

*Joe Anderson*  
*President*

March 4, 2026

*Larry O'Brien*  
*Vice President*

Representatives,

*Patricia Samford*  
*Secretary*

*Brian Kulczycki*  
*Treasurer*

*William Faller*  
*Director*

*John Giusti*  
*Director*

On Monday, January 19, 2026, the ruptured Potomac Interceptor Line began spewing 40-60 million gallons of raw sewage per day directly into the Potomac River. That gusher of fecal matter, household chemicals, and industrial waste continued unabated for nearly a week, with estimates of a total of 300 million gallons entering the Potomac, before DC Water managed to stem the tide at least mostly, and to begin to assess the damage. We would like to address three critical areas that we feel must be addressed by our government: 1) Adequate scientific sampling of the Potomac River; 2) Adequate public notices that are regularly updated; 3) Adequate public funding of this critical infrastructure to prevent repeat occurrences of this kind of disaster.

*Richard Hammond*  
*Director*

*David Lewis*  
*Director*

*Barry Muchnick*  
*Director*

*Anthony Pait*  
*Director*

*Elizabeth Price*  
*Director*

*Elaine Szymkowiak*  
*Director*

Please understand first of all that we appreciate the complexity of the containment, cleanup and repair operations, and we also appreciate the information posted and updated on DC Water's website. We also commend the Maryland Department of the Environment for their prompt and cooperative responses to requests for information by our staff and board of directors. However, the testing seems to be limited to a fairly narrow upstream section of the river, primarily centered around the Washington DC region and is taking place in the absence of a reliable model for determining likely flow patterns. As a result, the random testing of sites may yield unreliable data regarding the presence of fecal coliform and E. coli. The severe health consequences of understating the dangers posed by these contaminants cannot be ignored. The emergency response deserves the resources required to establish trust, based on scientific fact, backed by reliable data, and reported to the public in a digestible and easy-to-understand manner. Much more testing is needed, and soon.

*Kelly Ward*  
*Director*

*Capt. Will Gates*  
*Director Emeritus*

*Nancy McAllister*  
*Director Emeritus*

*Bob Paul*  
*Director Emeritus*

Information to the general public has also been in short supply. The greater Washington DC area, which includes Southern Maryland and the Virginia counties bordering the Potomac has received precious little information regarding the spill and downstream effects of the spill. The seafood industry is currently suffering from the public scare over the spill and needs a thorough explanation to the public to dispel unwarranted fear and give reliable cautions where needed. Our organization has received multiple requests from the public for assurance regarding the safety of eating fish, oysters, clams, or avoiding contact with the river. The regional news media is in turmoil, with the Washington Post decimating the local news reporting staff, and the more local news media over the last 10 years has

*Roger Stone*  
*Director Emeritus*



dwindled to near non-existence. Our average citizen needs a reliable source of information regarding these events that is digestible and prompt (the information contained on <https://mde.geodata.md.gov/Shellfish/> is difficult to find and requires background knowledge to interpret). If one such source exists, they need to be made aware of it. The public should not need to be investigative journalists to learn the critical information needed to protect itself. Our government needs to step in and use its power to inform the public in every way it can regarding matters of such grave concern.

The old expression is “Sh-t flows downhill”. Well yes, it does, as does water, which is why sewer plants are invariably located at the shoreline of whichever is the nearest large body of water, being the lowest point available to a region. It is much cheaper to use gravity than pumps, as every sanitation engineer will tell you. Several of us are old enough to remember when you daren’t swim in the Potomac River for fear of running into solids floating down stream. We commend the Blue Plains Sewage and DC Water for the upgrades to the treatment facility that have greatly reduced nitrogen and phosphorous loading into the Potomac. We commend the DC Water Clean Rivers Initiative with its Potomac River Tunnel Project, which will drastically reduce overflows from stormwater-caused sewage overflows. However, that does not address the sewage lines leading to the Blue Plains facility. This aging infrastructure from the 1960’s that was installed with far less oversight over safeguarding the cleanliness of the river is a nightmare waiting to happen. The unwillingness of our society to pay the cost of proper installation and maintenance has resulted in our having to pay the cost now to fix their problems. There needs to be an adequate funding of this critical infrastructure, with a partnership of all involved parties, MD, DC and VA and the Federal Government, to ensure that this tragedy is not repeated. The Potomac has come a long way since we called it the “Poop-tomac”. Let’s not go back to those “good ole days”.

Sincerely,



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St. Mary's River Watershed Association

CC: Governor Wes Moore and Meghan Conklin, Delegate Brian Crosby, Delegate Todd Morgan, Delegate Matt Morgan, Senator Jack Bailey, Congressman Steny Hoyer and Lydia Angel, Senator Chris Van Hollen and Alex Swanson, Senator Angela Alsobrooks and Carmen Ramirez, and Adam Ortiz

