

Reading Selection

The Chesapeake Bay: An Ecosystem in Danger

*Exploring the Bay in 1608, Captain John Smith found a hounteous bay full of fish such as "brettes, mullets, white Salmonds, Trowts, Soles, Plaice, Herrings, Rockfish, Eeles, Shades, Crabs, Shrimps, Oysters, Cocles and Muscles.... In somer," he wrote, "no place affordeth more plentie of Sturgeon, nor in winter more abundance of fowle.... In the small rivers all the years there is good plentie of small fish, so that with hookes those that would take paines had sufficient."**

The Chesapeake Bay Is an Ecosystem

The Chesapeake Bay area is a vast and complicated ecosystem. It covers a surface area of over 2,200 square miles (approximately 3,500 square kilometers). That's almost as large as the entire state of Delaware! Its waters are a mixture of fresh water from about 150 rivers and streams and salt water from the Atlantic Ocean. The bay holds 18 trillion gallons of water!

The bay bursts with all kinds of life. Its producers include water grasses anchored to the bottom and algae so tiny you need a microscope to see one. And its animals range from crabs, fish, muskrats, and seahorses to swans, diamondback terrapins, and billions of baby ecls.

The land around the Chesapeake is a jumble of different environments: swamps, wetlands, meadows, forests, mountains, and beaches. Each environment is home to many different kinds of plants and animals. In fact, over 2,500 different kinds of plants and animals live in the bay area.

In the bay's ecosystem (as in all ecosystems) every single element—water, land, air, light, and living things—is connected in a complex web of relationships. For the bay area, the web is very complex indeed.

But remember: through your work on the ecocolumns, you have already learned a lot about ecosystems. This will help you understand the complicated ecosystem of the Chesapeake Bay.

How Is the Bay Like Your Ecosystem?

You have seen that what happens on land (as in your terrarium) can greatly affect what happens in water (as in your aquarium). Now apply this idea to the land bordering the Chesapeake. It's covered with farms and factories, cities and highways, schools and apartment buildings, landfills and campgrounds, restaurants and marinas.



Over 13 million people live, work, and play in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

* Eugene L. Meyer, *Maryland Lost and Found: Peoples and Places from Chesapeake to Appalachia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).