



# Press Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## ***Bay Barometer* shows degraded health of Chesapeake Bay did not improve in 2008; Chesapeake Bay Program partnership continues to increase restoration efforts**

**Washington, D.C.** – The overall health of the Chesapeake Bay did not improve in 2008 and the nation's largest estuary continues to have poor water quality, degraded habitats and low populations of several key species of fish and shellfish. Based on the condition of these areas, the Bay's health averaged 38 percent, with 100 percent representing a fully restored ecosystem.

Detailed results are presented in *Bay Barometer: A Health and Restoration Assessment of the Chesapeake Bay and Watershed in 2008*, which was released today by the Chesapeake Bay Program. The full report is available at [www.chesapeakebay.net](http://www.chesapeakebay.net).

Chesapeake Bay Program partners continued to increase restoration efforts in 2008, and new programs and projects resulted in incremental gains toward goals. According to *Bay Barometer*, the restoration efforts stand at 61 percent, with 100 percent meaning that all measured needed for a restored Bay are implemented. Work is underway to reduce pollution, restore habitats, manage fisheries, protect watersheds and foster stewardship.

The Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries are unhealthy primarily because of pollution from excess nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment entering the water. The main sources of these pollutants are agriculture, urban and suburban runoff, wastewater, and airborne contaminants.

The partners of the Chesapeake Bay Program have set goals for the health of the Bay and the restoration measures needed to restore the ecosystem to a healthy state. *Bay Barometer* is the annual review of the partnership's progress and for the first time includes overall scores for both health and restoration.

"While there are small successes in certain parts of the ecosystem and specific geographic areas, the sobering data in this report reflect only marginal shifts from last year's results," said Jeffrey Lape, Director of the Chesapeake Bay Program. "This affirms the need to take bolder actions and involve a wider network of stakeholders and resources to achieve significant improvements. We are extremely disappointed in the Chesapeake Bay's continued poor health and are striving to make more rapid progress in restoring the estuary and its watershed."

One success story is that the partnership has met its goal for land preservation. Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and the District of Columbia committed to permanently protect from development 20 percent of their combined 34 million acres by 2010. Through the end of last year, the total land protected stood at 7.3 million acres, which surpassed the goal two years before the deadline. Forests, parks, wildlife refuges and other preserved lands provide habitat for animals and filter pollution before it reaches the Bay and its tributaries.

Bay Barometer also shows that the Chesapeake Bay Program is making strong progress in restoring fish passage, expanding public access and providing educational experiences for students throughout the watershed.

Water quality in Chesapeake Bay was again poor in 2008, meeting only 21 percent of goals. This includes key indicators for dissolved oxygen, water clarity, algae and chemical contaminants. There were minor gains in the underwater bay grasses that provide critical shelter to many fish and shellfish, improve water clarity by helping sediment settle to the bottom, add oxygen to the water and reduce shoreline erosion. Last year, there were 76,861 acres of bay grasses throughout the Bay, which was 42 percent of the goal and an increase of 11,984 acres from 2007.

*Bay Barometer* also showed a drop in the blue crab population. The goal is to have 200 million blue crabs that are at least one-year-old in the Bay. Last year, the population of spawning-age blue crabs was 120 million, or 60 percent of the goal. This is a substantial decrease from a population of 143 million in 2007, which was 71 percent of the goal. The abundance of other key species including oysters and shad remained at low levels.

One of the greatest challenges to restoration is continued population growth and development in the region, which destroys forests, wetlands and other natural areas. The impact of human activity is overwhelming nature and offsetting cleanup efforts. Because the watershed's 17 million residents have a tremendous impact on its health, a section called "How You Can Help" was added to *Bay Barometer*. It shows simple actions that people can take to help protect nature and reduce pollution. The Bay will only be restored through this collective effort.

Information in *Bay Barometer* will be used by the Chesapeake Executive Council at their annual meeting in May. The Chesapeake Executive Council establishes the policy agenda for the Chesapeake Bay Program. Executives from the six Bay states, the District of Columbia, the Chesapeake Bay Commission, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture participate in the Executive Council meetings.

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*The Chesapeake Bay Program is a unique regional partnership that has coordinated and conducted the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay since 1983. Partners include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, representing the federal government; the U.S. Department of Agriculture; the states of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia; the District of Columbia; the Chesapeake Bay Commission, a tri-state legislative body; and advisory groups of citizens, scientists and local government officials.*