

Chesapeake Bay Watermen

Rugged men and women have made their living on the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers for centuries. Known as watermen, they hand down skills learned by observing water, climate, and wildlife. Consequently, younger generations learn time-honored maritime traditions from their elders. The work is often dangerous, especially during bad weather, but affection and respect for the marine environment motivates those who work on boats. Watermen harvest fish, oysters, crabs, clams, and scallops. They operate ferries, tugboats, police boats, and research vessels. Thomas Jefferson, who promoted the idea of “a school of instruction for our navy,” recognized the valuable skills developed by working watermen and referred to their industries as providing good instruction. More than 200 years later, watermen are still seen here as they go about their work on the York River.



Photos courtesy of Sara E. Lewis and Charles Davis.

