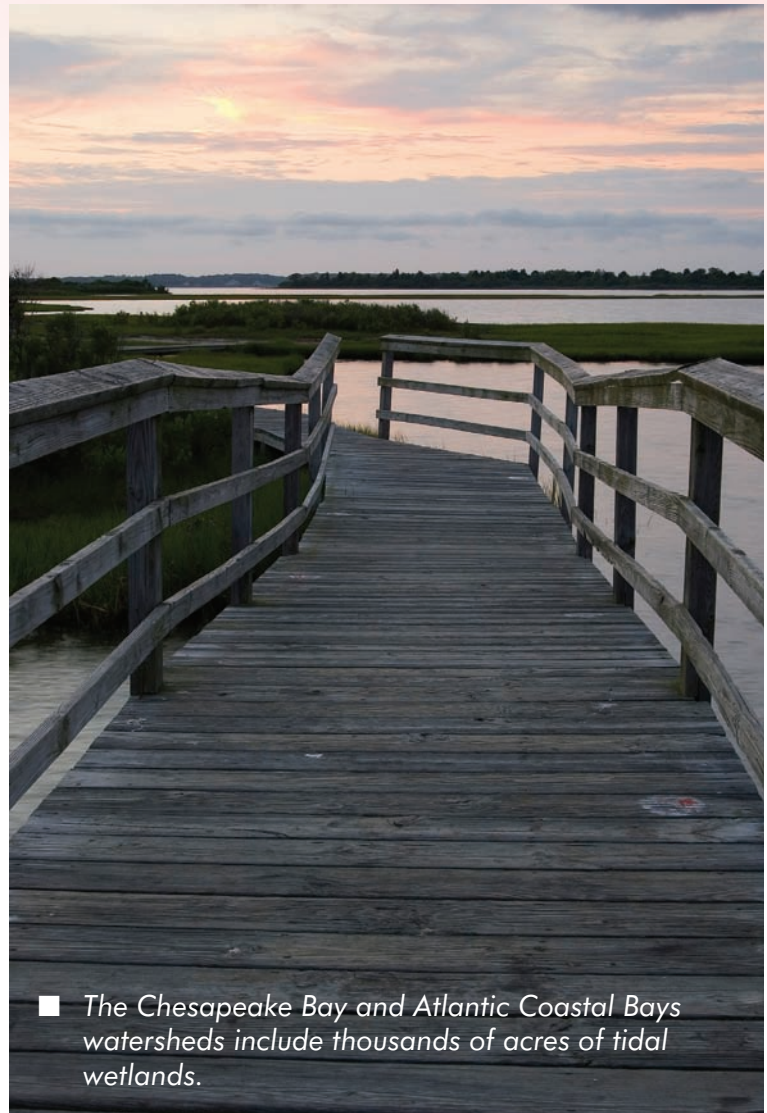


## INTRODUCTION

The Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Coastal Bays are among Maryland's grandest and most treasured natural resources. The Chesapeake Bay is one of the world's largest and most productive estuaries. Its watershed is home to nearly 16 million people, 5.6 million in Maryland alone, who live on its dozens of rivers and thousands of creeks—people who enjoy the beauty and bounty of this immense estuary. The waters of this 64,000 square mile drainage basin—which encompasses the headwaters of the Susquehanna River in New York and extends to the thriving Bay ports of Baltimore, Maryland, and Hampton Roads, Virginia—provide us with tremendous food, economic, and recreational resources.

The Atlantic Coastal Bays in Worcester County and Ocean City have many similarities to the Chesapeake Bay. Among these similarities are their rich biodiversity, as well as the increasing pressure of the multi-million dollar tourism industry that brings countless visitors to the Eastern Shore annually. Visitors come to fish, boat, swim, and enjoy the natural beauty of the area, and new residents are drawn there for the same reasons. The area's farms, forests, marshes, and beaches define the culture and character of the region, and increasing human activity in these areas creates additional stress on the watershed's fragile and delicately balanced ecosystems. In order to preserve all of Maryland's diverse estuaries to the fullest extent possible, the Coastal Bays were added to the Critical Area Protection Program in 2002.

The beauty and tranquility observed along vast stretches of the shoreline of the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays can be deceiving. Above and beneath that beautiful surface, scientists have been documenting disturbing changes that many citizens have likewise experienced: declines in



■ *The Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Coastal Bays watersheds include thousands of acres of tidal wetlands.*

**The beauty and tranquility observed along vast stretches of the shoreline of the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays can be deceiving.**



- *Habitat degradation, including the filling of wetlands, continues to stress the watersheds of Maryland's Bays.*

living resources such as submerged aquatic grasses, striped bass, shad, oysters, clams, and waterfowl. Less apparent, but nonetheless very significant, are changes in water quality, including increases in nutrient concentrations, turbidity, and toxic chemicals and decreases in dissolved oxygen.

**Less apparent, but nonetheless very significant, are changes in water quality, including increases in nutrient concentrations, turbidity, and toxic chemicals and decreases in dissolved oxygen.**

The Environmental Protection Agency's 1983 study titled *Chesapeake Bay: A Framework for Action* directly linked the precipitous decline in the Chesapeake Bay's once bountiful populations of anadromous fish, crustaceans, wildlife, and waterfowl to a parallel decline in the quality of its water and the destruction of natural habitat – a consequence of ever increasing human activity within its vast watershed. The study determined that significant and increasing levels of nutrients were entering the Bay system from nonpoint sources (urban, suburban and agricultural

runoff and atmospheric deposition). Population growth within the basin, as well as changing farming practices, were causing increased nutrient and sediment loads contributing to the eutrophication of the Bay. Elevated levels of toxics (heavy metals and toxic organic compounds) were being found in increasing quantities in

Bay water and sediments. Habitat degradation, such as overcutting of forests, filling of tidal and nontidal wetlands, and the development of open fields and meadows, was occurring at an alarming rate.

As the keystone of the multifaceted 1983 Chesapeake Bay Program, the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Protection Act was enacted in 1984 by the Maryland General Assembly to help reverse the deterioration of the Bay's environments. The Law created the Critical Area Commission, which was charged with creating



a land and resource management program that would reverse the adverse impacts of water pollution from runoff and the loss of habitat associated with growth and development. The Law also directed the Commission to develop specific “Criteria” as a framework for zoning, land use, and development regulations to be used by counties and municipalities in the development and implementation of their individual Critical Area programs.

Although many people dream of having the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, or the Atlantic Coastal Bays and their tributaries in their own backyard, only a small percentage of Maryland citizens live on or near these waters. As uses of the lands immediately surrounding these Bays and tidal tributaries have a tremendous impact on water quality and natural habitat of the Chesapeake Bay and Coastal Bays systems, those who benefit the most from the beauty and abundance of these resources also bear the heaviest responsibility for their future. The Critical Area Program and regulations affect everyone who owns land in the Critical Area, and Critical Area landowners take on the responsibility of learning about their local Critical Area regulations and abiding by them. If the common goals of restoring the water quality and habitat of the Chesapeake Bay and Coastal Bays and preserving their precious natural environments are to be achieved, it is important that not only those landowners, but all Maryland residents, understand and support the goals, philosophy and regulations of the Critical Area Protection Act for the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays.

Because the Critical Area Act and the Criteria result from a pioneering and comprehensive approach to conserving the State’s precious natural resources, the Critical Area Program may seem complex, and it is often misunderstood. Thus, this publication is written to present accurate and straightforward information about the Critical Area Program in a user-friendly

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■ *Maryland’s Bays and their tributaries and wetlands provide habitat for many species of waterfowl, including the Hooded Merganser.*



■ *Many Maryland residents find the Bays and their tributaries ideal for a variety of recreational activities.*







- *The William Preston Lane Jr. Memorial (Bay) Bridge, which carries close to 25 million vehicles across the Bay each year, is a constant reminder of the region's population growth.*

- *Protecting the diverse fish, wildlife, and plant species that depend on Maryland's Bays is a tremendous challenge.*



style. It is designed to increase public awareness of, and knowledge about, the Critical Area Program and its requirements so as to promote the restoration of Maryland's ecologically fragile bays.

The first two chapters of this general information guide provide an overview of the history of the Critical Area Law and Criteria and how Maryland's Critical Area Program evolved. Chapter 3 provides detailed information about the three land use classifications and a summary of the regulations affecting each classification. It also covers special provisions that accommodate existing land uses and lots created prior to the adoption of local Critical Area regulations. The fourth chapter deals with special protection measures for plant and wildlife habitats. Growth allocation, a unique component of the Critical Area Program to address the accommodation of future



growth in the Critical Area in an environmentally sensitive manner, is the focus of Chapter 5. Chapter 6 provides information about water-dependent facilities, such as marinas, ports, and public beaches, and Chapter 7 discusses shore erosion control measures and the guidelines for selecting the appropriate measure. Chapter 8 covers land uses and permitted activities in the Critical Area other than development; it also outlines why these uses are encouraged in the Critical Area. The following three chapters relate to enforcement, stewardship, and public participation. They emphasize the importance of not only strong and effective regulations, but public support of, and involvement in, implementation of the Critical Area Program at all levels. Chapter 12 is a summary of the document. The final sections of this guide include definitions and additional resources that provide more specific and complete information about many of the topics covered in this publication. These resources are available in print and on the internet.



■ *Maryland's Critical Area Program includes provisions for public access to the water.*



■ *Environmental stewardship efforts at all levels will be necessary to restore Maryland's Bays.*





**The Law and Criteria were designed to foster more sensitive land use and development activity along the shoreline of the Chesapeake Bay, Atlantic Coastal Bays, their tributaries, and tidal wetlands and to ensure the implementation of appropriate long term conservation measures to protect important habitats.**