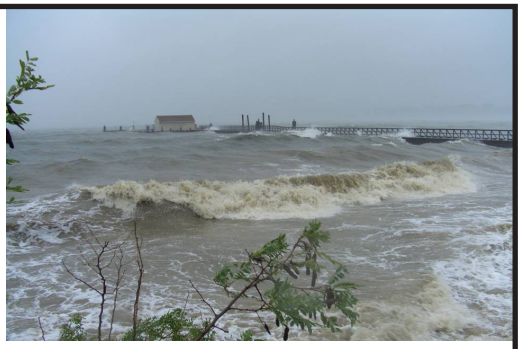
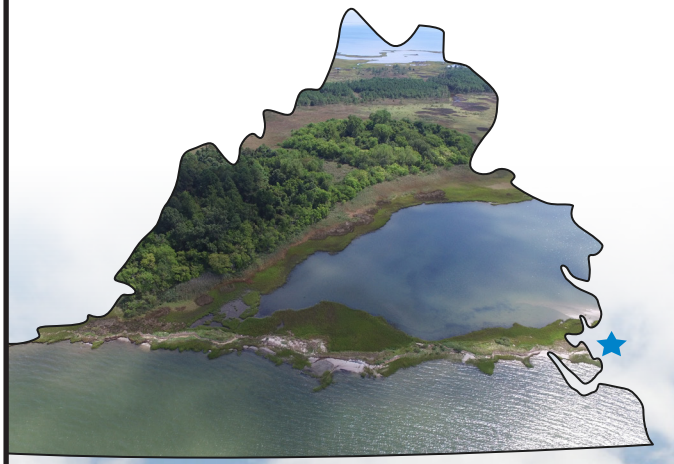


Chesapeake Bay–Virginia

National Estuarine Research Reserve



Location: Southern portion of Chesapeake Bay along the York River estuary that includes Sweet Hall Marsh, Taskinas Creek, Catlett Islands, and Goodwin Islands

Date Designated: 1991

Area Protected: 3,072 acres

Web Address: *vims.edu/cbnerr*

Access and Infrastructure

- Reserve headquarters and principle research and education facilities are located on the Virginia Institute of Marine Science's Gloucester Point campus.
- Goodwin Islands are managed exclusively for research and education. The islands have a limited-use public access policy and are accessible only by shallow draft boat; there are no docking facilities or designated trails.
- Catlett Islands are managed exclusively for research and education. The islands have limited-use public access policy and are accessible by shallow draft boats, with neighboring canoe/kayak launches at Poplar, Timberneck, and Cedarbush Creeks. Limited land access is available via adjacent Machicomoco State Park.
- The Taskinas Creek component lies within the boundaries of York River State Park. Park facilities include a visitor's center; hiking, biking, and equestrian trails; canoe launch and rentals; a fishing pier and boat ramp; and day-use shelters.
- Sweet Hall Marsh is privately owned, with access limited to reserve research and education activities.

Management: The reserve is administered on a daily basis by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, College of William and Mary. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management provides funding, national guidance, and technical assistance.

The Chesapeake Bay–Virginia National Estuarine Research Reserve is part of the nation's largest estuary, which is one of the most productive in the world. The York River estuary is the Bay's fifth largest tributary in terms of flow and watershed area and contains many of the diverse habitats that support over 3,600 species of plants and animals within the bay and its watershed. Representative coastal habitats within the reserve include seagrass beds, oyster reefs, sub- and intertidal flats, tidal freshwater and salt marshes, and upland, maritime, and flooded hardwood forests.

Through focused scientific, education, and stewardship programs, this research reserve informs coastal resource management decision-making and supports community education and planning. Areas of focus include water quality and quantity, climate and human-induced stressors on coastal ecosystems, and integrated coastal observing systems.

CHESAPEAKE BAY–VIRGINIA

National Estuarine Research Reserve

Interesting Things to Know

- Virginia's original "capital city" and Chief Powhatan's (father of Pocahontas) seat of power, Werowocomoco, is located across the York River from the Taskinas Creek reserve.
- For over 75 years, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science has offered real-world solutions facing Chesapeake Bay and beyond.
- As a climate change sentinel site, reserve studies focus on how underwater grasses and coastal marshes respond to environmental change.
- Through its Virginia Estuarine and Coastal Observing System web portal (*http://web2.vims.edu/vecos*) and water quality monitoring programs, the reserve is an instrumental contributor to Bay observations.
- Using local sentinel site information, the reserve's Climate Education for a Changing Bay curriculum improves climate and estuarine ecosystem literacy in three local school districts.
- Focused on community planning and environmental management needs, the reserve offers comprehensive training in resource assessment and delineation, and water quality and shoreline management.

About the Programs

The nation's 30 research reserves represent a tremendous asset, protecting nearly 1.4 million acres and providing habitat where plants and wildlife thrive. Community benefits include recreation, flood protection, and water filtration. Because the following programs are offered at each reserve, the system is able to make an environmental impact at the local level, as well as nationally.

Stewardship. Site protection and enhancement are part of every research reserve. Activities may include managing land and water resources, restoring habitat, controlling invasive species, maintaining biodiversity, and reducing environmental stressors.

Research. Reserve research is focused on how environmental factors—such as nutrient loading, climate change, invasive species, and storms—impact coastal ecosystems. The monitoring program provides long-term data on water quality, weather, biological communities, habitat, and land-use and land-cover characteristics.

Training. To provide the community with the information and skills needed to integrate coastal science into local decision-making and everyday lives, reserves provide specialized courses and information. Reserve training professionals are active in community planning and improvement initiatives.

Education. Local data generated at the reserve provide students with a firsthand experience of local environmental conditions. Educators lead student, teacher, and citizen field trips that are life-changing experiences, as participants see, feel, and smell what makes an estuary one of the most remarkable places in the world.

To learn more, visit coast.noaa.gov/nerrs.