



NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System Susquehanna Buoy: Winter Seasonal

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

The Susquehanna's watershed in central Pennsylvania and south-central New York is so huge that rainfall can vary widely from place to place. As winter progresses, rainwater and snowmelt runoff develop strong river flows. Thus salinity is virtually nonexistent here. Water temperatures fall into the 30s.

As temperatures drop, all of the cold-blooded creatures here slow down. Any rockfish, white perch, yellow perch, walleyes, largemouth bass, and smallmouth bass in the area have moved to deep holes like the one between Garrett Island and the town of Perryville. A few river herring and hickory shad may join them as winter deepens. Blue crabs bury into the sediments south of the Susquehanna Flats for their winter sleep. On warm days, a few perch, rockfish, and bass forage shallow ledges and sunny south-facing shorelines.

The most active creatures around the Susquehanna's mouth in winter are warm-blooded: ducks, Canada geese, and tundra swans, as well as mammals like river otters. Most of the "bay ducks" like canvasbacks forage in areas where underwater grasses grew last summer, especially the broad Susquehanna Flats just to the east and Furnace Bay to the north.

The ducks have come to the waters around the Susquehanna Buoy from summer nesting grounds in north-central Canada, while the migratory geese have come from the tundra of the Ungava Peninsula in far northeastern Quebec, and the tundra swans from Alaska's North Slope. The otters, however, are local, fishing and playing along the rivers' shores. They are often more visible in winter, perhaps because there are fewer people around.

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 the NOAA National Weather Service forecast for the area.