

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System Susquehanna Buoy: Fall Seasonal

Here at the northern end of Captain John Smith's Trail, the water is always considered fresh (that is, less than 3 Practical Salinity Units), even though it is affected by the Chesapeake's tides. That freshwater flow is critical to the underwater grasses that grow thickly around the margins of Garrett Island, just upstream of this buoy, and out on the Susquehanna Flats downstream of it.

Summertime water temperatures in the mid- to upper 80s favored the growth of underwater grass beds on the Susquehanna Flats that harbor juvenile shad, river herring, yellow perch, white perch, and rockfish spawned in the area back in the spring. Healthy, clear-water grass-bed habitat helps these little fish avoid predators like great blue herons and ospreys, plus marauding rockfish, larger perch, largemouth bass, and even some smallmouth bass and walleyes that have come down to the Flats from the river. Even so, there are enough small prey fish to sustain a healthy, diverse population of predators.

The eat-and-be-eaten activity will increase through the fall season, as cooling water temperatures warn the big fish to fatten up in the face of the oncoming winter. Ospreys head south, but the herons remain. In October, migratory Canada geese arrive from their breeding grounds on Quebec's far north Ungava Peninsula to feed and winter on the Flats.

Later in the season, other migratory waterfowl will arrive from breeding grounds in the upper Midwestern U.S. and Canada. Though not as busy as spring, these comings and goings cause considerable activity around this NOAA buoy where the Susquehanna meets the Chesapeake.

You can watch fall progress by following observations from this buoy at www.buoybay.noaa.gov. If you're heading out on these waters near the Susquehanna CBIBS buoy, be sure to check conditions at the buoy, as well as the NOAA National Weather Service forecast for the area.