

Maryland's Shoreline Length Background & Guidance

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NOAA's official value for the total length of U.S. tidal shoreline is 95,471 statute miles (The Coastline of the United States)ⁱ. According to the Coastline of the US, Maryland has 3,190 miles of shoreline. The tidal shoreline figures were measured by hand in 1939-40 with a recording instrument on the largest-scale charts and maps then available. Shorelines of outer coast, offshore islands, sounds, bays, rivers, and creeks were included to the head of the tidewater or to a point where tidal waters narrow to a width of 100 feet. The total length of tidal shoreline includes measurements of the coastal states as well as the outlying U.S. territories and possessions. The shoreline length figures were reconfirmed in 1961. NOAA uses the Coastline of the United States to calculate the shoreline-length allocation formulas for its federal grants, including those given to Maryland.

In 2003, the Maryland Geological Survey reported that based on a shoreline interpreted from air photos flown between 1988 and 1995, Maryland's tidal shoreline, bordering the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, the coastal bays, and the Atlantic coast, is 7,719 miles longⁱⁱ. This figure far surpasses the previously reported and frequently cited length of 3,190 (The Coastline of the U.S.) or 4,360 miles (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1990)ⁱⁱⁱ. Part of the increase is due to the inclusion of minor bay tributaries, the upstream sections of larger tributaries, and streams draining the interior of some marshes. A second reason for the increase is the difference in the map scale on which the two shoreline lengths are based. The 7,719-mile length is based on a larger map scale (1:12,000 vs. 1:20,000), which more faithfully represents Maryland's convoluted shorelines.

For legal and regulatory purposes, it is recommended that DNR reference NOAA's official value for total length of Maryland's shoreline: 3,190 miles. For general, educational and informational purposes, it is appropriate to use the updated figure of 7,719 miles of shoreline.

ⁱ For more information, visit: <http://shoreline.noaa.gov/faqs.html>

ⁱⁱ Hennessee, L., Valentino, M.J., and Lesh, A.M., 2003, Updating shore erosion rates in Maryland: Baltimore, Md., Maryland Geological Survey, Coastal and Estuarine Geology File Report No. 03-05, 26 p.

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. 1990. *Chesapeake Bay Shoreline Erosion Study*.