

REPORTER



C. Dalpra

Louis Harley Conservation Award recipients and ICPRB staff by the river (from left): ICPRB Living Resources Director Jim Cummins, waterman Brad Harley, ICPRB Chairman Scott Kudlas, Joe Fletcher, A.C. Carpenter, Tracy Bowen, Ray Fletcher, ICPRB Executive Director Joe Hoffman, Steve Chaconas.

ICPRB Honors Potomac River Stewards at Annual Fishing Event

As part of the 11th annual Jim Range National Casting Call held at Fletcher's Boat House on April 15, ICPRB honored five people who through their efforts have made the Potomac a cleaner, healthier river.

The goal of the annual fishing event, sponsored by the American Fly Fishing Trade Association (AFFTA), is to give members of Congress, agency officials, and congressional staff the opportunity to connect the legislative work they do for fisheries conservation and fishing tackle trade issues and to see first-hand how creative conservation initiatives are making a difference for fisheries across the country.

Ten years ago, the concept of the event was developed by conservation visionary Jim Range. After he passed away in 2009, the event was renamed in his honor.

At a time when the region's environment is suffering from heavy growth and land use change, and its environmental programs being pinched from declining government budgets, the event brings home the importance of protecting the nation's waterways, and the Potomac in particular.

The event features many displays and other educational opportunities by a long list of private and government partners. The event also has become a venue for ICPRB to celebrate its successful program to cooperatively restore the American shad to the Potomac River.

The morning began with a shad planking along the Potomac riverbank, where ICPRB staff served up a breakfast of planked (roasted), fried, and smoked American shad, and sauteed roe. As people gathered at

Our mission is to enhance, protect, and conserve the water and associated land resources of the Potomac River and its tributaries through regional and interstate cooperation.

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the riverside, many conversations about the Potomac could be overheard while the shad cooked and young men and women from the nonprofit group Family Tyes, which promotes family fly fishing, taught attendees the art of propelling a small fly with a rod and light line. Unfortunately, heavy storms earlier in the week had turned the Potomac into a roiling brown rapid that precluded actual fishing from boats. Several anglers tried their luck from shore.

Later in the morning, ICPRB Chairman Scott Kudlas, joined by Executive Director Joe Hoffman and Living Resources Director Jim Cummins, honored several people with the Louis Harley Memorial Potomac Conservation Award. Harley, the northernmost waterman on the Potomac, assisted the American Shad Restoration Program for many years with his boats, nets and know-how, taking Cummins out on spring evenings to catch spawning American shad to take eggs that would be hatched and placed upstream of the Little Falls Dam. When Harley passed away in 2009, ICPRB staff decided to preserve the legacy of the remarkable man with an annual award.

This year's awardees were a diverse group who each in their own way has continued Harley's legacy in the restoration and conservation of the Potomac and its historic shad:

Tracy Bowen, formerly the executive director of the Alice Ferguson Foundation, was cited for her leadership of the foundation in targeting litter as a major focus in cleaning the region's streams and rivers. During her 12 years at the foundation, Bowen helped grow the annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup to the largest regional cleanup of its kind, and built on that legacy by instituting the Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative. The project has spurred new legislation and education efforts, including the Trash TMDL for the Anacostia River, the Washington, D.C. bag bill, and other trash reduction and recycling projects.

Kirby "A.C." Carpenter has led the Potomac River Fisheries Commission nearly from its beginning. The agency regulates fishing in the tidal Potomac downstream of Washington, with commissioners from Maryland and Virginia. Carpenter has been a voice of moderation in helping to settle disputes between the watermen of the two states and promote practices that focus on the health of the fishery. Carpenter and the commission recognized the importance of American shad restoration very early in the effort, providing both financial and moral support to the restoration effort.

Steve Chaconas, a professional bass and snakehead guide, and outdoor writer, has been a strong advocate for a healthier Potomac River, and in providing meaningful river experiences for youth. Chaconas sees getting more kids outdoors as crucial to creating the next generation of river stewards



Kids braved the showers for a chance to catch a sunfish at the Family and Youth Casting Call. C. Dalpra

that will be needed to protect and preserve the region's waters.

The Fletcher brothers, Joe and Ray, have been icons of the river for decades, introducing thousands of Washingtonians to fishing and canoeing. Their great-great-grandfather Joseph founded Fletchers Boathouse on the river's bank in Washington in the 1850s. The brothers grew up on the river, and Ray still works the facility for the National Park Service. Joe is retired, but remains a fixture, fishing and talking with people. They have over decades created more than their share of river stewards at the boathouse. The Fletchers have rented boats and sold bait to congressmen, judges, lobbyists, and presidents, who have come to seek relief from the pressures of Capitol Hill, along with the rest of us who use the river as a welcome diversion to jobs and responsibilities. "My father's generation and my generation did

tremendous harm to the environment. Now it is up to all of us and each new generation to bring it back the other way," said Ray.

The event also served to highlight public/private partnerships through the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP), a focal point of the event. This year, NFHAP unveiled its 50th project under its Waters to Watch program, as well as honoring individuals and groups for exceptional achievements through the National Fish Habitat Awards. The Action Plan also unveiled its 2010 fish habitat report, "Through a Fish's Eye: The Status of Fish Habitats in the United States 2010."

The Casting Call also features the Family and Youth Casting Call (FYCC), on the following day. The public event gives area kids a chance to learn how to fish in the adjacent C&O Canal, which is stocked with sunfish for the occasion. This year, rain and thunderstorms shortened the day. Now in its fifth year, the FYCC is co-hosted by AFFTA and the National Park Service (NPS) and is intended to get kids hooked on fishing and the great outdoors and to showcase one of the great places to enjoy nature right in their backyard. The annual free event features fishing instruction, nature activities, and the National Park Service Junior Ranger program all within the city limits of our nation's capital. Even with the rain and before the event was called off, nearly 75 children and adults tried their hands at fishing and many fish were caught.

Spring Potomac Cleanup Nets Tons of Trash

Chilly, moist riverbanks could not dissuade thousands of volunteers from gathering to pull trash from hundreds of Potomac basin cleanup sites on April 9, although the threatened federal government shutdown did put some sites off limits due to lack of access.

Despite those deterrents, the 23rd annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup, organized by the Alice Ferguson Foundation, was very successful, noted cleanup coordinator Becky Horner. "At least 20 sites were cancelled, although most of them have been rescheduled," Horner said. A number of other sites were scheduled for completion during the next few weeks.

For 2011, 418 sites were registered with the foundation, which runs the Hard Bargain Farm environmental education center in Prince Georges County, Md.

Storms during the previous week meant lots of trash to pick up at many of the sites. With 221 of the 418 sites reporting so far, 7,750 volunteers removed 171.45 tons of



Volunteers clear an Anacostia shoreline by boat. C. Dalpra

trash, including 1,119 tires, 152,700 recyclable beverage containers, 22,467 plastic bags, and 27,959 cigarette butts. These numbers are expected to grow strongly as the remainder of the sites are cleaned and tallied, Horner noted. To date, Budweiser, known as the "King of Beers" was also the king of recyclable containers found, accord-

ing to cleanup data. McDonald's and Coke filled out the top three brands of recyclables collected.

In previous years, the cleanup coordinators focused observations on the ubiquitous plastic bags found on stream banks and tangled in adjacent trees after high water events. A new focus this year is on the number of "sharps" or hypodermic needles and syringes that are hazards not only to the stream but to the volunteers cleaning the stream.

The foundation is collecting data on the numbers of sharps found and their location to find any trends. Although the overall number of sharps found is not large, it is growing, Horner noted. More are found at urban sites, but they still turn up in rural areas. Site leaders are given information about how to deal with them, but "It's kind of scary to see," Horner said.

Groups of all sizes gathered in each of the watershed's five jurisdictions on Saturday morning, ranging from just a few people gathering beside a local stream, to more than 2,000 volunteers who cleaned a number of sites along the Anacostia River organized by the Anacostia Watershed Society.

Many of the Anacostia volunteers, including individuals, corporate groups, and members of school groups or social clubs, worked the shoreline of Anacostia Park in the District of Columbia and up into Maryland, assisted by boats from the watershed society and the District's Department of the Environment, which dropped off crews in more-remote sites and transported bagged trash to collection areas.

The hard working crews collected about 1,900 bags of trash, along with 680 bags of recyclables and 335 tires. More than 9,300 pounds of trash items too large to fit into bags also were collected. A lot of the trash and many of the volunteers were on display at the Bladensburg Waterfront Park, where the society hosted an after-cleanup cookout for the volunteers. Because much of the Anacostia shoreline is on National Park property, a federal government closure would have left a significant amount of trash on the bank.

The amount of plastic bags collected along the Anacostia decreased again this year, anecdotal evidence that the bag fee passed in the District has been a significant factor in reducing that type of trash along the river. The Anacostia used to consistently have the highest number of bags, but that dubious honor is now held by Montgomery County, Md., Horner noted. The Maryland legislature considered a bag fee bill similar to the District's in the recently completed session, but the bill did not pass. A similar type of bill is under consideration in Montgomery County.

The year-old law in the District, where shoppers pay five cents for each bag, has



J. Murphy
Matt Silliman (left) and Andy Shaw with a canoe load of trash pulled from the St. Mary's River.

netted the government about \$2 million to be spent on river restoration in its first year, significantly less than the approximately \$3.5 million that officials estimated. There is no complaint about the lost revenue, however, since the law has decreased plastic bag use from 270 million bags in 2009 to only 55 million in 2010.

Many of the sites were worked by smaller but equally dedicated groups. About 17 members and friends of the Saint Mary's River Watershed Association gathered to clean the river, a scenic tidal tributary that empties into the Potomac a few miles upstream of its mouth at Chesapeake Bay. Volunteers took to canoes and kayaks to clean the shoreline, collecting 12 tires, 20 bags of trash and recyclables, and about 500 pounds of trash from the St. Mary's River between the Great Mills canoe launch and the St. Mary's College of Maryland. The haul included children's toys, metal barrels, a suitcase, a propane tank, two car steering wheels, and a trash can.

"This is the group's third cleanup, and we are always surprised at the things that we find in the river," said Lindsay Tempinson, who coordinated the cleanup for the watershed association. She noted that the group had about the same amount of participation as in previous years, and collected about the same amount of trash. That doesn't mean that the St. Mary's River doesn't need more help, however. The group traveled down the river, cleaning the shore and shallow water as they went, "but there is only so much trash that you can fit into a canoe," Tempinson said. She added that an enthusiastic portion of the group was planning to return to the river the following weekend to pull more trash.

These acts of stewardship were repeated throughout the watershed and are symbols of the changes in behavior that are at the root of solving the trash problem in the watershed. How do we eliminate litter at its source, when someone drops trash on the ground, or dumps a load of tires on a secluded stream bank?

To that end, the annual cleanups have evolved into a piece of a much wider effort led by the Alice Ferguson Foundation, the Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative, which seeks to make the watershed trash free by 2013. The ambitious program is

promoting a mix of policy, regulation, law enforcement, and public education and outreach to change the sometimes thoughtless habit of littering. In previous years, the initiative has conducted research with public relations firms to better characterize littering behavior and determine the best methods that can change those behaviors. Initiative partners are now designing a campaign to be used across the watershed. Anti-littering messages are being tested at bus stops, libraries, community centers, and parks in five pilot jurisdictions: the District of Columbia, Montgomery and Prince George's counties, Md., and Fairfax and Arlington counties in Virginia. The five-year-old initiative also is focused on helping businesses to decrease their trash footprint through minimizing waste creation and better recycling, and in promot-

ing government policies and enforcement, such as the District's bag bill.

The initiative's sixth annual summit will be held October 19, 2011, at George Mason University's Arlington campus. For more information, visit www.potomaccleanup.org.

The Potomac Cleanup is the largest regional event of its kind, which began from a single cleanup with a few volunteers in 1989. Since that time, more than 50,000 volunteers and more than 375 partner organizations have removed some five million pounds of trash from the basin's waterways.

The ICPRB has been a partner in the event since 1991.

Groups Give Anacostia Failing Grades

While noting that the water quality of the tidal Anacostia River is steadily improving, Anacostia Riverkeeper and the Anacostia Watershed Society gave the river failing grades in a recently released "State of the Anacostia River" Report. The two nonprofit watchdog groups based their assessment on data collected by the District of Columbia and Maryland governments.

The assessment was based on four metrics: dissolved oxygen, needed by fish and other creatures in a diverse, healthy environment; fecal bacteria, a measure of pollution from animal and human contamination; water clarity, needed for the growth of plants and a measure of sediment and nutrient pollution; and chlorophyll a, which is a measure of the amount of algae present in the water. The report noted that, on average, each of the three tidal sections of the river assessed for the report met the District's water quality standards only about 65 percent of the time.

The report noted improving trends for each category in each of the areas, except for water clarity in the lower tidal river, which is degrading. The report also estimated the time in which these improving trends, if they continue at existing rates, would result in complete (100 percent) attainment of water quality standards. The times varied from just two years for meeting dissolved oxygen standards in Maryland's portion of the tidal river (from Bladensburg down to the District line), to never meeting the standard for water clarity in the lower river, which is getting worse.

While water clarity is improving in the middle section of the tidal river, it is at such a low rate and improving so slowly that the report estimates complete attainment of the standard will take 4,063 years. Water clarity in the upper tidal river would take 361 years, according to the report.

The report describes the poor state of the Anacostia as impacted by three main impediments: fecal bacteria contamination, toxics, and stormwater runoff, which includes



Watching the River Flow

Low flows and dry weather in February gave way to a wetter pattern in March that raised flows to well above normal in the Potomac River measured near Washington, D.C., according to provisional data from the U.S. Geological Survey. Provisional data has not been reviewed for accuracy.

The February average flow of the Potomac was about 6.4 billion gallons per day (bgd), about 43.1 percent less than the long-term average of 11.2 bgd. Daily extremes during the month ranged from a low of about 1.93 bgd on February 1, rising to a high of about 16.93 bgd on February 28. Water taken from the river for metropolitan water supply averaged about 335 million gallons per day (mgd).

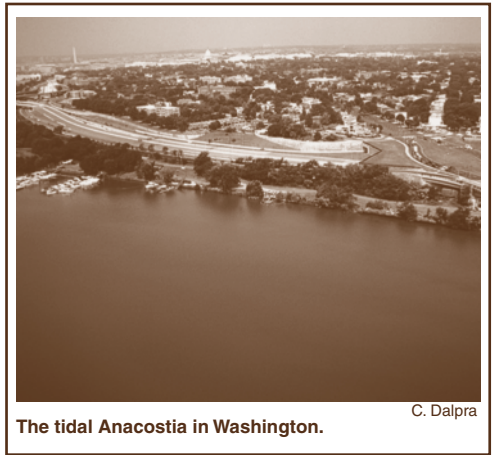
March flows averaged about 22.5 bgd, or about 46.8 percent more than the long-term average of about 15.3 bgd. The river's flow ranged from a high of about 92.4 bgd on March 12, and falling to a low of about 9.2 bgd on March 23. Water taken for metropolitan area municipal supply averaged about 334 mgd.

the trash, nutrients, and sediments carried by storm flows into the river.

For stormwater, described as the biggest threat to the river, the report finds a solution in the use of environmental site design, which seeks to preserve a watershed's natural drainage and flow patterns as much as possible. These practices include reducing stormwater flows through raingardens, porous pavement, and a range of other retrofit practices, which can be added to existing development and incorporated into new construction.

The report also notes the importance of public education in raising awareness of the costs of poor water quality on communities, restoration projects to improve quality, and legal action to enforce existing laws designed to maintain waterway health and protect human health.

The report also critiques the watershed's governments (The District, Montgomery and Prince George's counties, Maryland state, and the federal government), and gives residents a list of actions they can take to accelerate those improving trends.



The tidal Anacostia in Washington.

C. Dalpra

Some people may find the report an oversimplification of a very complex topic that involves public policy, economics, government budgets, and the way we live. But in reaching out to the general public to raise awareness of these problems, the report notes attaining water quality standards is something in which we all have a stake, a role, and a responsibility.

Snakehead Caught Upstream of Great Falls

Since the invasive northern snakehead fish was found in a Crofton Md., pond in 2002, and shortly thereafter in the Potomac's Virginia tidal embayments, the species' population has quickly grown and expanded its range.

The Great Falls of the Potomac is a natural barrier for most fish species, such as American shad, but perhaps not for the snakehead. In late March, a local angler reported catching a snakehead about two feet long near White's Ferry, far up the Potomac. While the fish are air breathers, it is questionable whether the fish was able to traverse the falls. To get upstream to the free-flowing Potomac, the fish more likely used the C&O Canal, or was placed upstream of the falls by a person releasing their pet snakehead, or by an angler who wants to see the fish establish themselves upriver.

Fisheries biologists have played catch-up since the introduction, trying to learn more about the fish and its habits so that it can be successfully managed. The fish have surprised biologists in the Potomac environment, showing fast growth rates and more tolerance for the saltier waters of the lower tidal Potomac than originally thought. While the population began centered in Dogue Creek on the Virginia side of the Potomac, it quickly migrated to coves on the Maryland side. Snakeheads were later found in the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia, one with a government-stocked trout in its belly. A snakehead also has been reported in a Saint Mary's County, Md., creek, and last summer came reports of a fish in St. Jerome Creek, which would require a journey out of the



USFWS

Potomac and around Point Lookout in waters considered too salty to be comfortable for the fish. Some biologists wonder if the resourceful fish took advantage of spring freshets or other high-flow events to ride a slug of fresher water downstream to those tidal embayments to find a home in the fresher water creeks that feed them.

But those scenarios don't explain passage up through the Great Falls. American eels do climb the falls, and as Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Fisheries Director Don Cosden noted, the snakeheads as a species seem "Pretty determined." The fish can live out of the water for an extended time, so long as their skin remains moist, but they do not move very well out of the water. It is more likely that the fish was placed upriver in the same way that they came to inhabit the river in the first place.

The report of one fish above Great Falls is not proof that the fish has established itself in the free flowing Potomac, Cosden noted.

He said that DNR plans to monitor the area to look for more snakeheads in the White's Ferry area.

So far in the tidal Potomac, surveys have not borne out one fear—that snakeheads may out-compete the economically important largemouth bass fishery for food and territory. So far, recruitment and adult health of largemouth bass stocks seems unaffected by the snakeheads, for now, Cosden noted.

The effects that a population of snakeheads could have in a smaller system such as the free-flowing Potomac or smaller streams is a matter for conjecture.

Anglers are required to immediately kill snakeheads that they catch. In Virginia waters, anglers are required to report catches of snakeheads to a hotline number, (804) 367-2925. Maryland requests that anglers catching a snakehead outside the Potomac to contact the Maryland Fisheries Service by emailing a notice to Don Cosden at dcosden@dnr.state.md.us. Importation of snakeheads is a federal offense. The population found in the pond in Crofton began when a

man released the fish after he had purchased it at a market. Some species of snakeheads came into the area through the aquarium trade. Many non-native fish are released by hobbyists, evidenced by goldfish populations in many streams, ponds, and the C&O Canal. Anglers also should not place live fish in new areas.

The natural resources agencies of both states are working hard to educate the public about the dangers of introducing exotic species to new environments, although it can be a tough sell. After all, the two most popular game fish in the river, large- and smallmouth bass, were themselves introduced into the Potomac from the Ohio River system by train in the late 1800s. Deliberate introductions by both individuals and government agencies are common.

Yet we would be wise to heed the request to not push any more non-native species into our already stressed natural environments, and make sure our fishing buddies understand why.

Drinking Water Source Protection Annual Report Available

Millions of people living in the Potomac River basin are provided with safe drinking water every day. Meeting emerging challenges and ensuring a reliable supply for the future, however, requires vigilance and cooperation. By undertaking a collaborative approach, the unique Potomac River Basin Drinking Water Source Protection Partnership (DWSPP) – almost two dozen water suppliers and government agencies – helps to ensure that people's most basic need for clean, safe and abundant water is reliably met.

Begun in 2004 as an offshoot of source-water protection plans required of public water supply utilities,

The partnership is a voluntary association of water suppliers and government agencies focused on protecting the sources of drinking water in the Potomac River basin. This coalition of water utilities and management/regulatory agencies has been working comprehensively together to address current and future issues that affect raw water supplies in the basin.

Last year's efforts included coordination on a number of concerns. The group is working to gain knowledge and work together on urban issues, including use of federal pollution permitting, cleanup plans, and state water quality standards in protecting source water, and impacts of road salting and airport deicing practices; tracking evolving information on emerging contaminants, and using drug take-back programs to help keep drugs out of waterways and federal strategies for protecting drinking water; agricultural issues,

especially in working with farmers to limit the occurrence of the pathogen *Cryptosporidium* in source water; and early warning and response issues where the group is working with regional first response agencies to ensure that protection of drinking water sources and treatment plants are included in response plans.

The partnership's 2010 annual report is now available at <http://www.potomacdwspp.org>.

Potomac Data Buoys Off-Line

It has not been a good year for the two data buoys placed in the Potomac River by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as part of the Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System.

The two Potomac buoys, one near the river's mouth and another placed a year ago just south of Washington, D.C., are part of a system that provides scientists, recreational users, and others with a wealth of both scientific and historical information. The buoys collect weather data, hydrology, and water quality information and serve as navigational aids for boaters. The buoys can be reached by telephone ((877) buoybay) or on the web at www.buoybay.org. They also are part of the Captain John Smith National Historic Trail, and dispense information on the history of the Chesapeake.

Currently, both the Potomac buoys are

listed as "off-line." The upper Potomac buoy was pulled out of the water over the winter for maintenance, but NOAA budget cuts may stall its return to the river. "Uncertainty with funding has put the redeployment of the buoy on hold," said NOAA spokesperson Kim Couranz. She added that future budgets also could limit the deployment of new buoys not yet placed. If the NOAA budget becomes

gloomy enough, the entire fleet of nine buoys could go silent.

The lower Potomac buoy is not working because of technical difficulties. A retaining pin in the mooring system for the buoy failed, and the buoy began a short tour of the river. The buoy didn't drift far and "was well behaved while on the loose," Couranz said. It will be back on station soon.

2011 Potomac River Ramble Cancelled

The ICPRB regretfully must cancel this year's Potomac River Ramble due to budget constraints.

The current economy and resulting constrained budgets of the Potomac basin jurisdictions require careful use of ICPRB funds. In addition, the Ramble has always relied on sponsorships from businesses to defray planning costs that keep the annual Rambles affordable to the general public. Business sponsorships this year were very few, again relating to the national and regional economy.

"While the ICPRB values the Ramble as an effective stewardship program that creates support for a healthier Potomac,

a decision was made to cancel the trip for this year," advised Joseph Hoffman, ICPRB executive director.

We are working on holding one or more day-long trips this summer, and hope to again offer a multi-day Ramble in 2012. We will announce any dates and locations on the ICPRB website and Facebook page. The ICPRB thanks all potential and repeat sponsors and Ramblers for their support and hope to see you on the river soon.



Potomac Basin

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