

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System

Gooses Reef Buoy: Winter Seasonal

Water conditions at the NOAA CBIBS buoy at Dominion Gooses Reef reflect not only the rainfall from Eastern Shore rivers like the Chester and Choptank but also that from the Susquehanna's gigantic drainage basin in central Pennsylvania and south-central New York. Winter brings strong weather systems that pour snow, sleet, and rain into the Susquehanna watershed. Water temperatures fall into the 30s, and this part of the Chesapeake may see some skim ice.

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 along the shore under Calvert Cliffs, just to the west of this buoy, 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 rivers and the Bay's mainstem for their winter sleep.

The most active creatures around the Gooses Buoy in winter are warm-blooded: ducks, Canada geese, and tundra swans, as well as mammals like river otters. Waterfowl biologists note that the birds have come here from summer nesting grounds in north-central Canada, while the migratory geese have come from the tundra of the Ungava Peninsula in far northeastern Quebec, and the tundra swans from Alaska's North Slope. The otters, however, are local—fishing and playing along the rivers' shores. They are often more visible in winter, perhaps because there are fewer people around.

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 Gooses Reef buoy, and check the NOAA National Weather Service forecast for the area.