



# CHESAPEAKE BAY RESOURCE PROTECTION AREAS

## What is the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act?

Enacted by the Virginia General Assembly in 1988, the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act mandates that local governments include water quality protection measures in their zoning and subdivision ordinances, in addition to their comprehensive plans.

Isle of Wight adopted the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area Ordinance in November 1990 to protect environmentally sensitive lands known as *Chesapeake Bay Preservation Areas*. The most sensitive of these are called *Resource Protection Areas*.

## What are Resource Protection Areas?

Resource Protection Areas (RPAs), or buffers, are the "corridors" of environmental sensitivity land that lie alongside or near the shorelines of streams, rivers, and other waterways. In their natural condition, RPAs protect water quality, filter pollutants out of stormwater runoff, reduce the volume of stormwater runoff, prevent erosion, and perform other important biological and ecological functions. Components include:

- Tidal wetlands
- Tidal shores
- Non-tidal wetlands connected by surface flow and adjacent to tidal wetlands or tributary streams
- A 100-foot buffer landward of the above features

## Why are RPAs so important?

Streams, lakes and rivers are a key ingredient in our quality of life. They support a wide variety of plants, animals and aquatic life. People also enjoy them as visual and recreational resources.

A naturally vegetated RPA, or buffer, acts as (1) a protector to stabilize stream banks and limit erosion in the stream channel, (2) a filter to reduce the amount of sediments and nutrients that are carried off by stormwater runoff, (3) a transformer to change the chemical structure of some pollutants via chemical/biological processes, (4) a nutrient sink to store nutrients in the RPA vegetation and (5) a food source (ex. fallen leaves) for small organisms in streams.

These five critical functions enable the RPA to remove pollutants from stormwater runoff and to protect the stream or other water body.

## Where are RPAs located in Isle of Wight County?

RPAs are located adjacent to the James and Pagan Rivers, to include, but not limited to: the Jones, Lawnes, Ragged Island, Cypress and Brewers Creeks.

Additionally, RPAs within the County are located along the perennial streams (streams that flow all year long) throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed portion of the County. Roughly one-half of the County's streams are tributaries to the James River. In turn, the James River is a tributary to the Chesapeake Bay.

## Permitted activities in the RPA (subject to the approval of the Zoning Administrator):

- Water dependent facilities, such as docks, piers and public beaches
- Rebuilding existing structures of the same size or smaller
- Water wells, boardwalks, trails, pathways and public utility structures
- Selectively removing trees, for reasonable sight lines and vistas or pedestrian walkways (created using natural materials)
- Removing dead or dying vegetation

## Activities NOT permitted in the RPA:

- New development
- Additions to existing structures
- Parking lots
- Secondary structures, ex. sheds or gazebos
- Clear-cutting trees
- Filling and grading activities

## Are there consequences of violating a RPA?

Yes, non-compliance with a RPA is a violation of the County's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area Ordinance and can result in penalties. Violators will be required to restore the RPA in accordance with County guidelines, so that the RPA again can remove pollutants from stormwater runoff.

## Are there requirements for landowners of RPA areas?

Yes, landowners must install signs that indicate the boundaries for designated RPA areas. These signs are obtained from the Planning and Zoning Department.

There are also requirements for where and how far apart these signs must be installed.