



NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System Upper Potomac 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 Upper Potomac buoy early each winter and replaces it with a placeholder "ice buoy" until the water begins to warm again in early spring.

The Potomac's huge drainage basin brings rainfall and snowmelt runoff to the Upper Potomac Buoy from parts of Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia. The basin includes virtually every type of land use in the Chesapeake region, including forestland, farmland, and the massive network of suburbs, roadways, and urban areas around the District of Columbia.

During the winter months, from the area around this buoy downriver for 50 miles to the Rt. 301 bridge, the rootstocks and seeds from underwater grasses and the huge autumn crop of seeds from annual marsh plants provide a cornucopia of nutritious food for ducks, geese, and swans that arrived in November and December from nesting grounds in the Upper Midwestern United States and Central Canada to spend the winter foraging in these marshes.

Bald eagles and great blue herons, however, will pick out a living of small fish on mud flats warmed by the weak winter sun, and the eagles will hunt sick or aging waterfowl. Both species will begin mating and nesting in February. Predatory rockfish, largemouth bass, and white perch will seek out the relative warmth of deep holes in the rivers and creeks to wait out winter's lean season. Only the chain pickerel and blue catfish will continue to feed with any regularity.

As winter progresses, you can check the trends and current conditions of other CBIBS buoys at 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.