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Conservation Group Gives the Potomac a “D” Grade:
*Combination of urban and rural pollution creates an environmental “knockout punch”
for Potomac River region*

Washington, D.C., Nov. 9 – The Potomac Conservancy released its fifth annual *State of the Nation’s River* report, scoring the rivers’ health at a barely passing “D” grade, a downgrade from the group’s previous D+ in 2007. The report points to reasons for the low grade: growing population and poor land use practices are the primary culprits for a polluted and degraded Potomac River. The report also focuses on the two worlds of the Potomac, the rural farms and mountains to the west and the urban cityscape in the south.

These “two worlds” pose different challenges to the Nation’s River. According to the report, upstream, forestry and farming practices play a big role in influencing the river’s health; downstream, sprawling building projects and sewage treatment challenges loom large.

“In an increasingly interconnected world, large rivers like the Potomac act as powerful barometers to gage how well we are treating our environment,” said Dr. Todd Lookingbill of the University of Richmond. “At least two current trends— the burial of small streams in urban environments and the expanding footprint of exurban development—have troubling consequences for the health of the Nation’s River.”

Hedrick Belin, President of Potomac Conservancy, acknowledges the rural-urban divide. “Despite the differences,” he says, “both worlds are joined by a shared desire for a healthy, safe river. After all, the Potomac provides us with more than just beautiful scenery; it is the source of most of the area’s drinking water. It’s up to all of us to keep this river healthy.”

Throughout the report, Potomac Conservancy provides a vision of changes and actions to better land use and improved water quality. The Conservancy believes that the key to successful restoration of Potomac lands and waters is accountability, efficiency and enforcement.

The report re-evaluates the grade they gave the Potomac back in 2007 and investigates how to continue to move forward. “We know what needs to be done,” says Belin, “but this region is going to have to find the political will to make the hard choices. Investing a dollar today to reduce pollution will return clean water dividends for years to come.”

The Conservancy believes that the most efficient way to enact widespread change is to have strong federal and state stormwater laws, and to change local codes and ordinances to

- Protect existing forest land and replant areas near stream banks

- Help promote well-managed farms and better regulate large, industrial farm operations.
- Make sure pollution is treated or eliminated before it enters our waterways.

“As our region’s population continues to grow, we need each county to be actively implementing a plan to protect green buffers along our creeks and streams,” Belin adds. “In tight economic times, we need county, state, and federal agencies to step up to the plate and strengthen their codes and ordinances so that we’re not wasting limited resources on things mother-nature provides us for free.”

A companion document, the 2011 "Potomac Agenda," provides recommendations for state and federal government agencies to collaborate on more cohesive regulations and practices that will protect our water supply. The Agenda calls for specific actions that, for example, promotes regulations and funding to preserve our forests and better manage our farmlands in a sustainable fashion.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please visit www.potomac.org or contact *Anne Sundermann*, 301-608-1188 ext.208 or sundermann@potomac.org

The report can be downloaded at:

www.potomac.org/site/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/sonr11_finalreport.pdf

The Potomac Agenda can be downloaded at:

www.potomac.org/site/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/sonr11_PotAgenda.pdf

About Potomac Conservancy

Since 1993, Potomac Conservancy has safeguarded the Potomac River and its tributaries and connected people to this national treasure. As the Voice of the Nation’s River, the Conservancy’s primary focus is to restore water quality by advocating sound policy and promoting thoughtful land management. The Conservancy protects and restores Potomac landscapes by enhancing a network of rivers, forests, and natural areas. Since healthy lands and rivers reflect the quality of life in our communities, the Conservancy promotes enjoyment of the river in ways that foster a genuine conservation ethic. For more information, visit www.potomac.org.

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