NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System
Norfolk/Elizabeth River Buoy: Winter Seasonal

The water in which the NOAA CBIBS Elizabeth River buoy is stationed is normally clear but stained the color of iced tea by tannic acid in leaves and needles from the Dismal Swamp's abundant trees. That effect grows now, when fall's dead leaves have accumulated in the river.

While the Elizabeth River receives some fresh water from rainfall and inflow from the James River, it also gets lots of salt water from the Atlantic. That salty water can help to suppress disease pressure on the Elizabeth River's restoration oyster reefs and keep salinity high enough to keep the oysters happy. On sunny winter days, those healthy reefs will be magnets for puppy drum (young red drum), speckled trout (also a member of the drum family), and rockfish. Meanwhile, the river's blue crabs will have dug themselves into the bottom sediments for their winter sleep.

The oyster reefs form a bright spot in the river. They are a joint project of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, area schools, citizen volunteers, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and Nauticus, where you can see an example of oyster restoration when you visit.

Though the Elizabeth River's health has improved somewhat from recent advances in sewage treatment and efforts to reduce pollution by the river's heavy industries, the waterway still suffers from intense municipal growth and its resulting stormwater pollution.

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