

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System

Annapolis Buoy: Fall Seasonal

Water quality here inside the mouth of the Severn River is determined by both the rainfall in the river's short watershed upstream of Annapolis and by what comes down the Bay's main stem from the Susquehanna.

At summer's end, salinity tends to be 10-12 practical salinity units, about one-third of seawater, and water temperature is beginning to fall. Unless this area receives heavy rainfall from a tropical storm or hurricane, the salinity should stay in that range through the fall, as temperatures decline. Decreasing water temperatures and shorter days should diminish the pollution-driven algae blooms that can hamper water quality for much of the summer.

As fall's temperatures drop, water quality will improve. With declining surface temperatures, that upper layer is sinking, effectively "turning over" or mixing the river and bringing oxygen-deprived bottom water to the surface for wind and rain to refresh. You can follow trends on the CBIBS website, www.buoybay.noaa.gov.

For fish and birds, the falling temperatures signal the prospect of winter and the need to fatten up for that lean season. Young-of-the-year menhaden, a.k.a. "peanut bunkers," and their two-year-old kin school up in preparation for migration to coastal waters off North Carolina. The majority of the fish in those dense schools will survive to make the trip, but a significant number will feed predators along the way, ranging from fishing birds like loons, gulls, and gannets to bluefish and rockfish.

Most fall visitors to this part of Capt. Smith's Trail are carrying fishing rods or racing sailboats. It's a great time to be out there, but be sure you have enough boat under you, that you dress for the weather, and that you pay prudent attention to the weather information that the NOAA CBIBS Annapolis buoy gives you. Be sure to check the NOAA National Weather Service forecast for the area, too.