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## **Potomac Conservancy launches *Fish Mystery* campaign to solve scientific mystery and protect D.C.'s drinking water supply**

*Petition drive will showcase public support for more research into intersex fish discovered here and toxins that are leading suspects*

Washington, D.C., Apr. 20—Potomac Conservancy today announced the launch of its *Fish Mystery* campaign, calling for more research into why over 80% of male smallmouth bass in the Potomac River are now exhibiting female traits, such as eggs.

The campaign kicked off this morning with a teleconference call featuring U.S. Rep. James P. Moran of Arlington, sponsor of HR-4190, the Endocrine Disruption Prevention Act of 2009. Moran recently became chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies.

Potomac Conservancy President Hedrick Belin and USGS Fish Pathologist Vicki Blazer summarized scientists' findings to date and described a series of actions that individuals, the government, and Congress can take to help solve the mystery of intersex fish—based on the suspicion that a “toxic stew” of emerging pollutants is to blame.

The intersex fish phenomena—first discovered in the Potomac River in 2003—has since been detected nationwide. A 2009 report by the U.S. Geological Survey found intersex fish in a third of 111 sites tested around the United States.

Chemicals that mimic hormones and disrupt the endocrine system are suspected to be the leading cause of such conditions. These include substances common to our everyday lives, including pharmaceutical drugs and personal care products that are flushed into wastewater, and runoff from farms and feedlots that contains pesticides and fertilizers. With almost 90% of the region's drinking water drawn from the Potomac River, the quality of local water and its impact on people—particularly children—is a top concern.

“We have a good idea what the leading suspects are, but it appears to be more than one chemical, interacting,” said Potomac Conservancy President Hedrick

Belin on this morning's call. "We need to get these toxins out of our river water, which is the source of much of the DC area's drinking water."

A key component to the *Fish Mystery* campaign is a regionwide petition drive that launches today and will run all summer, urging legislators to prevent such chemicals from degrading our environment and threatening our health. With a goal of 5,000 signatures by Labor Day, Potomac Conservancy will reach out to residents of Potomac communities, asking them to sign the petition to express their concern for the health of themselves and their family, the Potomac River and its wildlife, and future generations. Speakers are available to address community groups, as well.

The petition calls on local members and leaders of to support the following actions to prevent these chemicals from degrading our environment and threatening our health:

- Provide additional funding (\$500,000 per year for 3 years) to research the causes of intersex fish;
- Direct the National Institutes of Environmental Health Sciences to research endocrine disrupting compounds and their effects on human health, and request that Congress fund that research at \$2.5 million per year for at least 3 years;
- Demand coordination, oversight and accountability from all agencies using federal funds to research these issues;
- Invest in technology that can filter endocrine disrupting compounds from our drinking water supply and from sewage treatment plant output; and,
- Investigate the efficacy of drug take-back programs to keep pharmaceuticals out of our water supply.

**BACKGROUND:** In November 2009, Potomac Conservancy released its annual *State of the Nation's River* report, highlighting the issue of endocrine-disrupting pollutants in Potomac waterways, the importance of this issue to residents of the Potomac River region, and shortcomings in current federal and local regulations that leave this widespread problem essentially unregulated. A copy of that report may be found at [http://www.potomac.org/site/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/pc\\_sonr\\_lr1.pdf](http://www.potomac.org/site/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/pc_sonr_lr1.pdf).

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,** please visit [www.potomac.org/site/FishMystery/](http://www.potomac.org/site/FishMystery/) or contact Lydia Tukarski at Potomac Conservancy at 301-608-1188 x204.

***About Potomac Conservancy***

Since 1993, the Potomac Conservancy has protected the health, beauty, and enjoyment of the Potomac River and its tributaries. Its conservation programs address the goals of improving water quality, protecting the river's scenic integrity, enhancing recreational resources, and building an informed and engaged constituency, using a range of tools, including restoration, permanent protection, advocacy, and citizen education and engagement.

In 2007, Potomac Conservancy graded the overall health and well-being of the Potomac watershed at a grade of D+. In the intervening years, annual updates to the *State of the Nation's River* report highlight issues of importance to residents of the Potomac River region. The river's overall health status will be revisited in 2011.

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