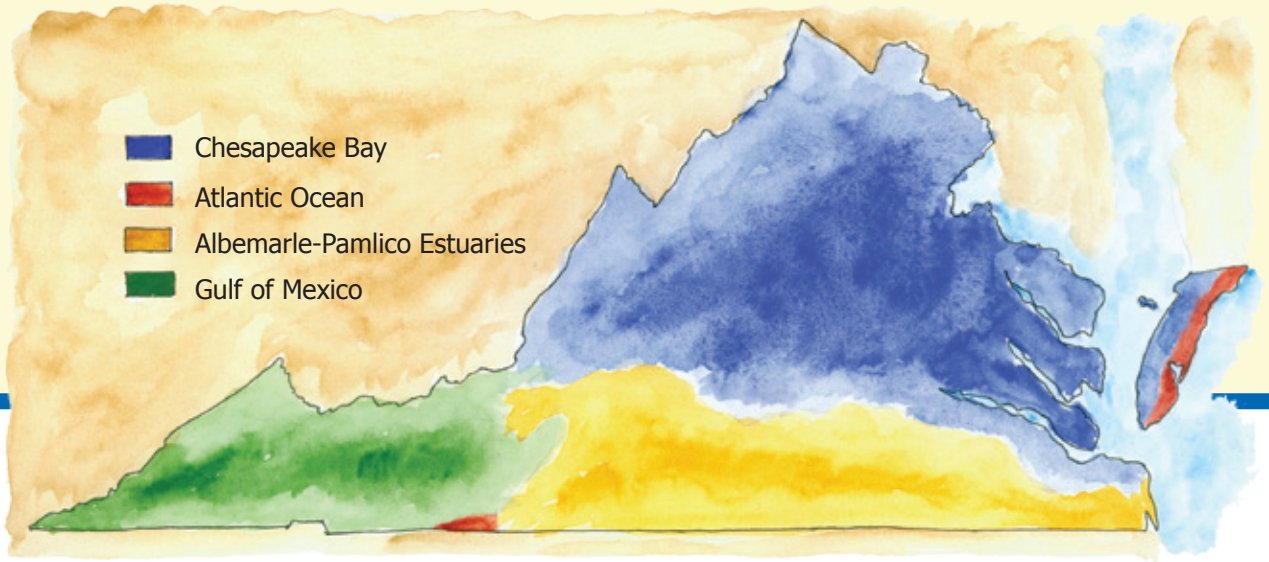
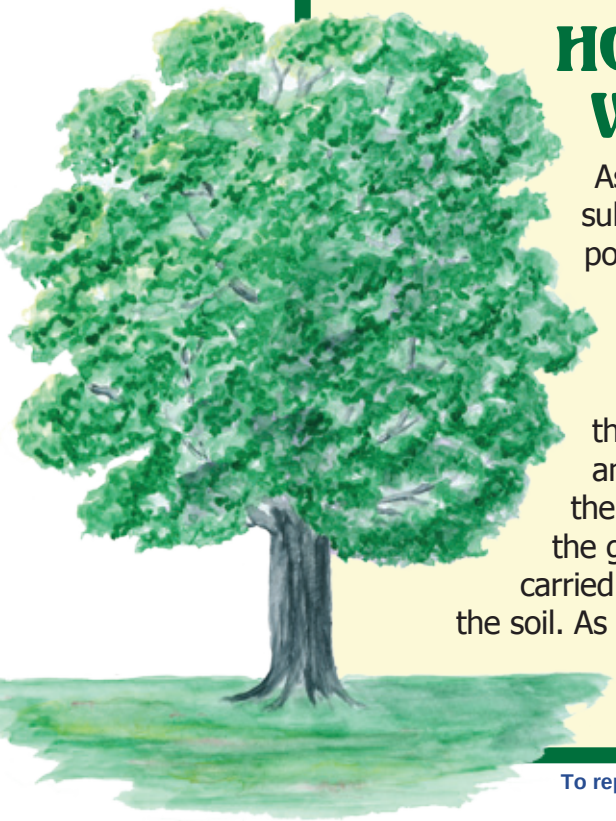
SPOTLIGHT ON THE CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHED

The map shows where Virginia's streams complete their watershed journeys. As you can see from the map, much of Virginia is in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Parts of six states make up this watershed, and over 16 million people live within it. The Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in all of North America! Many species of wildlife live in the Bay and its surrounding wetlands. Young fish and crustaceans find the food and shelter they need in its marshes and tidal creeks. Waterfowl, such as ducks and geese, spend the winter feeding in shallow Bay waters. People use the Bay for recreation, and some earn a living by catching fish and shellfish there. Because so much life depends on the Bay, keeping it clean and healthy is very important. Virginia's forests play a big part in protecting the health of the Chesapeake Bay.





HOW DO TREES PROTECT WATERSHEDS?

As water moves across the landscape, it can pick up pollutants – substances that do not belong in a healthy stream. Examples of pollutants include fertilizers from farm fields, pesticides from home lawns, oil and chemicals from roadways and parking lots, and even soil from new construction sites.

Watersheds with lots of trees have some natural protection from these harmful substances. Heavy rains are less likely to disturb and carry away soil in a forested watershed. This is because the raindrops slow down when they hit tree leaves and drip to the ground. The trees also act as filters for many of the pollutants carried in water. Tree roots absorb much of the water as it sinks into the soil. As trees use water, they remove pollutants before releasing water back into the air. Fortunately, almost two thirds of Virginia's land is forested – that is, covered by trees.