



Chesapeake Bay Program  
A Watershed Partnership

# Press Release

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**For Immediate Release**  
**April 18, 2007**

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## **Bay Program Releases 2006 Chesapeake Bay Health & Restoration Assessment**

*Annual Report Shows Most of Bay's Waters Degraded; Restoration Efforts Advance;  
Mixed Year-to-Year Results*

**ANNAPOLIS, Md.** – The Federal/State Chesapeake Bay Program partnership today released its *Chesapeake Bay 2006 Health and Restoration Assessment* reports. These reports were developed to provide a clear and concise synopsis of Chesapeake Bay health and the on-the-ground restoration efforts taking place across the bay watershed.

The reports found that in 2006, while Bay Program partners made significant advances in restoration efforts through newly-focused programs, legislation and/or funding, year-to-year results were mixed and the overall health of the Bay remains degraded.

“While the partnership is making strides in certain restoration efforts, there are significant challenges ahead,” said Jeff Lape, director of the Chesapeake Bay Program Office. “We are counting on the continued resolve of all our partners to forge ahead to reach our Chesapeake Bay goals.”

A summary of findings in the *Health Assessment* include:

- To-date, less than one-third of water quality goals have been met;
- The Bay's habitats and lower food webs are at about one-third of desired levels; and
- Many of the Bay's fish and shellfish population remain below desired, historical levels.

Specific indicators find that in 2006, dissolved oxygen showed a significant improvement from 2005, to one of the best years on record, though at 37 percent of the goal. Chlorophyll *a*, a measure of algae, showed slight improvement from last year, while mid-channel water clarity declined slightly. In addition, 53 percent of monitored tidal rivers had chemical contaminants in fish tissue high enough to warrant fish consumption advisories in those areas.

Bottom (benthic) habitat continued to be significantly impacted in 2006, matching 2005 numbers with 41 percent of the Bay's floor considered healthy. Bay-wide acreage of underwater grasses decreased by 25 percent in 2006 to the lowest total acreage figure since 1989, covering only 59,090 acres – or about 32 percent of the 185,000-acre restoration goal. Blue crab, oyster, and shad populations also remained well below restoration goals with levels reaching 57 percent, 9 percent, and 3 percent of goal, respectively.

With the human population in the watershed currently at over 16 million and growing by more than 170,000 residents annually, urban and suburban lands have contributed significantly to the degraded condition of the Chesapeake Bay. To date, it is estimated that the pollution increases associated with land development (e.g. converting farms and forests to urban/suburban developments) have surpassed the gains achieved from improved landscape design and stormwater management practices. The rapid rate of population growth and related residential and commercial development has made this pollution sector the only one in the Bay watershed to still be growing, and thus “progress” is negative.

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2006 *Restoration Assessment* findings include:

- About half of the pollution reduction efforts needed to achieve the nutrient goals have been undertaken;
- Habitat restoration efforts are collectively less than half-way to Program goals;
- Watershed protection efforts are slightly more than two-thirds of the way toward goals; and
- A newly developed indicator, Fostering Chesapeake Stewardship, has reached two-thirds of its goals.

“From the 2006 data, we can see that the Bay Program partners must remain committed to cleaning up the Chesapeake,” said Carlton Haywood, chair of the Bay Program’s Monitoring and Assessment Subcommittee and director for program operations at the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin. “However, not all of the data we see in the 2006 report is negative. Tremendous strides have been made in an effort to restore the Bay.”

Some of the noted 2006 successes include the steep reduction of harmful nutrients discharged from wastewater treatment plants. Nitrogen discharges are at 72 percent of the reduction goal while phosphorous discharges have reached 87 percent of reduction goals. However, pollution control efforts need to be accelerated in the agricultural sector, with only 45 percent goal achievement in the reduction of nitrogen pollution from agriculture and a 49 percent goal achievement for phosphorous, the report shows.

Reopening upstream blockages to migratory fish in the Chesapeake Bay watershed is measured at 76 percent of the goal, with 2,144 miles reopened since 1990. Watershed land preservation efforts have resulted in 99 percent achievement of restoration goals with a total of 6.83 million acres permanently preserved. The forest buffer restoration goal of 2,010 miles was reached by Bay Program partners well ahead of schedule, and in 2003 the target was raised to 10,000 miles. As of 2006, 53 percent of the new goal had been achieved.

“While much has been accomplished, there is still much work left to be done,” said Lape. “Restoring the Chesapeake Bay to its former glory cannot be done with government support alone. It is up to every citizen living in the Bay watershed to become a steward of our nation’s largest and most cherished estuary.”

Electronic versions of the *Chesapeake Bay 2006 Health & Restoration Assessment* reports can be found at [www.chesapeakebay.net/press.htm](http://www.chesapeakebay.net/press.htm). Because of space limitations, only brief text is included in the printed report. Detailed information about each indicator can be found at [www.chesapeakebay.net/indicators.htm](http://www.chesapeakebay.net/indicators.htm). Expanded analysis and interpretation of data as well as the methods used to compile the graphs can be found at [www.chesapeakebay.net/assess/](http://www.chesapeakebay.net/assess/).

The Chesapeake Bay Program is a unique regional partnership that has directed the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay since 1983. The Bay Program partners include the states of Maryland, New York, Delaware and West Virginia; the commonwealths of Pennsylvania and Virginia; the District of Columbia; the Chesapeake Bay Commission, a tri-state legislative body; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, representing the federal government, and participating citizen advisory groups.

The Chesapeake Bay watershed is home to more than 16 million people living in parts of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia. Since 1983, the Chesapeake Bay Program has coordinated the restoration of the Bay and its watershed.

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