

**Why are wildlife biologists concerned about nutria?**

When nutria become established in an area, they can cause tremendous damage to natural ecosystems by eating aquatic vegetation. Removal of this vegetation destroys food and habitat for native wildlife and can result in permanent damage to the wetlands. The wetlands surrounding Chesapeake Bay are extremely important to the health of the bay and its fish and shellfish populations. Nutria also damage private property by gnawing (chewing) landscaping plants and by burrowing into levees and undermining waterfront bulkheads. They also impact agriculture by consuming plants and produce, especially strawberries, melons, and pumpkins. Female nutria can bear young by six months of age and can produce up to 30 young in their lifetimes, so they can infest new habitats very quickly.