

Chesapeake Bay Gateways

Map And Guide



Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network

Chesapeake Bay Program
Chesapeake Bay Program



A fleet of skipjacks set sail for oyster beds -1921. Photo courtesy of the Mariners' Museum, Newport News, VA

The Chesapeake Bay is a vast area of extraordinary beauty, biological diversity, and human history. It has inspired, challenged, and tested those who have sailed its waters and traversed its land.

For thousands of years, the Bay has defined traditions and cultures for those who call it home. Few places provide such a unique sense of place or have collected such a rich library of natural and human stories as the Chesapeake Bay.

"The baye is the most delightful water I ever saw between two sweet lands."

Father Andrew White, 1634

Chesapeake Bay Gateways link you to those places and stories. By visiting Bay Gateways you'll have the opportunity to experience, learn, and play in one of the most unique estuaries on Earth.

With knowledge of the Bay comes understanding, with understanding comes appreciation, with appreciation comes stewardship. As you discover Chesapeake Bay Gateways, maybe you will echo the thoughts of others when they say..

Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network

Telling the Chesapeake Bay Story

Connecting You to a "Sense of Place"

The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network is a system of parks, refuges, museums, historic communities, and water trails in the Bay watershed. Managed by many different partners, these sites each tell a part of the Bay story. Together, as the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network, they provide a way for experiencing and understanding the Bay as a whole.

The essence of the Chesapeake Bay story is found in the way that water, place, nature, and people are interconnected over time. Chesapeake Bay Gateways illustrate the interdependence of life in and around the Bay. To fully appreciate and understand the Bay, each Gateway location must be viewed in relationship to the others. Gateways interweave the many stories of the Bay.

Chesapeake Gateways are places to enjoy, to renew your spirit, and to inspire. Science increases our knowledge of the Bay, helping to restore its waters. But it is the Bay's mystery and unique sense of place that bring us back. Gateways are portals of discovery.

The stories of the Chesapeake Bay stretch far back in time

From the Bay's origins to its maritime heritage, the stories are about people and place

The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network brings the stories together

There are many ways to tell the varied and diverse stories of the Chesapeake Bay. Gateways tell these individual stories. Gateways are sites where historic events occurred or places that immerse you in local traditions. At Gateway sites and water trails you can sail the Bay's waters, explore natural landscapes, and view wildlife. You can relax and enjoy the Bay's beaches, parks, or preserves. In time, you will come to know the remarkable Chesapeake. Like the Gateways Network, the Bay itself is a collection of special places, interconnected with the Atlantic Ocean and more than one hundred thousand rivers, streams, and creeks. By visiting Gateways, the Bay's stories begin to unfold.

The Bay's earliest stories are found in the rocks, soils, and fossils left behind from the region's origins. The familiar Bay landscape we know today evolved from events occurring about 15,000 years ago. The Wisconsin Glacial ice-sheet, more than a mile thick, extended southward into Pennsylvania. When a warming global climate melted the glacier, the ancient Susquehanna River valley flooded. This and rising sea levels gave birth to the Bay.

The Chesapeake Bay region, born from melting glaciers, supports one of the most diverse habitats of plant and animal life in the United States. By visiting Gateways, you learn how it is all connected.

The Chesapeake Bay remains connected to its glacial past. The main stem of the Bay is more than 180 miles long. The shoreline, with its many creeks and rivers, extends more than 11,684 miles; a distance longer than the East Coast. The Bay reaches a maximum depth of 175 feet, but is shallow overall, averaging only 22 feet. The Chesapeake Bay's moderate climate, surrounding wetlands, and varied ecosystems support one of the most diverse habitats for wildlife in the United States.

Like pieces of a puzzle, the story begins to emerge. Gateways tell stories through places, with each one adding to the whole.

Maybe it was the abundant wildlife or the Bay's natural bounty that first attracted humans to the Chesapeake waterways. About 12,000 years ago the area's first explorers found a changing landscape. The climate was cooler and wetter than today. The northern glaciers were retreating and the Bay's shoreline was rising. Now extinct animals like the mammoth, short-faced bear, and giant beaver roamed the coastal plain.



Photo courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Canada Geese (above), ducks, and other waterfowl take full advantage of the rich habitats of Bay wetlands. Gateways like Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and others transport you to peaceful, natural landscapes.

Around 5,000 years ago the Bay's native populations shifted from nomadic hunters and gatherers to a more agrarian lifestyle. With plentiful food and the seemingly endless supply of shellfish, crabs, and fish available from Bay waters, the sparse populations began to grow.

The first European explorers found thriving cultures throughout the Chesapeake Region. Gateways connect people to place.

The waterways of the Chesapeake Bay provided natural conduits for the people who lived here. As villages became more established it wasn't long until trade and interaction with nearby groups increased the ability of these early inhabitants to farm, hunt, and fish the Bay's waters. When the first European explorer, Giovanni da Verrazano, arrived in the Chesapeake in 1524, the region was settled by large and thriving native populations.

Many of the names we associate with the Chesapeake Bay and its waterways originated with these native populations. The tribes of the Susquahannocks, Monacans, Nacochtanks, Piscataways, Potomacs, Mattaponi, Rappahannocks, Pamunkeys, Powhatans, Accomacs, Pocomokes, Wicomiccos, Nanitokes, Choptanks, and Wicommises are closely inter-linked with the history of the Bay.

In 1607 English colonists entered the Chesapeake Bay and founded Jamestown. Later, under the leadership of Captain John Smith, they became the first Europeans to fully explore and map the Bay.

On June 2, 1608 John Smith set sail with 14 men. The expedition chronicled conditions familiar to today's boaters: summer squalls, quiet waters, shallow creeks, and wooded shorelines. The supply of fish was so plentiful that it prompted Smith to record in his journal:

"...lying so thicke with their heads above the water, as for the want of nets we attempted to catch them with our frying pan."



Photo courtesy of Maryland Office of Tourism Development
For early colonists of the Chesapeake, there were many obstacles: sickness, native conflicts, and making a living. Stories of colonial life are told at Historic Saint Mary's City, Jamestown, and other Gateways.

Like the American Indians before them, European settlers recognized the potential of this vast inland sea with its many navigable waterways. The colonization of the area reflected the use of these waterways to transport crops of tobacco and corn to coastal ports and ultimately the markets of Europe.

The ease of growing crops and the Bay's bounty brought waves of settlers to the region. Africans were transported to the area as slave laborers and forced to work on the expanding number of plantations. The proximity to the Bay and its rivers was an economic boon to the plantation owners and many supported their own harbor and ship building facilities.

Maritime cultures emerged centering around life on the Bay. By the time the fight for American Independence erupted in 1775 the residents and settlers had already transformed themselves into established Bay-side societies. The Chesapeake Bay was instrumental in the American victory. On October 19, 1781 Cornwallis surrendered to General George Washington at the port city of Yorktown.

The combination of American Indians, Africans, and Europeans created new cultures centered in the Chesapeake. Gateways show the interdependence of people and land.



Photo courtesy of Sotterley Plantation
The Chesapeake became an agricultural landscape in the 18th and 19th centuries, with tobacco as a key crop. Gateways like Sotterley Plantation (above) and others tell this story.

After the Revolutionary war, the waterways of the Chesapeake became a haven for "Privateers." The schooners used by these pirates were built for speed and running blockades. They preyed on the ships of Great Britain and her allies. The vessels were sharp edged and streamlined. Their large spread of canvas enabled them to out sail anything on the seas. The ships of the Privateers were the forerunners to the famous Baltimore Clippers.

From revolution to retribution, the newly formed country continued to struggle. It was by the "dawn's early light," that we began to see who we were as a nation. Gateways transport you to places of history.

In 1812 growing tensions with Great Britain erupted into open war. The Chesapeake region was hit hard. In Maryland, British troops and naval units attacked several Bay towns, defeated an American army at Bladensburg, and burned Washington's public buildings.

In 1814 the massive British Navy, flush with numerous victories, confidently sailed into the heart of the Bay intent on taking Baltimore. Defending the city was Fort McHenry, a small coastal fort and battery. Thousands of bombs rained on the fort, but a small group of patriots fought on, refusing to surrender. As dawn broke and the smoke cleared, flying high over the fort, a tattered "Star Spangled Banner" still waved.



APR photo
The defense of Fort McHenry during a British Naval attack on Baltimore in 1814 culminated in the 1815 Treaty of Ghent ending the war of 1812. The events of that day inspired Francis Scott Key to pen what would become our national anthem. Gateways like Fort McHenry tell the stories that shaped our nation.

As the market for the Bay's bounty grew, so did the annual harvest. In 1879, more than 17 million bushels of oysters were taken from the Bay and shipped to markets around the East.



Photo courtesy of NOAA
More Atlantic blue crabs are harvested from the Bay than any other place on Earth - 50 to 75 million pounds, each year.

Among the biggest challenges to the Bay are increasing human population and changes in the regional economy. Today, more than 15 million people live in the watershed with another 2 million expected over the next 20 years. With people come demands for everything from new roads, houses, and water and energy supplies to more crabs and oysters for a larger human appetite. All of these things have an impact on the Bay. Pollution from cities and farms flows directly to streams, rivers and the Bay. Sprawl development permanently changes the natural and historic character of the Bay landscape and pollutes the Bay. The growing stresses to the Bay dramatically impact traditional fishing, farming, and forestry that have been hallmarks of Bay culture for centuries.

For the next hundred years, new technologies and transportation routes regularly expanded the Bay economy. Canals allowed goods to be shipped up and down Bay tributaries, creating new markets.

The Civil War dramatically interrupted life in the Bay region. The importance of the Bay and its tributaries as strategic factors continued in the Civil War, just as in the War of 1812 and American Revolution. Naval vessels would ferry troops and supplies up the Bay, the James, and other major rivers.

The war years were hard on the Chesapeake and when the fighting ended the economy began to rebuild. Most of the region's old-growth forests were cut down and farmers cleared more than 40% of the land for crops-especially, wheat, corn, and tobacco. The landscape was changed as never before.

New technologies and vessels helped, but it was the back-breaking work of harvesting the Chesapeake that welded the people of the Bay together. Gateways tell the stories of working-life on the Bay.

For those who worked on the Bay, new vessels and methods were developed to take full advantage of the Bay's resources. Bugeyes and skipjacks emerged in the 1860s, an improvement over earlier log canoes. By the close of the 19th Century, more than 2,000 skipjacks, bugeyes and other vessels dredged oysters on the Bay's shallow waters.

"Watermen," the unique Chesapeake term applied to those making their living from the Bay's waters, hold a prominent place in the region's economy and mystique. Working year-round, many watermen harvested oysters half the year and crabs the other half. Others took clams, menhaden, and other fish. On the Bay's Eastern Shore, abundant waterfowl spawned intensive duck and geese hunting and development of "punt" guns which could kill dozens with one shot. The long back-breaking work of the watermen supplied the markets of Norfolk and Baltimore and the communities of the Bay region.



Photo courtesy of the Mariners' Museum, Newport News, VA
The Chesapeake "watermen" harvest the Bay's rich bounty of crabs, oysters and fish. This way of life is a distinctive part of the Bay story told at the Mariners' Museum and many other Gateways.

Railroads soon increased the ability to transport Chesapeake products inland, but boats remained the



Photo courtesy of Maryland Office of Tourism Development
The Bay has spawned a unique set of utilitarian designs, among them the Skipjack and screw-pile lighthouse. These Bay icons can be seen at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum and other Gateways.

primary means of transportation on the Bay throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. Steamships flourished, plying the waters of most tidal rivers. Ferries helped people cross rivers and the Bay.

By the early 20th century a growing population also viewed the Bay as a place for recreation. Early resorts and amusement parks grew up along the western shore, though many faded from the scene decades later. Over time, recreational boats began to outnumber work boats in many of the Bay's communities.

The Bay presents many challenges to sailors who dare its waters, from those who depend on it for their livelihood to those seeking to tame it on a warm afternoon. Gateways are about access to the Bay.

Today the Chesapeake continues as one of the nation's busiest maritime corridors. More than 10,000 ocean-going vessels carry 100 million tons of cargo in and out of the Bay every year. Scores of Naval Ships are concentrated in Norfolk. Watermen still harvest the Bay's crabs, oysters, and fish; the blue crab harvest alone sold for an average of more than \$50 million a year during the 1990s. Thousands of sailboats ply the Chesapeake while an increasing number of canoes and kayaks paddle rivers, streams, and inlets.



Photo by Dr. Dyke courtesy of MPRR, Inc.
With thousands of miles of rivers, streams and open water, the Bay watershed is a haven for recreational boating. Paddle the Mattaponi River (above), part of the York River Water Trail, and other Gateway water routes to explore the region.

Gateways bring alive the Bay's maritime culture, special places, and stories. They are the setting of historic events that shaped the nation or quiet moments amidst natural beauty. Gateways help newcomers understand the Bay and its rich traditions. They remind those who have lived here for generations of who they are and where they came from. The stories of the Chesapeake Bay are there for all to hear and for you to help tell.

The Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Stewardship and the Chesapeake

Helping the Bay

The Chesapeake Bay is the nation's largest estuary, a body of water where the ocean meets fresh water from upland rivers and streams. The mix creates a vast area of varying salinity, from entirely fresh water in the north to highly salty zones where the Bay meets the ocean. This, along with the Chesapeake's shallow depth-which allows sunlight to reach the bottom of diverse underwater habitats-accounts for the Bay's incredible richness. More than 3,000 species of plants and animals inhabit the Bay watershed. All are linked in a complex, interdependent web.

About half of the Bay's water comes from the Atlantic, while the other half comes from 150 major rivers and streams and more than one-hundred thousand smaller tributaries that drain a 64,000 square mile land area. Of rivers feeding the Bay, the Susquehanna delivers the greatest volume, about 50 percent of all fresh water.

The watershed is huge relative to the Bay's volume. For every 1,000 square miles of land in the watershed, there is just one cubic mile of Bay water. As a result, what happens on both land and water directly effects the Chesapeake. Sediment, fertilizers, and other pollutants run off land, ending up downstream. So the health of the Bay becomes an indicator of our stewardship of the watershed as a whole.

Primary Rivers of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed



Since American Indians first called these waters the "great shellfish bay," people have recognized the Chesapeake's importance. American Indians, early colonists, farmers, industrialists, watermen, and developers have all depended on the Bay and its tributaries. Over time, human uses of the Bay and its watershed began to impact the very qualities which drew people to the Chesapeake for centuries. Oysters were once so abundant early ships ran aground on oyster reefs; today harvest levels are approximately 8% of harvest highs in the 1950s. Blue crabs, the icon of the Bay, appear threatened as well. Underwater Bay grasses, which provide important habitat for many species may have declined by as much as 90%.

Yet the Chesapeake continues to inspire and for the past two decades stimulate one of the nation's largest conservation efforts. In 1983 the Chesapeake Bay Program was created through an agreement between the US Environmental Protection Agency, Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, and the Chesapeake Bay Commission. In 1987 the Chesapeake Bay Program started setting specific goals and target dates for addressing a range of Bay conservation and restoration issues. Some have been very successful. Others remain as significant challenges to be solved in coming months and years.

What ails the Bay? In answering that question many scientists and environmental managers might say "you and me." So how can you help the Bay and its tributaries? Here are some suggestions:

When Visiting Chesapeake Bay Gateways:

- Learn the stories of the place you are visiting and how it relates to the Bay
- Ask about opportunities to volunteer in a conservation project
- Respect local cultural traditions and private property
- Support local farmers, fishermen and businesses
- Try not to leave any physical impacts - follow "Leave No Trace" practices
- Be a responsible boater, leaving sensitive habitats and bay grasses undisturbed and minimizing wakes in shallow water and near shore
- Fish responsibly; practice catch and release
- Dispose of trash properly

At home:

- Conserve water and electricity
- Use fewer toxic chemicals, cleaners, and pesticides; whether they go down the drain or run off the land they end up in the Bay
- Plant native trees and shrubs, especially along streams
- Drive fewer miles; auto exhaust and fluids eventually end up in the Bay
- Apply only the amount of fertilizer that is necessary
- Support Bay and local watershed conservation efforts
- Get involved in local planning issues

For More Information:

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