

## **NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System Patapsco Buoy: Winter Seasonal**

Due to the risk of ice that could damage delicate sensors on the buoy, NOAA's Chesapeake Bay Office pulls out the Patapsco River Buoy early each winter and replaces it with a placeholder "ice buoy" until the water begins to warm again in early spring.

Water conditions at the NOAA CBIBS Patapsco Buoy reflect not only the rainfall in its river's large watershed upstream of Baltimore but also that of the Susquehanna's gigantic drainage basin in central Pennsylvania and south-central New York. Strong winter weather systems pour snow, sleet, and rain into the whole watershed of the Susquehanna, as well as rain into the Patapsco's headwaters. Water temperatures normally drop into the 30s early in the New Year.

As temperatures drop, 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, though younger fish drop into deep holes like the trench in the Bay off the mouth of the Chester River. Blue crabs bury into the sediments in the lower river and the Bay's mainstem for their winter sleep.

The most active creatures around the mouth of the Patapsco 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 along the lower Patapsco to the west of this buoy and the mouth of the Chester to the east, especially around Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge, where they can dive for small shellfish and underwater grasses. "Sea ducks" like scoters and longtails will be further offshore, also diving on shellfish beds.

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