



Press Release

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First “State of the Nation’s River” report rates Potomac’s health a D+

Action steps listed for Maryland and Virginia to control stormwater runoff and protect forest cover at the local level

SILVER SPRING, Md.--- Potomac Conservancy grades the health of the Potomac river watershed a D+, saying “polluted runoff from our parking lots, roads, and roofs,” soil erosion, unhealthy stormwater, and river pollution are overwhelming and degrading the Potomac River system.

The report, *State of the Nation’s River: Potomac Watershed 2007*, was issued with a companion Potomac Agenda. The Agenda lists several steps that local and state governments can take immediately to help the river in two critical action areas: land development and stormwater management.

State of the Nation’s River Report

According to this year’s report, the health of the river has reached a plateau. Improvements were made initially after the 1972 passage of the Clean Water Act. In the three decades since, population in the region has boomed. The resulting land conversion and development, as well as poor land use practices, have increased polluted runoff.

There have been some reductions in nutrient and sediment pollution, the report says, but the pollutants still exceed their caps, and levels are not decreasing enough to significantly improve water quality. Of the rivers that flow into the Chesapeake, the Potomac delivers the largest amount of sediment each year, and the second-most volume of water.

“The Potomac River is a national treasure, and part of the lifeblood of the Chesapeake Bay,” said H. Hedrick Belin, president of Potomac Conservancy. “Decision makers must take immediate action to protect and preserve the river so it is available for all people to enjoy. The steps we take – or fail to take – today will have a profound impact on the future of both the Potomac and the Chesapeake.”

The Conservancy said it found “disturbing trends of loss of forest cover and inefficient increases in paved surfaces amidst improvements in nutrient runoff and CSO prevention.” Data from the US Geological Survey point to a 41% increase in paved surfaces such as rooftops, sidewalks, and parking lots, for every 8% increase in population in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Solutions offered in the report include:

- Protect existing forest land, and replant strategic areas
- Mandate use of low-impact development techniques
- Require states to fully fund cost-share programs and best-practice implementation and hold agricultural interests responsible for mitigating their impacts on the watershed.

- Update the federal Clean Water Act to respond to new sources of pollution such as phthalates from plastics and endocrine disruptors from personal care and pharmaceutical products.

The group will provide annual reports on specific issues facing the Potomac watershed.

The report is based on data compiled by the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin, the Chesapeake Bay Program, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and researchers at the University of Maryland, among others. It was funded in part by the Chesapeake Bay Trust and Danaher Corporation.

The Potomac Agenda

Potomac Conservancy Director of Policy Anne Merwin said, “Our first-ever Potomac Agenda identifies the Potomac Conservancy’s two top policy priorities—land protection and better stormwater management—and highlights several specific actions that Maryland and Virginia can take in the immediate future to make a positive difference in those areas.”

The Agenda details actions that will protect existing forest land and replant strategic areas, such as streamside buffers and greenways and mandate use of low-impact development techniques in new and rebuilt construction for better stormwater management.

The full report and the Potomac Agenda, as well as a five-minute video featuring Potomac Conservancy President Hedrick Belin, are available on the Conservancy website at www.potomac.org/site/state-of-the-nations-river/

About Potomac Conservancy

Since 1993, Potomac Conservancy has protected the health, beauty, and enjoyment of the Potomac River and its tributaries. The Conservancy’s primary focus is protection of water quality through land protection and sound land use practices and policies. Because clean water alone is not enough, the Conservancy also works to preserve and restore the Potomac’s scenic landscapes, and to enhance river-based recreational opportunities.

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