



## Potomac River receives a grade of B-; first time ever above C

### *Potomac River Health Best in Decades*

Today, Potomac Conservancy released its ninth *State of the Nation's River* report at [www.potomacreportcard.org](http://www.potomacreportcard.org). Using an established baseline and set of benchmarks, Potomac Conservancy measured progress to date and has upgraded the Potomac River to a B-. The grade is up from a C in 2013 and D in 2011.

The Potomac River is on its way to recovery. **In fact, the Potomac is the *only* major Chesapeake Bay tributary to achieve short- and long-term nutrient reductions in its headwaters.**

“Our hometown river — the source of drinking water for nearly 5 million residents — is worth saving. We’ve made tremendous progress towards achieving our goal of a fishable, swimmable Potomac by 2025. But the Potomac is not in the clear yet,” says Hedrick Belin, President of Potomac Conservancy.

### TOP TAKEAWAYS

#### POSITIVE TRENDS:

- The top 3 pollutants in the Potomac – nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment – are on the decline.
- Shad, white perch, and other common game fish are making a comeback.
- More people are experiencing the river through fishing, water access trails, and state parks.

#### CONCERNING TRENDS:

- Polluted urban runoff is the only growing source of pollution to the Potomac and Chesapeake Bay.
- Blue catfish and snakeheads are invading our waters, putting shad and other fish at risk.
- Underwater grasses, habitat, and water clarity have been slow to recover.

**FISH:** According to the report, **after decades of decline, the Potomac River is now healthy enough to support growing populations of common game fish**, including American shad and white perch, which was last graded a C, but merited an A in this report. Since fish are impacted by so many environmental factors, they are a key indicator of river health.

“Shad in the Potomac River had been on the decline for decades, but now their populations exceed the federal restoration goal. Strong public involvement programs, including dozens of Washington area schools where students hatched and released shad into the River, contributed to the recovery.” says Jim Cummins, Director, Living Resources at the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin and [once referred to by \*Field & Stream Magazine\* as the Shad Protector](#) in the *Conservation Hero Awards*. “I am happy to see that they are surging. The shad species’ name, ‘sapidissima,’ means delicious,” so that is another reason to celebrate the recovery efforts.”

“While the smallmouth bass fishery is doing well, risks due to the influx of pollutants carried into our waterways continue,” says John Mullican, District Fishery Manager at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. “Invasive species and intersex are potential threats to this popular resource and the

Inland Fisheries Division is committed to working closely with other agencies to investigate and tackle these issues.”

**OUTDOOR RECREATION:** Hiking trails, fishing spots and aquatic activities are just a few of the adventures available for people who want to explore nature and history. The report looks at how healthy lands and clean water contribute to more people enjoying the outdoors.

“The connection between improved water quality and outdoor recreation is full circle. **It’s pretty simple - when the river is healthier, more people want to recreate on and around it - hiking, paddling, cycling, camping, and other outdoor activities,**” says Matt Little, Mid-Atlantic Manager, REI Outdoor Programs and Outreach. “As more people appreciate this community treasure, it turns into more investment in the river.”

**LOCAL CLEANUP PLANS WORKING:** The report recognizes the EPA’s Chesapeake Bay cleanup plan and 2025 pollution reduction targets as key drivers for the advancement of clean water policies and sustainable land use practices.

“Like the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, the report offers practical recommendations for improving the entire eco-system.” says Nicholas DiPasquale, Director of the Chesapeake Bay Program Office of the EPA. “Smart development along the Potomac River ultimately helps the Bay. The combination of the strategic goals and best management practices of the Chesapeake Watershed Agreement and the progress seen in the report are clear contributions to the healthier grade.”

States and localities have also been highly involved in ensuring a healthier river. Maryland and Virginia banned phosphorous in most lawn fertilizers in the past few years. Montgomery County, Prince George’s and Washington DC recently banned Styrofoam, making the Anacostia River one of the first Styrofoam free watersheds in the country.

**EMERGING THREAT:** The report warns that despite meaningful progress, there are still major threats to the ecological health of the Potomac River. **Polluted urban runoff – the only growing source of pollution to the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay – threatens to undo decades of restoration progress.** The report recommends that we continue to follow river-friendly development plans in order to maintain the current progress and address continued problem areas and threats.

**NOTE TO EDITORS:** Potomac Conservancy releases a *State of the Nation’s River* Report and gives a grade to the river biennially. The grade is up from a C in 2013 and D 2011.

**BACKGROUND:** Potomac Conservancy is the region’s leading clean water advocate, working to ensure the Potomac River boasts clean water, healthy lands, and vibrant communities. Founded in 1993, the Conservancy fights for improved water quality in our “Nation’s River” through conservation and advocacy. Potomac Conservancy empowers individuals to take an action for clean water, building a local and vocal movement for clean streams, protected drinking water sources, and safe access to the river. For more information, visit [www.potomac.org](http://www.potomac.org).

**FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO VIEW FULL REPORT,** please visit [www.potomacreportcard.org](http://www.potomacreportcard.org) or contact Patricia Brooks at 202-351-1757.

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