



INTERSTATE COMMISSION ON THE POTOMAC RIVER BASIN

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ICPRB: Protecting a River, Advancing a Quality of Life

The Potomac River is the lifeblood of the region, as well as the Washington metropolitan area, and is justly called the “Nation’s River.” The lives of the more than five-million basin residents, 75 percent of whom live in the Washington metropolitan area, are touched daily by the usually silent giant that runs through the nation’s capital. It is the region’s major source of drinking water, accepts the effluent from waste treatment plants, cools power generation plants, and with the attendant C&O Canal, serves the recreational needs of a culture that treasures its precious “down time.”

The river’s resurrection from its designation as a “national disgrace” during the Johnson Administration to the coveted resource of today is the work of many, including a unique, non-regulatory agency, the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin. Authorized by Congress in 1940, ICPRB provides leadership for the member jurisdictions to manage water pollution in the basin. The Commission became one of the first organizations with a congressional mandate to consider water resources on a watershed basis, rather than along political boundaries.

COMMISSIONERS

The ICPRB Commissioners represent the commonwealths of Pennsylvania and Virginia, the states of Maryland and West Virginia, the District of Columbia, and the federal government. These individuals, appointed by their respective jurisdictions, set policy and provide guidance for the Commission, an interstate compact agency.

STAFF AND PROGRAMS

Complementing the commissioners is a professional staff that has gained a strong reputation for delivery of sound science and analysis that arms decision-makers at various government levels with the facts and technical data to resolve issues concerning the watershed. The staff efforts focus on four primary areas of involvement:

Water Resources

The water resources knowledge of the staff is used to coordinate the water supply withdrawals of the three major metropolitan area water utilities that rely on Potomac River water for nearly 500 million gallons per day to meet the thirst of the capital region. Throughout the basin, project expertise includes:

Water resources operations and supply modeling

- *Water demand forecasting*
- *Flood control and flood forecast systems*
- *Acid mine drainage abatement passive treatment*
- *Drinking water assessments and source water protection studies*
- *River flow modeling and time of travel studies*

Water Quality

Water quality issues addressed by Commission staff include supporting highly complex studies and projects that reap benefits both for the Potomac basin and for the Chesapeake Bay drainage, of which the basin comprises a major part. Project expertise includes:

- *Stream assessments to determine impairments*
- *Water quality modeling*
- *Sediment transport modeling*
- *Total maximum daily load (TMDL) plans for watersheds*

Living Resources

Commission participation as a partner in the bay cleanup aims at restoring living resources, improving the productivity of the ecosystem, and ensuring its vitality as a place to live, work, and recreate. Staff expertise and abilities to address impacts on the entire chain of life in the Potomac and the bay include:

- *Zooplankton and phytoplankton assessments*
- *Restoration of viable American shad and other fisheries populations*
- *Aquatic habitat assessments and redevelopment*
- *Wetlands assessments and restoration*
- *Fisheries management and flow assessments*

Communications

The agency's technical expertise is magnified by a communications program that extends the impacts and results of ICPRB's projects to the region's public. Work in protecting and improving the region's resources can be effective only when the public is educated about the reasons for those actions and their role in the preservation of those resources. To that end, the Commission:

- *Publishes newsletters and reports*
- *Maintains an informational web site*
- *Responds to requests for information*
- *Reaches out to schools, citizen groups, and other organizations*
- *Coordinates watershed groups conducting stream cleanups*

COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

The ICPRB works with numerous partners throughout the basin using cooperative skills for encouraging multiple jurisdictions to coordinate actions on water resource issues. This brings to the watershed needed action to address the basin's major challenges, including water quality impairments, water supply, flooding, groundwater use, and nonpoint source pollution. The Commission can complete a range of surveys and assessments designed to increase the knowledge of the ecosystem that allows for more efficient resources management.

REGIONAL FACILITATION

With the mainstem of the Potomac River forming interstate boundaries, a cooperative, regional organization is best suited to facilitate solutions. In a basin of nearly 15,000 square miles, including five principal political jurisdictions and more than five-million residents relying on its water for domestic, industrial and agricultural water supply purposes, a technically skilled agency must assist the multiple interests in solving water resources problems. With more than one-million acres of federally owned or managed land in the basin, the federal government has an interest in the waters of the basin. An agency that provides for coordinated state and federal water resources management actions can accomplish this if properly supported. Such an agency exists in the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin.

Created with an interstate compact by an Act of Congress in 1940, the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) is composed of commissioners representing the federal government, the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The ICPRB mission is to enhance, protect, and conserve the water and associated land resources of the Potomac River basin and its tributaries through regional and interstate cooperation.

ICPRB accomplishes this mission through a variety of actions to conduct, coordinate, and cooperate in studies and programs in the areas of water quality, water supply, living resources, and land resources. The Section for Cooperative Water Supply Operations on the Potomac River (CO-OP), a special section of the Commission, was created as a technical operations center for management and coordination among the regional water utilities to avoid water supply shortages in Metropolitan Washington during droughts.

For additional information contact the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin at 301-984-1908, or visit its website at <http://www.potomacriver.org>