NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System
Stingray Point/Rappahannock Buoy: Winter Seasonal

The NOAA CBIBS buoy off Stingray Point sits at the confluence of the Rappahannock and Piankatank Rivers, where they meet the open Chesapeake. Because of the influence of these rivers, the salinity at the buoy is greatly affected by rainfall levels. Low salinity from heavy rain may help to suppress disease pressure on the oyster reefs near the buoy, but in all except the wettest years, salinity remains high enough to keep the oysters happy. There is cautious optimism in the scientific community that these oysters are developing some disease tolerance. Restoration reefs in the two rivers appear to be doing well, as do a few carefully regulated harvest bars and a number of new but thriving oyster aquaculture operations.

As water temperatures drop into the 40s, 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 one under the Rappahannock's Grays Point Bridge. The bottom water there is generally warmer and more stable than the surface, which responds to daily variations in air temperature.

The most active creatures around Stingray Point 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 two rivers, especially in areas 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. Cold water requires extreme caution and extra safety practices for boaters. Before heading out on these waters, check conditions at the NOAA CBIBS Stingray Point buoy, and check the NOAA National Weather Service forecast for the area.