

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System

Norfolk Buoy at Nauticus

Spring Seasonal Information

Welcome to NOAA's Norfolk CBIBS Buoy, located in the Elizabeth River between Norfolk and Portsmouth. If you are on the observation deck at Nauticus, look across the river to see the yellow buoy, roughly a quarter-mile away, just west of the river's channel and south of the Portsmouth Naval Hospital on Hospital Point.

The Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River flows north toward the Nauticus Buoy, carrying fresh water from the Dismal Swamp and rain that falls on the City of Chesapeake. The water from the swamp is normally clear but stained the color of iced tea by tannic acid in fallen tree leaves and needles. The dominant influence, however, is salt water that flows in from the Atlantic through Hampton Roads. If the James and the Southern Branch receive a lot of fresh water, the Atlantic's influence gets pushed back.

Salinity has direct effects on the river's dozen restoration oyster reefs, as their inhabitants prepare to spawn in June. Meanwhile, in spring, the puppy drum (young red drum), speckled trout, and rockfish move out of the Elizabeth's warm-water industrial discharge canals to feed around the reefs. Crabs emerge from their winter beds in the river's bottom to feed around the reefs. By the new moon in May, most begin their first slough of their shells for the new year.

The Elizabeth River still suffers heavy pollution from intense municipal growth and heavy industry. However, recent cleanup efforts are beginning to improve the river's health, including several oyster reef restoration projects. At Nauticus you can see an example of oyster restoration when you visit.