

Wetlands

Wetlands cover approximately 1-2 percent of the land in Cecil County. Wetlands provide vital habitat for plants and animals, filter pollutants, control erosion, and help protect the shoreline from damaging waves. Wetland plants also act to regulate global temperature by absorbing large amounts of carbon.

America's wetlands support over 5,000 species of plant life, 190 amphibian species, and many endangered species. Some endangered species found in the wetlands of Cecil County include the Whooping Crane and the Bog Turtle. Cecil County's wetlands are also home to a Maryland Threatened Species, the Bald Eagle.



Image Credit: Bog Turtle
<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/naturalresource/spring2006/turtles.asp>

There are two types of wetlands, tidal wetlands (coastal) and non-tidal (inland) wetlands. Tidal wetlands are found where seawater joins freshwater along coastal areas, creating a unique ecosystem. The plants and animals found in tidal wetlands have adapted to survive in salty water and soil conditions. Non-tidal wetlands are found along the floodplains of rivers and streams and in other low-lying depressions.

The Federal Government regulates some of the activities that take place in wetlands through Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The "Swampbusters" and the Coastal Management and Coastal Barriers Resources Act also provide protection for and further regulation of activities that take place in wetlands.

Where To Get Help for wetland information

- Cecil County Wetlands Restoration
<http://www.mde.state.md.us/assets/document/wetlandswaterways/CE.pdf>
- Living in Harmony With Wetlands
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/highlights/wetlands>
- What are Wetlands?; <http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/vital/what.html>
- Environmental Concern; <http://www.wetland.org>



Cecil County's Forests

More than 60 native species of trees are found in Cecil County. Cecil County's forests provide vital habitat for many of Maryland's animal species. Forests are important to the health of the Bay, acting as filters, improving water quality, reducing sedimentation, removing nutrients, and regulating stream flow during storm events. In addition, forests can be harvested sustainably for products including lumber, furniture, flooring, firewood, and pulp for paper.

There are approximately 85,000 acres of forest in Cecil County, comprising about 38 percent of the land area. Of that, about 8,000 acres of forest are located in State parks, forests, or State/Federal wildlife management areas. However, forest land is decreasing in Cecil County and Maryland.

In an effort to lessen the impact of development on forestland, the State of Maryland adopted The Forest Conservation Act in 1992. The Act regulates the cutting, clearing, or grading of forested areas that are to be developed. A Forest Conservation Plan also defines how sensitive areas will be protected during development. Since 1993, Cecil County Planning and Zoning has been implementing and enforcing the State mandated Forest Conservation Act through approved Forest Conservation Plans or exemption declarations.



Where To Get Help for forestry information

- Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forest Service, Cecil County Office **410-287-5777**
- Cecil County Forest Conservancy District Board; <http://www.cecilfb.sailorsite.net>
- A Citizen's Guide to the Forest Conservation Act in Maryland
http://www.cbf.org/site/DocServer/Forest_Conservation.pdf?docID=4845
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forest Service;
<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/forests>; **1-877-620-8367**
- The Importance of Maryland's Forests
<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/forests/fiabrochure.pdf>
- Cecil County Maryland Forest Conservation Regulations
<http://www.ccgov.org/uploads/PlanningAndZoning/General/ForestConservationRegulations.pdf>

Creating Living Shorelines

There are approximately 4,360 miles of shoreline within the Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Thirty percent of Maryland's tidal shorelines are identified as eroding, as well as 14,063 miles of freshwater streams that lead to the Chesapeake Bay. Maryland Chesapeake Bay shorelines are eroding at an average rate of 0.6 feet per year. Although average values can be calculated, site specific conditions must be considered to design shoreline stabilization practices. Erosion along shorelines is a natural but relentless process. Many methods have been utilized to try to slow or stop the erosion process. More recently, the natural approach to shoreline stabilization has been used in many different scenarios with much success.

The natural approach is favored over the structural approach. The structural approach utilizes permanent stone or concrete structures such as bulkheads and revetments and should be used only in high energy areas with high erosion rates. In low energy erosion areas, non-structural practices can be used to slow erosion as part the natural approach. Non-structural practices include fringe marsh creation and coir log edging. Medium energy areas most commonly use hybrid projects. Natural approach hybrid projects include vegetative marsh fringes with sills, groins, or breakwaters. The goal of the natural approach is to establish or restore vegetative marsh areas. Vegetative marsh acts as a buffer that can reduce run-off pollution and act as a nutrient and sediment trap. The root system of vegetative buffers holds the shoreline sand in place, reducing the effects of erosion.



Ordinary Point during restoration (left) and after shoreline restoration (right).

Where To Get Help for shoreline information

- Cecil County Planning and Zoning should be contacted for Critical Area interpretation and permitting needs **410-996-5225**
- Resource Conservation & Development; <http://www.md-esrcd.org>; **410-822-9300**
- Cecil Soil Conservation District; <http://www.cecilscd.com>; **410-398-4411 ext. 3**
- Shore Erosion Control the Natural Approach
http://www.somdrd.org/articles/uploads/1/Shore_Erosion_Control_1.pdf
- Shore Erosion Control: Living Shorelines and Other Approaches
<http://www.jefpat.org/Living%20Shorelines/lsmainpage.htm>

Critical Area

The Critical Area Act was passed in 1984 in an effort to protect Maryland's most important natural resource, the Chesapeake Bay. The Bay watershed covers 64,000 square miles, where 15 million people and 2,700 species of plants and animals live and interact.

By law, the Critical Area is defined as all land within 1,000 feet of the Mean High Water Line of tidal waters or the landward edge of tidal wetlands and all waters of and lands under the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Any land-disturbing activities within the Critical Area must be carried out following specific provisions that can be found in the State-adopted Critical Area Criteria and local Critical Area Programs.

Before conducting any land-disturbing activities, be sure to contact the Cecil County Department of Public Works regarding grading permits and Cecil County Planning and Zoning concerning Critical Area questions. Critical Area violations include activities such as clearing trees, removing vegetation, and increasing impervious surfaces. These activities are violations if conducted without proper permits, variances, or management plans.



Riparian Forest Buffer within the Critical Area
along the North East River

From My Backyard to Our Bay

110-foot Buffer: The Cecil County Critical Area Law requires a 110-foot Buffer along the shoreline used as a transition between upland and aquatic habitats.

Typical Critical Area Violations:

- Clearing trees and/or vegetation in the Buffer
- Construction of accessory structures (shed, pool, etc.) in the Buffer
- Disturbance of the Buffer, including; grading, stockpiling of construction materials, or dumping

Other Violations:

- Clearing or cutting trees anywhere within the Critical Area without a permit
- Building or grading without a building or grading permit

The above listed activities may not be a violation if the property owner has proper approval from the local planning and zoning office and a building and/or grading permit is displayed on the property. If you feel that the work being carried out is not in accordance with the permit, call the office that issued the permit.

Where To Get Help for Critical Area information

- Cecil County Planning and Zoning **410-996-5220**
- Cecil County Department of Public Works **410-996-5267**
- Maryland Critical Area Commission; <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/criticalarea>; **410-260-3477**
- Maryland Department of the Environment Tidal and Non-tidal Wetlands Division Call **410-537-3837** or **410-537-3768** for violations including filling of tidal or non-tidal wetlands without a permit, pier construction without a permit, construction of structures on piers, and clearing and/or burning marsh vegetation
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Natural Resources Police Call **410-260-8880** for violations including exceeding the posted speed limits on waterways and abandoned boats
- Cecil County Zoning Ordinance
http://www.ccgov.org/uploads/PlanningAndZoning/General/ZO_Entirety.pdf
- Cecil County Government Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
<http://cecilmaps.ccdps.org/public/>