

# University of Maryland Chesapeake Bay Report Card is Highest Grade in 22 Years

*The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science issued a Chesapeake Bay Report Card with a grade of C+ for the Bay health and clean water.*

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[Chesapeake Bay](#) Health Improves to C+ for the first time in over 20 years. Ecological, societal, and economic conditions in the watershed are influenced by land use.

The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) released its annual report card today

with the overall Chesapeake Bay earning a grade of C+ (55%), the highest grade since 2002. The 2023/2024 Chesapeake Bay and Watershed Report Card issued today at the Susquehanna River Basin Commission office in Harrisburg is the 17th annual ecosystem report card. The Chesapeake Bay Watershed Health, which includes ecological, societal, and economic indicators, scored 52% (C), a moderate score overall.

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*Fernando Miralles-Wilhelm*

“The Chesapeake Bay restoration is seen as a global model of sustainability. The Report Card shows that the results are moving in the right direction but we need to pick up the pace of these efforts particularly in light of climate change which will make meeting the targets more difficult,” said Fernando Miralles-Wilhelm, president of UMCES.

The overall Chesapeake Bay score is significantly improving, reflecting progress in the bay's restoration efforts. Scores for Bay indicators also improved or

remained steady from the previous year. Out of the fifteen Bay regions, eleven showed improved



The Chesapeake Bay trajectory is up this year with improvement in nearly all regions of the Bay watershed.

scores with five regions showing significant improving trends. The region with the highest overall score was once again the Lower Bay at 70% (B), followed by the Upper Bay at 61% (B-), which improved to a B- grade for the first time.

“The Upper Chesapeake Bay, which receives the Susquehanna River, has the second highest score in Bay Health, and it continues to improve,” said Dr. Bill Dennison, UMCES professor and vice president. “This improvement is a testament to efforts to reduce nutrients in the Susquehanna River watershed, underscoring the hard work in the state of Pennsylvania on nutrient reduction and riparian buffers.”

“There is still much to do, but this is a strong indicator of progress. After being off track, the partnership is now accelerating progress. In recent years, EPA has stepped up enforcement, accountability, and investments and it is paying off. These efforts have helped spur historic results among upstream and downstream states and all sectors, especially agriculture,” said EPA Mid-Atlantic Regional Administrator Adam Ortiz.

The overall Watershed Health Score (C) is the same as the previous year. In 2024, Ecological scored a C+, Societal scored a C, and Economic scored a C. This year’s report examines the watershed scores in relation to land use. Generally, regions with agricultural lands had the lowest overall scores in the Societal category, while major cities scored poorly in the Economic category. Regions with high tree cover and low agricultural or development use achieved higher Ecological scores.

“The work being done to clean up the Chesapeake Bay is critical. And it’s clear that this work is paying off. The Susquehanna River is the cleanest it’s been in two decades,” said U.S. Senator John Fetterman. “But there’s still more to be done to continue to improve the ecosystem and enhance outdoor recreation for everyone in the watershed.”

Similar to the previous year, the ecological and societal conditions in the eastern shore of Maryland and Virginia are worse than in other regions. With roughly 40% of the land in these regions dedicated to agriculture, balancing the economic and social benefits of agriculture with its ecological impacts is crucial for maintaining a healthy ecosystem. Across the Chesapeake Bay watershed, working with the agricultural communities is important to manage the impacts of agricultural runoff.

“This game-changing investment in the Chesapeake Bay shows that the infrastructure law and the Inflation Reduction Act are working. These laws are giving Pennsylvania farmers the tools they need to fight water pollution and restore the ecosystem,” said U.S. Senator Bob Casey. “We’ve got more work to do, and I will keep fighting to ensure that we support farmers as they continue protecting our environment.”

The 2023/2024 Chesapeake Bay and Watershed Report Card highlights UMCES' ongoing efforts to enhance the report card and create new avenues for driving change. These initiatives include

the development of indicators for man-made debris (including plastics), environmental justice, and agricultural impacts.

The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science's Integration and Application Network produces the annual report card, which is the most comprehensive assessment of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. The report card uses extensive data and analysis in partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), the Chesapeake Bay Program, academic institutions, and watershed jurisdictions. For more information about the 2023/2024 Chesapeake Bay and Watershed Report Card including region-specific data, visit [chesapeakebayreportcard.org](https://chesapeakebayreportcard.org).

#### UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science leads the way toward better management of Maryland's natural resources and the protection and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. From a network of laboratories located across the state, UMCES scientists provide sound evidence and advice to help state and national leaders manage the environment, and prepare future scientists to meet the global challenges of the 21st century. [www.umces.edu](http://www.umces.edu)

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