

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System Annapolis Buoy: Winter Seasonal

Water conditions at the NOAA CBIBS Annapolis buoy reflect the rainfall not only in the Severn River's short, 13-mile-long watershed upstream of Annapolis but also in the Susquehanna's gigantic drainage basin in central Pennsylvania and south-central New York.

During winter, water temperatures generally fall into the 30s. In exceptionally cold years, skim ice forms. As water temperatures drop, all of the cold-blooded creatures in these waters slow down. Most of the menhaden have departed for wintering areas off the North Carolina and Virginia coasts, as have large migratory rockfish. Younger fish drop into deep holes like the trench in the Bay along Kent Island, which is actually the ancestral channel of the Susquehanna. In places like that, the bottom water is generally warmer and more stable than the surface, which responds to daily variations in air temperature. Blue crabs bury into the sediments in the lower Severn and the Bay's mainstem for their winter sleep.

The most active creatures around the Annapolis buoy in winter are warm-blooded: ducks, Canada geese, and tundra swans, as well as mammals like river otters. Most of the "bay ducks" like scaup and canvasbacks will be in creeks and coves like Whitehall Bay, just to the north, and Carrs Creek, just to the west, especially in areas where they can dive for small shellfish and underwater grasses. "Sea ducks" like scoters and longtails will be further offshore, diving on shellfish beds on the outside edges of Hacketts and Tolly bars.

As winter progresses, you can check the trends and current conditions at www.buoybay.noaa.gov. Cold water requires extreme caution and extra safety practices for boaters. Before heading out on these waters, check conditions at the NOAA CBIBS Annapolis buoy, and check the NOAA National Weather Service forecast for the area.