THE CHESAPEAKE BAY REGION

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ABOUT

The Chesapeake Bay Region is a massive area on the East Coast of the United States, encompassing six states and the District of Columbia. The Chesapeake Bay itself is a large estuary, a body of water formed where freshwater streams flow into and mix with ocean water. Besides the estuary, the Chesapeake Bay Region also offers diverse habitats, including forests, wetlands, and rivers. The bay area supports over three thousand species of plants and animals. Birds migrating along the Atlantic Flyway utilize the bay's marshes for food and shelter.

HUMAN IMPACTS

The Chesapeake Bay Region has undergone massive development. Croplands and urban sprawl have replaced many of the region's habitats, and this rapid development has polluted the area's waters. Agricultural runoff from croplands, as well as suburban runoff from septic tanks, lawns, and gardens, is supplying excess nutrients to the water. These excess nutrients would typically be absorbed and removed by wetlands, but much of the Chesapeake Bay Region's wetlands have been destroyed. Meanwhile, climate change is leading to rising sea levels, which are eating away at habitats along the Chesapeake Bay Region. Several islands have already been entirely flooded and lost to rising sea waters.

IMPACTS TO WILDLIFE

Excess nutrients in the bay's waters might not sound like a big problem, but it is having serious effects on life in the Chesapeake Bay Region. These excess nutrients fertilize the algae until it grows into gigantic blooms that block the sunlight that underwater grasses need. Many bay species depend on these grasses for food and protection. Meanwhile, critical grasses of the wetlands are also being threatened by the rising seas.

MAPPING

Create a map showing the Chesapeake Bay region, including its watershed. Label the states and major cities in this region. Use Google Earth to explore the satellite image of the Chesapeake Bay. What signs of human impact do you see? These might include a wall or fence, lights, active construction, roads, traffic, or human settlements (towns, houses/buildings). Determine which human impacts exist in this area and add these to your map. Make sure to include a key on your map so that people looking at your map will know what your symbols and lines mean.