



Name _____

Date _____

Regions of North America: The Chesapeake Bay

The alarm buzzes at 3:30 am. A man rolls out of bed, stretches, and begins preparing for his workday. After pulling on a yellow raincoat and pants, he heads for his workboat. He carries bait, nets, and a hardy lunch. This is the life of a Chesapeake Bay waterman.

In the many small waterfront communities bordering the Bay, people make their living from the water. The brackish water yields crab, oysters, and many varieties of fish. The watermen head out early to make their catch and then sell their harvest to the fish markets and restaurants of the area. This has gone on for centuries in small communities like Smith Island, St. Michaels, and Tilghman Island. But, today, this way of life is as endangered as some of the species that make their home in the mix of salt and fresh water. Crabs are harder to find and may be smaller than in years gone by. Some Chesapeake Bay restaurants bring in crabs from other areas to serve on their tables. During some years, the oyster population has been so depleted that watermen must turn to other jobs to pay their bills. What has caused these problems in the brackish Bay?

To understand, we must first look at the Chesapeake Bay watershed. A watershed is the land area that drains into a body of water. The Chesapeake Bay has a large watershed area. It includes the six states of Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, and West Virginia along with the District of Columbia. The activities of people in these areas affect the water in the Chesapeake Bay. Rapid building has taken place in many places. New housing developments along the water mean sediment may seep into the water. Shoreline grasses may disappear. This means the young of species such as blue crabs don't have habitat for hiding. Sprays, used to control insects and help crops grow, can run into the Bay. These types of things hurt the water habitat. The food chain is affected. This means the way of life of the watermen is hurt. These workers must often find a different way to make a living.

Along the Chesapeake Bay, there are other economic opportunities. Some of these have survived for centuries. Others, such as the recreation industry, are fairly new. Tourists enjoy water sports such as motor boating and sailing. The restaurants and hotels that welcome these visitors mean jobs for the people who call the Bay home. But, these sports and the number of people they bring to the water can change the environment.

Shipbuilding is an industry that has a long history in the Bay. Today, many people make their living building and repairing ships for the military. The United States Navy has a huge shipyard at Norfolk, Virginia. There are also shipyards that construct cargo ships and small pleasure crafts. These provide jobs for many people.

But, for those who come from a long line of watermen, the disappearance of crabs and oysters means the possibility of giving up a way of life they love. They know there are other ways to provide for their families, but it is hard to give up greeting the rising sun as you throw out crab pots from your own fishing boat.

I. Remembering Ideas

Fill in the blank with a word from the article. Read the sentences to help you better understand the concepts from the article.

1. Water that is a mixture of salt and fresh is called _____.
2. A land area that drains into a body of water is called a _____.
3. Dirt from the construction of buildings runs into water and changes it. This is called _____.
4. A major industry that has a long history along the waters of the Chesapeake Bay is _____.
5. There is a huge U.S. Naval shipyard at _____.

II. Putting It Together

This article talks about a part of social studies called **economics**. As you know, people need jobs so they can pay for goods and services. To help you better understand the economy of the Chesapeake Bay region, think about these questions. Answer each one using complete sentences.

1. What has happened in the Chesapeake Bay watershed that is causing trouble for watermen?

2. Do you think the tourist industry is good for the Chesapeake Bay? Tell why or why not.

3. How have ships and boats been important on the Bay?
