

Section 1: Introduction to the Maryland Coastal Bays

General Introduction

Gaining an understanding of the health of an ecosystem requires the appropriate monitoring and analysis of the resulting data. Of course, such a monitoring program should be based on sound scientific research into the factors that affect the health of the ecosystem at hand. The Maryland Coastal Bays are lagoonal estuaries: coastal areas fringed by barrier islands or reefs where freshwater mixes with saltwater. While most ecosystem characteristics and processes are common to all coastal lagoons, all, including the Maryland Coastal Bays, are unique in some way. Therefore, before delving into the current health status and trends of this ecosystem, an introduction to its function and the monitoring programs that provide the data for its assessment is appropriate. The following chapters detail the monitoring programs in the Coastal Bays as well as provide a characterization of this coastal lagoon ecosystem.

Chapter 1.1 Ecosystem health assessment: Monitoring Maryland's Coastal Bays

Chapter 1.2 The Maryland Coastal Bays ecosystem