



RT ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES, INC.

Your Solution-Oriented Environmental Services Firm

CHESAPEAKE BAY'S WATERS ARE THE CLEAREST IN DECADES

Water clarity in the Chesapeake Bay is the best it's been in decades, and native rockfish, oyster and blue crab populations are rebounding as the overall health of the nation's largest estuary improves, a report released in early January found.

Still, a recent Chesapeake Bay Foundation report notes that the bay - an economic driver that supports fishing, farming, shipping and tourism - remains "a system dangerously out of balance, a system in crisis," and says progress has been uneven across the region. The Chesapeake Bay watershed spans 64,000 square miles in parts of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Scientists from the foundation compile data for 13 indicators in three categories: pollution, habitat, and fisheries. They assign each indicator a score from one to 100, and those results taken together resulted in this year's overall grade of 34. The group says a perfect score is not attainable because of population growth and development, but a 70 would present an A grade and a "saved bay."

Nine of the 13 indicators showed improvement from the last report, and each of the three categories improved overall.

On water clarity, the report issued an overall grade of a D-minus. Still, that represented a 2-point improvement from the previous report, and the foundation called it "the clearest water in decades."

The indicator showed the most improvement was the blue crab population, which the report said has increased dramatically since 2014, from 297 million to 553 million. The report noted that although this year's population was lower than the 2012 peak of 779 million, it reflects a "more resilient population" because juvenile, male, and female spawning stock counts all increased.

The report also found that the rockfish, or striped bass, population appeared to have stabilized after a 10-year decline, and oyster harvests exceeded 1 million bushels in 2015 for the first time in 30 years.