

Envision the Choptank

Envision the Choptank engages communities, businesses, and government in collaborative solutions that improve the health and productivity of oyster reefs and restore fishable, swimmable waters to the Choptank River.



At 68 miles long, the Choptank is the longest river on the Delmarva Peninsula, with headwaters reaching into Delaware and its mouth emptying into the Chesapeake Bay. Once an area of abundant wetlands, extensive oyster reefs, and thriving fisheries, the Choptank's water quality has been steadily declining since U.S. Geological Survey monitoring began in 1965. Nutrient and sediment runoff from agriculture, wastewater, and development have led to poor water clarity and periods of low dissolved oxygen, making it difficult for underwater grasses, fish, and oysters to thrive.

Native oyster populations—a key cultural and economic driver for the Choptank region—are estimated to be less than one percent of historic levels in the Chesapeake Bay. Approximately 70% of the underwater grass beds in the river have disappeared, while at the same time more than 47,000 acres of wetlands have been lost in the upper portion of the river alone. In addition, higher than acceptable levels of bacteria have led to oyster harvest closures in several tributaries and the mainstem Choptank, affecting watermen and aquaculture operations.

Despite these challenges, the Choptank remains a treasured part of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem, containing critical habitat for spawning striped bass, river herring, and blue crabs, the Chesapeake's most lucrative fishery. The Choptank is one of the most productive blue crab nurseries in the Bay.

Because of the Choptank's rich natural heritage, a variety of organizations and agencies are focusing their efforts on the Choptank, working to improve the quality of its waters and conserve the diversity and abundance of natural and cultural resources within the watershed. For example, the multiagency effort to restore oysters and the reefs they form to the Choptank River complex—the largest oyster restoration project in the nation—has already resulted in two billion oysters planted in the lower Choptank.

...community-driven solutions

...people, economy, and natural resources

...a swimmable and fishable Choptank





Nonprofits and government agencies are partnering with farmers, businesses, and residents to protect this investment by implementing best management practices that filter pollution on farm fields and developed lands and prevent it from fouling the creeks and rivers where oysters, crabs, and fish need clean water to survive.

Envision the Choptank is working with conservation organizations, community groups, government agencies, and local citizens to find collaborative solutions that protect and restore the resources of the Choptank to improve the quality of life for local citizens. The group is using the latest science and technology together with local knowledge to target protection and restoration efforts where they will be most effective at improving water quality and habitat.

The partnership recognizes that the long-term sustainability of the Choptank's people and wildlife depends on community participation. As such, **Envision the Choptank** works to better perspectives of residents and community groups throughout the watershed so that local values can inform solutions to water-quality problems that endure.

Envision the Choptank believes that people and groups are most effective when they work together. Efficiency is gained through each partner contributing their unique strengths to shared projects, and needed capacity is brought through dedicated staffing focused on facilitating the development of shared goals and partnership projects, assisting with fundraising for projects, and encouraging ongoing communication and collaboration.

Current partners include the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Chesapeake Conservancy, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, Maryland Sea Grant, The Nature Conservancy, Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy, and Pickering Creek Audubon Center.



Envision the Choptank welcomes participation from any person or group interested in the health and vitality of the Choptank River. To get involved, contact Lauren Taneyhill at lauren.taneyhill@noaa.gov.