 804-786-2042). Pennsylvania residents may obtain a copy of the official registration and financial information from the PA Department of State by calling toll free, within PA, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement. Copies are also available from the Membership Department, CBF Philip Merrill Environmental Center, 6 Herndon Ave., Annapolis, MD 21403.



Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Philip Merrill Environmental Center

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Cover Photos: David W. Harp



Since 1967, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, a nonprofit, membership-supported organization, has made "Save the Bay" a rallying cry throughout the watershed. To get involved in hands-on Bay restoration or other activities call any of the offices below or visit our website at savethebay.cbf.org.

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