



OUTDOORS

Dozens Of Dead Fish, Crabs And Birds Wash Ashore At Calvert Cliffs State Park In “Nexus Event”

by Carrie Cabral
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Source: Patrick Flaherty

LUSBY, Md. — In mid- to late February, a local hiker found dozens of dead fish and shore birds on the beach of Calvert Cliffs State Park.

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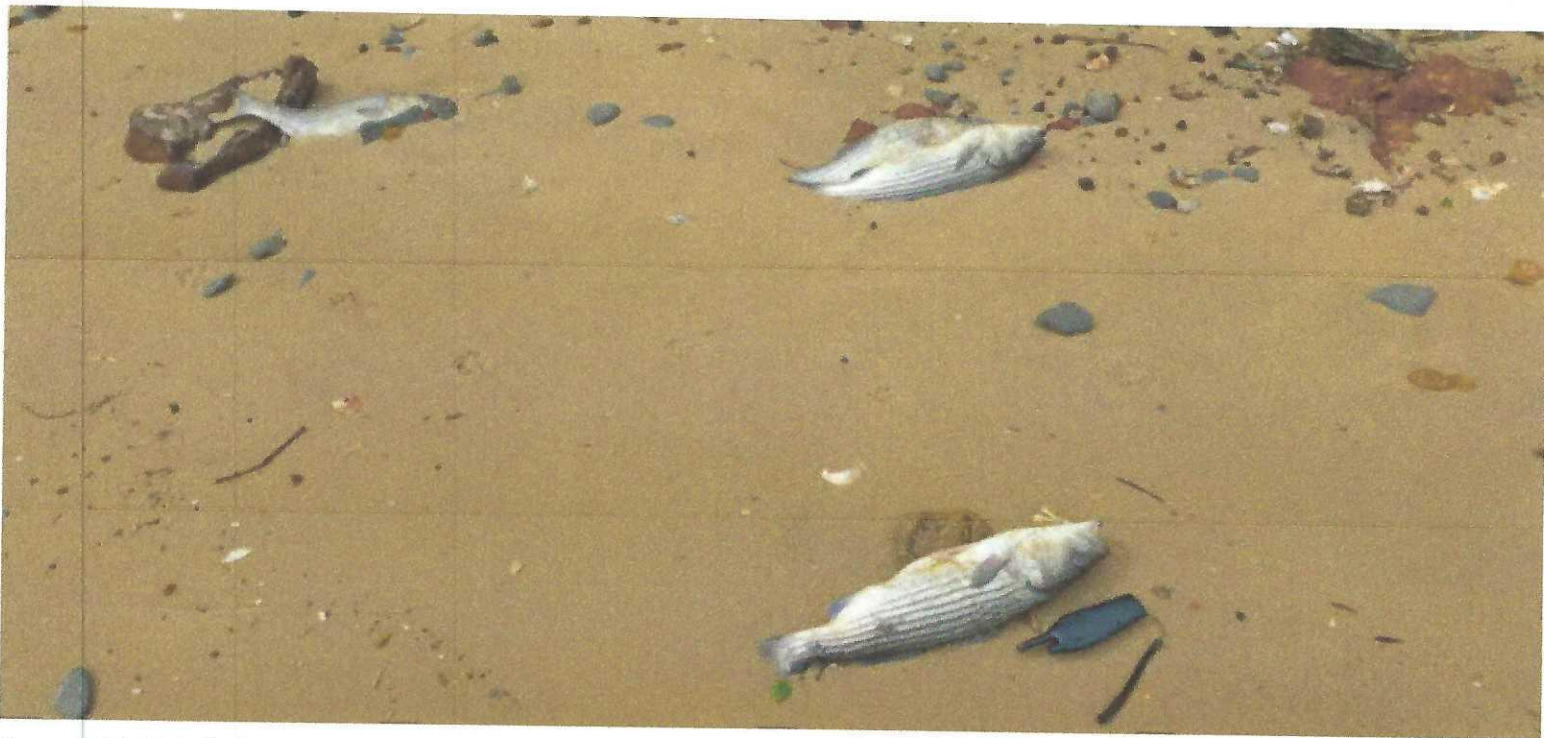


Patrick Flaherty, a Lusby resident and 2026 Board of County Commissioners candidate, said he's hiked in Calvert Cliffs almost every day for the last 15 years. He's never seen anything like this before.

On Feb. 11, 13 and 23, Flaherty documented dozens of dead animals washed ashore. The 23rd brought the largest and most concerning event — Flaherty documented 96 deceased rockfish, toadfish and crabs, as well as eight to 10 sea ducks and several seagulls washed up along the beach in the area between the Cove Point LNG property line to the cliffs bordering the Calvert Cliffs Clean Energy Center, owned by energy company Constellation. Flaherty immediately contacted the [Maryland Department of the Environment](#) (MDE), which sent out an investigator.



“Sometimes in the summer, you see some dead fish on the beach,” Fla Ad ends in 15
never.”



Source: Patrick Flaherty



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Flaherty said in a statement to [The BayNet](#) that all three events occur winds blowing southwest, creating cresting waves on the beaches. He have naturally pushed any floating dead marine life and birds from the ~~the~~ ~~long~~ ~~cove~~ ~~between~~ ~~Constellation~~ Energy's property and the Cove Point LNG facility directly onto the beaches of Calvert Cliffs State Park rather than allowing them to drift elsewhere down the Chesapeake.

Officials at Calvert Cliffs Clean Energy Center said they hadn't made any similar observations on their property, nor witnessed any unusual events.

"If any such discoveries are made in the future, we will immediately report them to MDE," a representative for Calvert Cliffs said in an email to The BayNet.

The MDE investigator, Chris Lockett, agreed that winter die-offs of fish are rare. In this case, he attributed the deaths of multiple species to a "nexus" event — or a combination of factors that led to the deaths rather than a single incident. The birds, he said, may indicate some kind of disease. Blue crabs, on the other hand, do occasionally experience winter die-offs. It's not common, but has been documented in cold winters. Crabs spend their winters dug into the sediment in the bay — those who chose to do this in shallow waters are more vulnerable.



Source: Patrick Flaherty



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The fish deaths were where Lockett's investigation took an unusual turn. Lockett, who has personally worked on more than 500 fish death events, said he also looked for injuries that could indicate that fish were caught in

trawls. Finding neither, Lockett moved on to water quality issues. He took water samples for oxygen levels, algae blooms and pollution.

The most likely scenario, Lockett said, was that fish suffered from temperature stress related to catch-and-release fishing. He said that the water temperatures vary in certain spots in the bay. On a few key warm days in February, people took to the water for recreational fishing. During that process, they released fish into colder waters than the ones in which they were caught. A sudden temperature change, even of just a few degrees, can be a huge shock to the fish's system.

“A lot of times, you walk down to the scene of something like that, and you see they're all dead. And the simplest explanation is that they're all related, but when you investigate you come to understand it's not the case. We can say now that it's scientifically correct to say they're not connected events,” Lockett said.

Lockett is confident in his findings about the fish kill event. The waterfowl death event is being investigated by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

“This is how it gets done at MDE,” Lockett said. “It's based on strong science and evaluating the evidence to come to a conclusion.”

However, Flaherty still expressed concern about the environmental impact of developing the area, especially given the ongoing discussion about adding a data center to Lusby.

The MDE typically doesn't release public reports on its investigations. Each year, fish kill events are documented in an annual report. This event would be included in the 2027 report. If the event was related to a compliance issue or a company, or someone was directly responsible, the event would be documented differently. Still, public reports aren't something people typically request.

“People like Mr. Flaherty are important to MDE,” said Jay Apperson, deputy director of communications at MDE. “We always advise people to report things to us. We want to know, and we'll look into it.”



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