

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System

Jamestown Buoy: Fall Seasonal

Rainfall from the James River's headwaters in southwest Virginia on down through the Blue Ridge to the coastal plain affects this big river. The salinity even in early fall is high enough to be unhealthy for humans to drink, unless a hurricane or tropical storm makes landfall here.

Over the coming months, rainy and snowy weather in the James watershed should drop the salinity below 3 practical salinity units, in the range considered fresh.

That transition affects many living things in this part of the river. The freshwater bald cypress trees, for example, which are just barely able to live on the backside of the island, grow in much greater profusion in the tidal fresh waters of Powhatan Creek and the Chickahominy River nearby. Those trees, unusual because they are deciduous conifers, change into lovely fall colors, just as other riverbank trees like maples, black gums, and sycamores do. They turn into complex shades of russet heather before their needles fall around Thanksgiving.

Meanwhile, in the marshes, a huge September crop of seeds from annual plants like wild rice, smartweed, tearthumb, Walter's millet, tickseed sunflower, and rice cutgrass provides a cornucopia for ducks and geese that arrive from northern nesting grounds to spend the winter in these mostly ice-free waters. As water temperatures fall from summer's 80s to the 50s, predatory rockfish, largemouth bass, catfish, and white perch in the river feed voraciously to stock up fat against winter's lean season.

As fall progresses, you can check the trends and current conditions at www.buoybay.noaa.gov. Before heading out on these waters, check conditions at the NOAA CBIBS Jamestown Buoy, and check the NOAA National Weather Service forecast for the area.