

Section 6: Habitat condition in the Maryland Coastal Bays

General Introduction

Key habitats such as seagrass beds, wetlands, and natural shorelines are necessary to ensure the health of Coastal Bays fish and shellfish populations. Seagrasses are an important resource in the Coastal Bays, improving water quality, providing habitat for fish and shellfish and food for aquatic species and water birds. Wetlands are necessary to maintain habitat for waterfowl and fish, buffer coastal storms, absorb flood waters, and maintain adequate water quality for all Coastal Bays inhabitants. Changes to shorelines (bulkheading, rip-rap) threaten many fish and shellfish species as well as diamond back terrapins, shorebirds, and horseshoe crabs, which rely on the Coastal Bays for all or part of their life cycle. Macroalgal flora can be an important habitat, especially in areas where no other structure (such as seagrass beds) exists. The following chapters summarize recent monitoring analyses of five Coastal Bays habitat indicators.

Chapter 6.1 Seagrass abundance and habitat criteria in the Maryland Coastal Bays

Chapter 6.2 Development of a seagrass habitat suitability index for the Maryland Coastal Bays

Chapter 6.3 Results of recent macroalgae surveys in the Maryland Coastal Bays

Chapter 6.4 Status of wetlands in the Maryland Coastal Bays

Chapter 6.5 Status of shoreline in the Maryland Coastal Bays