



# VISION *for the* CHESAPEAKE

CHARTING A COURSE FOR THE FUTURE OF SPORTFISHING AND BOATING ON THE BAY

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**A HEALTHY BAY AND A ROBUST SPORTFISHING AND BOATING ECONOMY ARE INTRINSICALLY LINKED.**

ALTHOUGH PROGRESS IS BEING MADE TO REVERSE THESE TRENDS, UNFORTUNATELY, THE CHESAPEAKE'S HEALTH REMAINS COMPROMISED BY POLLUTED RUNOFF, HABITAT LOSS, AND OVERFISHING AS WELL AS MISGUIDED FISHERY MANAGEMENT DECISIONS.



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THIS REPORT INCLUDES RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FISHING AND BOATING MANAGEMENT  
ACTIONS AND HABITAT RESTORATION INITIATIVES THAT WILL HELP MAINTAIN AND  
IMPROVE THE BAY'S VITALITY.

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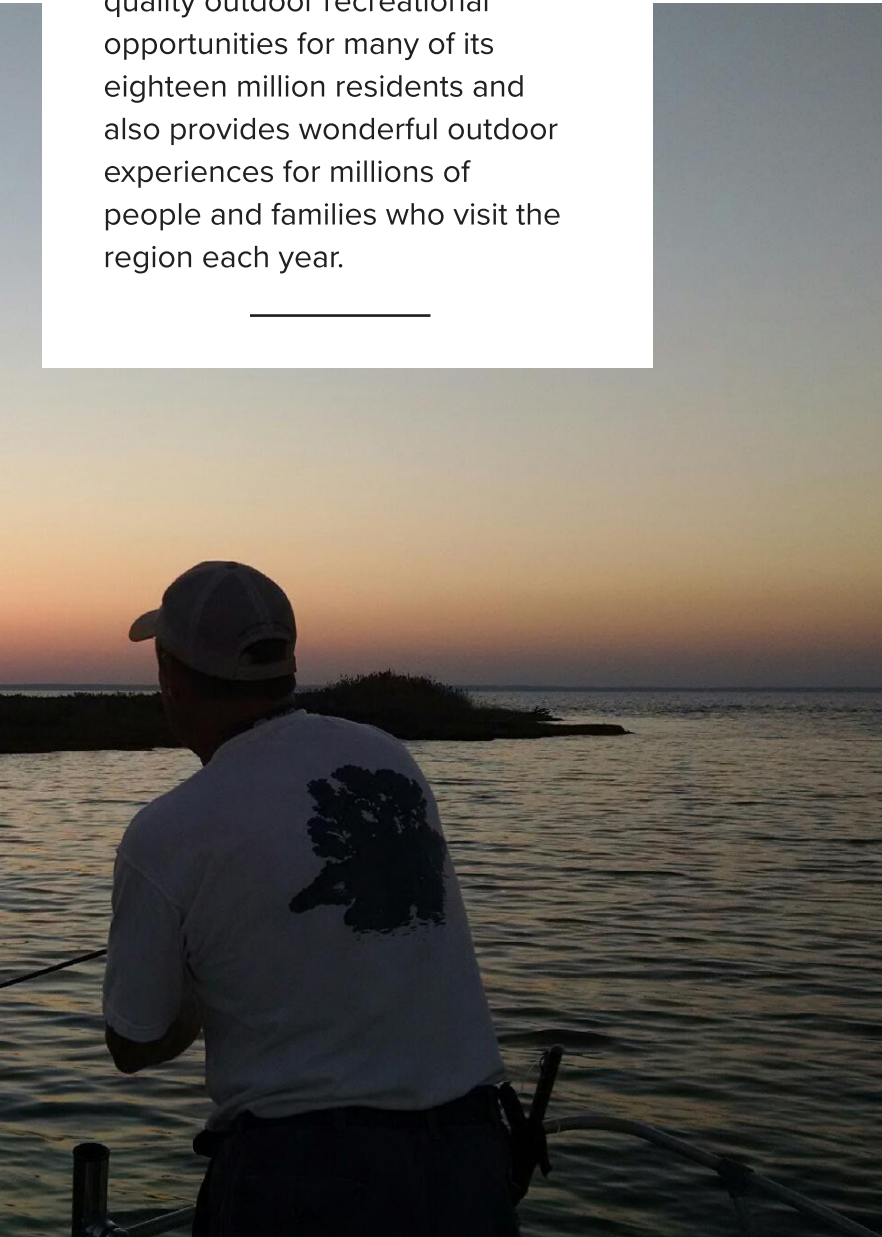




## INTRODUCTION

**T**he Chesapeake Bay, the largest estuary in the United States, is undeniably a national treasure. Woven into its natural tapestry is the rich legacy of recreational boating and sport fishing that, along with other outdoor pursuits, shape the region's cultural identity and drive its robust economic health. The Chesapeake watershed offers year-round, high-quality outdoor recreational opportunities for many of its eighteen million residents and also provides wonderful outdoor experiences for millions of people and families who visit the region each year.

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The boating and sport fishing community has always been at the forefront of natural resources conservation and, once again, stands ready to re-dedicate our commitment to achieve these worthy goals.



A fishing rod with a lure and reel is mounted on a boat deck. The background shows a sunset over the water, with the sun low on the horizon and its light reflecting on the water's surface. The fishing rod is dark-colored and has a silver reel with a yellow spool. A lure is attached to the line. The boat deck is white and textured. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

## INTRODUCTION

### **For decades,**

the boating and sportfishing community has consistently proven that we are the best stewards of our marine resources and access to the Chesapeake we cherish. This Report includes recommendations for fishing and boating management actions and habitat restoration initiatives that will help maintain and improve the Bay's vitality. The boating and sport fishing community has always been at the forefront of natural resources conservation and, once again, stands ready to re-dedicate our commitment to achieve these worthy goals.

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## EXPANSION

### **Expanding Economic and Cultural Importance of Sport Fishing and Boating**

The Chesapeake Bay is one of nature's crown jewels, a dynamic estuary with more than four hundred tidal tributaries that supports a multitude of fish species and

diverse aquatic habitats. The Chesapeake region also offers nearly year-round recreational possibilities, with boating and sport fishing being among the most popular. Combined, these activities generate several billion dollars annually in total economic activity while supporting tens of thousands

of jobs in the Bay region. Add to that many millions more dollars generated from fishing license sales, registration fees, and excise taxes as well as donations that fund conservation efforts, and it is clear Chesapeake boaters and anglers are a powerful economic engine for the region.



**CHESAPEAKE BOATERS  
AND ANGLERS ARE A  
POWERFUL ECONOMIC  
ENGINE FOR THE REGION.**

## EXPANSION

A healthy Bay and a robust sportfishing and boating economy are intrinsically linked. Although progress is being made to reverse these trends, unfortunately the Chesapeake's health remains compromised by polluted runoff, habitat loss, overfishing and misguided fishery management decisions. Moreover, the continued regional population growth and climate change are likely to exacerbate these challenges, which threaten to stunt the growth and enjoyment of recreational fishing and boating. Therefore, a proactive and aggressive approach to reverse this decline is required.

Although people of all backgrounds and walks of life enjoy recreational fishing and boating, it is essential to ramp up efforts to engage, recruit, and make welcome new participants—especially those from underserved communities.

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Also, decision makers, fishery managers, and elected officials need to better understand and appreciate the true economic contributions of the recreational boater and angler as well as the cultural importance of boating and fishing to the Bay region. This is the most compelling argument for striking a balance between commercial and recreational fishing.

Although people of all backgrounds and walks of life enjoy recreational fishing and boating, it is essential to ramp up efforts to engage, recruit, and make welcome new participants—especially those from underserved communities. The growth of fishing and boating in the Chesapeake Bay depends upon it.





## economics BY THE NUMBERS

**\$1.7 billion**

Annual Contributions to Conservation  
by U.S. Anglers

[Source: American Sportfishing Association.]

**\$1.3 billion**

Total Economic Contribution by  
Virginia Anglers

[2018 Source: Southwick Associates via ASA.]

**\$767 million**

Total Economic Contributions by  
Maryland Anglers

[2018 Source: Southwick Associates via ASA.]

**\$3.5 billion**

Total Economic Impact of Maryland's  
Marine Industry

[Source: National Marine Manufacturers Association.]

**\$2.9 billion**

Total Economic Impact of Virginia's  
Recreational Boating Industry

[Source: National Marine Manufacturers Association.]

**17.4**

Average # of Jobs Created for Every  
\$1M Invested in Conservation.

[Source: Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.]

## Building Diverse Angler Participation

[Condensed from 2020 Special Report  
on Fishing published by the Recreational  
Boating & Fishing Foundation]

Today's anglers and boaters are  
younger and more diverse. To them,  
fishing and boating means spending  
quality time with friends and family  
while connecting with nature, which  
can inspire peace, relaxation, and  
improve their mental health.

## who's fishing? BY THE NUMBERS

**50 million**

number of Americans participating  
in fishing, the highest in 12 years.  
Encouragingly, 90% of new anglers  
plan to keep fishing

**3 million**

number of new anglers nationally  
in 2020, the highest number in five  
years

**10 million**

number of participants from minority  
communities engaged in fishing

**17.9 million**

number of women anglers, an all-  
time high



## THE FUTURE

### Fisheries Management

For decades, fishery managers have followed the “best available science” model to implement regulations that support the maximum sustainable yield for most United States’ fisheries. This approach was designed to manage commercial fisheries to maximize the biomass (abundance and weight of fish) that can be removed from the system before causing long-term damage. Differences between management objectives and recreational stakeholder priorities can often impede progress to reach consensus on important issues.

Although progress has been made to consider the requirements and goals specific to recreational anglers, significant challenges remain. Leaders must strike the appropriate balance between taking decisive actions that increase fish stocks while expanding access to public resources and not hindering economic growth. Achieving this balance requires timely and reliable data sources, clear communications with the public, and building the knowledge base of stakeholders in order to build consensus.

Balancing  
commercial  
fishing interests  
with recreational  
anglers’ goals  
requires reliable  
data, open  
dialogue, and  
consensus  
building.

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### Recommendations

- ▶ Fully implement bipartisan Bay-specific regulatory initiatives that address fundamental differences between commercial and recreational fishing.
- ▶ Improve data collection and enhance ecosystem-based, conservation strategies.
- ▶ Improve public engagement and communication tools within the stakeholder process.
- ▶ Continue to develop short- and long-term measures to more precisely manage the harvest of striped bass, bluefish, cobia, and other important gamefish.
- ▶ Develop relationships and policies that recognize the management needs and economic importance of recreational fishing.
- ▶ Review and update state natural resource laws to reflect scientific advancements in fisheries assessment and management, diverse stakeholder values, and a science-based approach to fisheries management.
- ▶ Support the development of the “human dimensions aspect” of fisheries management to help managers and decision makers better understand behaviors of anglers to help better inform their decisions.
- ▶ Make self-reporting tools such as iAngler and “Citizen Scientist” available to anglers so they can report their catches of important gamefish and invasive species to fishery agencies.



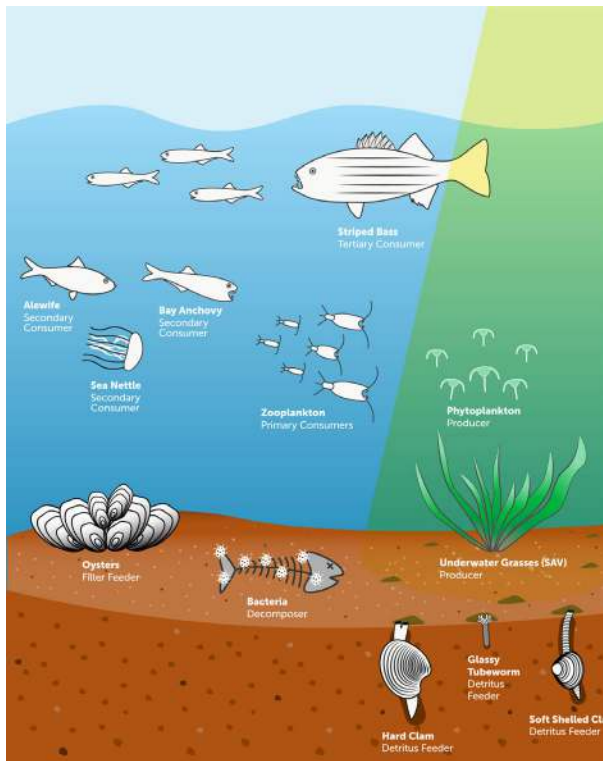
## Bay Fast Facts: Did You Know?

The Chesapeake Bay, the largest estuary in the United States, was formed about 10,000 years ago at the end of the last ice age when rising sea levels flooded the Susquehanna River valley. Renowned for its seafood – especially oysters, striped bass, and blue crabs – the Chesapeake's name comes from the Algonquin word *Chesepiooc*, which means "great shellfish bay."

- **200 Miles** = Length of Bay's mainstem from Susquehanna Flats to the Virginia Capes.
- **11,684** = Miles of tidal shoreline – that's more than the entire U.S. west coast!
- **21 Feet** = Bay's average depth. 24% is less than 6' deep!
- **174 Feet** = Bay's deepest point – The Hole, off Bloody Point, MD.
- **30 Miles** = Bay's widest point, south of the Potomac River.
- **3,600** = Species of plant and animal life supported by the Bay.
- **70%+** = Percentage of striped bass that spawn in and use the Bay as a nursery, largest on the Atlantic coast!
- **30-80 Gallons** = Amount of water a single oyster can filter in a day.
- **80,000** = Acres of Bay grasses growing in shallows.
- **500M** = Pounds of seafood harvested each year.
- **18M+** = People who live, work, and play within the watershed.

[Sources: Chesapeake Bay Program;  
National Park Service, Recreational  
Boating and Fishing Foundation]





## Forage Fish

A tried-and-true slogan in sporting fishing says, “Big Fish Eat Little Fish,” which is why healthy stocks of forage species are so essential to healthy gamefish populations. Perhaps no fish is as important to the Chesapeake’s food web as menhaden. Often called the most important fish in the sea, these oily little fish—also known as bunker or poggy—are the primary prey for striped bass, bluefish, and weakfish as well as whales and sea birds.

For decades, the commercial reduction industry has been dominated by a single, now foreign owned corporation that takes a grossly disproportionate amount of the harvest. Despite encourag-

ing progress made to more sustainably manage menhaden and other forage species, concerns persist that not enough forage fish are being left in the Bay and ocean to support healthy populations of gamefish and other marine animals.

Progress has been made to more sustainably manage menhaden, but are enough being left in the Chesapeake and Atlantic Ocean for gamefish and other marine animals?

## Recommendations

- ▶ Work with state resource agencies and federal commissions to accelerate the pace of implementing an ecosystem-based management structure, particularly Ecological Reference Points, for all important forage species.
- ▶ Fully fund multi-year, coast-wide menhaden research and data collection, including
  - Spatial studies of distribution, abundance, and diversity;
  - Placing observers on boats to collect at-sea samples from purse-seine sets.
- ▶ Pass the bipartisan Forage Fish Conservation Act to help address shortcomings in the Marine Fisheries Conservation and Management Act by requiring science-based catch limits that also account for predators’ forage requirements.
- ▶ Fully implement and enforce existing conservation laws to ensure forage fish are not over-exploited, and commercial fisheries comply with regional and coast-wide harvest caps.
- ▶ Ensure that the Virginia Marine Resources Commission continues to have management oversight of menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay.



Menhaden are one of the Chesapeake's most important marine resources, and are a primary prey for striped bass, red drum, bluefish, and other game fish. Stronger conservation of these oily little fish is critical to a healthy Bay ecosystem as well as the sportfishing, boating, and tourism economy.

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A reduction fishery purse seine vessel vacuums up tons of menhaden in Virginia's portion of the Chesapeake Bay. Virginia is the only East Coast state that still permits this type of industrial gear to harvest menhaden in state waters.

[Photo by Brian Lockwood]

## UP FOR THE CHALLENGE


### **Habitat, Water Quality, and Climate Change**

Clean water and vibrant habitats are the cornerstones of healthy fisheries, which in turn support quality recreational fishing and pleasure boating. Reducing polluted runoff and restoring marine habitats are top priorities for the region's sportfishing and boating community. Because without quality habitat, even our best efforts to increase fish abundance, improve stock assessments, and expand data collection will fall woefully short.



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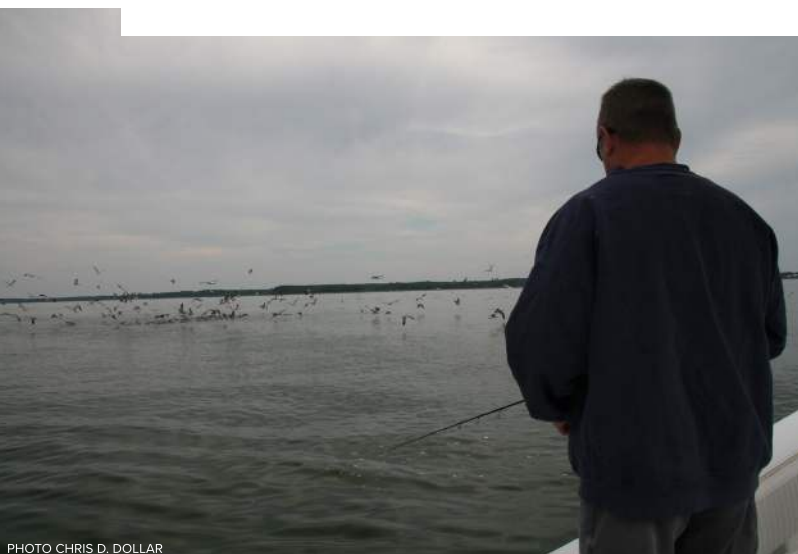


Improving marine and estuarine habitats will also help mitigate the increasing challenges brought about by climate change. Researchers are now observing shifts in fish migration patterns, altered breeding seasons, and changes in fishes home ranges. Left unchecked, climate change could lead to seemingly small yet impactful increases in water temperatures that could negatively impact spawning and nursery grounds as well as hinder spawning success and juvenile survival rates.

Additionally, more frequent extreme weather events—hurricanes, floods, storm surges—have been documented to accelerate habitat loss and contribute to poor water quality, both of which negatively impact numerous aquatic resources.



*...climate change could lead to seemingly small yet impactful increases in water temperatures that could negatively impact spawning and nursery grounds as well as hinder spawning success and juvenile survival rates.*





## UP FOR THE CHALLENGE

### So what's the answer?

We must redouble efforts to build more oyster reefs, enhance more acres of underwater grasses and create more wetlands. These habitats are a vital nursery for sportfish and prey and help to improve the Bay's overall productivity while protecting shorelines from storm surge.



### Recommendations

- Fully fund Chesapeake Bay restoration and protection programs that honor the Bay-state commitment to make Chesapeake waters “fishable and swimmable” by 2025.
- Prioritize existing restoration efforts with measurable outcomes that provide food and habitat for fish and crabs, reduce shoreline erosion, and improve water quality.
- Fully fund federal legislation, such as the Great American Outdoors Act and America’s Conservation Enhancement Act, to improve public lands’ access and restore habitats.
- Expand and further develop state artificial reef programs to provide better accessibility to nearshore and shoreline habitat enhancement, protection and resiliency projects.
- Empower recreational anglers to participate as “Citizen Scientists” to help provide decision-makers and managers with more data.
- Increase public awareness and education initiatives that promote healthy habitats and water quality important to supporting recreational fishing and boating opportunities.



## CONCLUSION

### For decades,

Chesapeake sportsmen and women and boaters have been unwavering in their commitment to restore and protect the Bay's wild places. This support remains strong, and in fact has increased in recent years, especially from sport anglers and fishing and boating related businesses.

Without question, the goals that leaders in the sportfishing and boating community share are lofty, and the challenges formidable. To advance solutions-oriented policies that improve fish stocks and restore marine habitats, perseverance, commitment, and political will is required. Our coalition of partners are committed to sustainable fisheries, healthy habitats, and expanded public access, but we can't do it alone. We need your help.

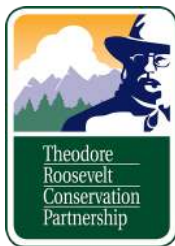
PHOTO ROB CHOI

Sportfishing, boating and conservation partners are committed to sustainable fisheries, healthy habitats, and expanded public access, but we can't do it alone.

**WE NEED YOUR HELP.**

## PARTNERS *in* CONSERVATION

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