



STATE OF THE NATION'S RIVER 2009

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The New Pollutants Brewing in Our Water Report Discusses Emergence of Endocrine Disruptors in Potomac

Washington, D.C., Nov. 11—Potomac Conservancy today released its third annual [State of the Nation's River report](#), calling attention to a variety of pollutants found in the Potomac River that disrupt the endocrine system, which regulates the normal growth and sexual development of vertebrate species, including humans and fish.

The [report](#) describes the emergence of these new contaminants in the Potomac River system; features the latest research, exploring the potential relationship of these chemicals to the phenomenon of intersex fish; and reviews shortcomings in current federal and local regulations that are leaving this widespread problem essentially unregulated.

A companion document, the 2009 [Potomac Agenda](#), calls on Congress to amend the Safe Drinking Water Act, and seeks better stormwater regulations at the local level. The report suggests other avenues of future action to address these new pollutants, including updated assessment models for chemicals that may disrupt the regulation and development of the endocrine system, advocates for technology to remove these chemicals from our waste water and drinking water supplies, and calls for regulatory action for state and federal government agencies.

Scientists speaking with reporters on a conference call today said the prevalence of the intersex condition in over 80% of Potomac River fish studied is the "canary in the coal mine," warning of health problems that can be caused by endocrine disrupting compounds. Since approximately 90% of D.C.-area drinking water comes from the Potomac River and many other nearby municipalities get their water from surface sources, they said it is critical that steps be taken to limit the amount of these chemicals entering the rivers of the greater Potomac basin.

"Endocrine disrupting compounds are major pollutants in the Potomac watershed, and we need to exercise the utmost caution when introducing these compounds into our rivers, streams and, ultimately, our drinking water," said Dr. John Peterson "Pete" Myers, chief scientist for Environmental Health Sciences of Charlottesville, Va.

“Water treatment facilities are not yet required to screen for endocrine disrupting contaminants, so they end up in our tap water,” Myers said. “We aren’t sure exactly what level of exposure causes harmful effects to human health, but if the intersex fish phenomenon is any indication, there’s a critical need for regulatory agencies and decision makers to start addressing this issue.”

Endocrine disrupting compounds are chemicals that affect growth, metabolism and reproduction in organisms such as humans and fish. They are found in pesticides, veterinary products, pharmaceuticals, personal care products and biosolids. These contaminants have become so widespread in the environment that they have even been detected in the urine of infants.

The *State of the Nation’s River* report explains that land uses are providing a critical pathway for such chemicals to enter our water supply. Endocrine disrupting compounds are most prevalent in rivers and streams in industrialized, agricultural, and/or urbanized areas, with particularly high concentrations near sewage treatment plants or other sources of wastewater. Virtually every place where water and chemicals combine becomes a potential source of endocrine disrupting compounds entering sources of drinking water.

At present, there are no water quality standards for endocrine disrupting contaminants. “The federal government has already taken steps to limit so-called legacy pollutants from damaging the natural environment and human health,” said Potomac Conservancy President Hedrick Belin. “It now needs to employ 21st-century scientific testing and update the regulatory framework to deal with the emerging threat of endocrine disrupting compounds found in the Potomac River and its tributaries.”

Potomac Conservancy views the following [actions](#) as opportunities to break the cycle of allowing endocrine disruptors to enter our environment unchecked:

- Enforce and strengthen water quality regulations
- Call on EPA to incorporate health and exposure data from drug and chemical manufacturers into the agency’s chemical testing profiles
- Provide funding to develop treatment technology, retrofit our wastewater treatment plants, and upgrade drinking water treatment facilities
- Resolve the problem of agricultural biosolids, which are implicated in the problem as well
- Introduce legislation to establish and implement programs to recover unused prescription drugs rather than having them enter drinking water sources

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please visit www.potomac.org or contact Sarah Goldberg at 301-887-1060.

About Potomac Conservancy

In 2007, Potomac Conservancy graded the health and well-being of the Potomac watershed at a grade of D+. The river's overall health status will be revisited in 2011. 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.

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. For additional information, visit www.potomac.org.

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