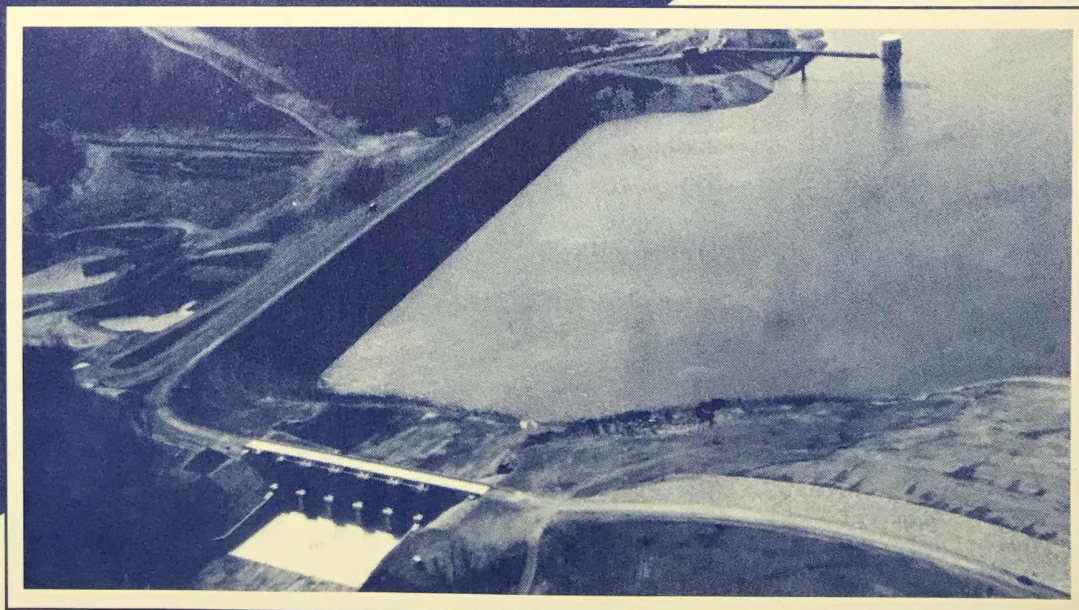


Flowing To The Future

Improving the North Branch Watershed

The North Branch
TASK FORCE
August 8, 1995



Flowing to the Future

Final Draft

A Plan for Improving the North Branch Potomac River Watershed

North Branch Task Force

August 10, 1995

Introduction

On December 2, 1993, Governor William Donald Schaefer of Maryland, Governor Gaston C. Caperton of West Virginia, and Chairperson Phyllis M. Cole of the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) entered into an agreement to form a task force for the improvement of water quality and recreational opportunities on the North Branch of the Potomac River. The Task Force includes representatives of state and local governments, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the ICPRB, and the private sector.

The agreement that created the North Branch Task Force (Appendix 1) recognized the water quality and jurisdictional problems that have historically plagued the watershed. It also recognized that water quality has greatly improved because of the operations of Jennings Randolph Reservoir and the acid mine drainage mitigation efforts of both government and the mining industry. The agreement directed the task force to work toward resolving the remaining problems to create a substantial fishing and recreational industry in the watershed. This strategic plan is the next step in the process of achieving the extraordinary potential of this damaged but remarkable watershed.

Vision

The Task Force has a view of the North Branch watershed as it could be ten years hence. That vision is of a healthy watershed that supports a high-quality nationally-recognized trout fishery and provides diverse recreational opportunities to complement and sustain viable local economies. These added economic benefits need not replace or preclude those from traditional businesses. Rather, we believe that the watershed's natural resources can be managed for the benefit of and in harmony with the area's human resources.

Realizing the Vision

A significant element in resource planning throughout the North Branch watershed is the operation of Jennings Randolph Reservoir. The reservoir was authorized for construction by Congress to serve flood control, water supply, water quality, and recreation needs. Water releases causing

Goal 1. Improve the water quality in the watershed to develop and maintain a high quality, year-round trout fishery in the mainstem of the North Branch Potomac River.

Objective Increase the minimum pH of the North Branch mainstem at the outflow from Jennings Randolph Reservoir to 6.5 by 1996.

Action Items Maintain the acid neutralization facilities at Kitzmiller, Lost Land Run, Gorman, and Laurel Run/Kempton as well as appropriate privately operated facilities.

Establish a standing acid mine drainage work group composed of, as a minimum, representatives from the Maryland Division of Freshwater Fisheries, Maryland Bureau of Mines, West Virginia Wildlife Resources Section, West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection, U.S. Department of Interior Office of Surface Mining, private industry, and others as appropriate. This workgroup shall provide a continuing forum for the mitigation of acid mine drainage problems in the North Branch watershed, including the implementation of innovative technologies, acquisition of project funding, and periodic evaluations.

By June 30, 1995, complete a study within the watershed to identify sources of acid mine drainage and the most feasible and effective methods of neutralizing acidity.

Install appropriate acid neutralization facilities and/or abatement measures in subwatersheds identified in the study.

Continuously monitor and adjust the treatment rate of these facilities to achieve and maintain the pH objective.

Aggressively seek federal and other funding to establish a trust fund for the generation of annual revenues to operate these treatment facilities.

Objective Reduce the supersaturation of nitrogen gas in the outflow from Jennings Randolph Reservoir to eliminate the degradation of downstream fisheries and other aquatic life.

Action Items As part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reconnaissance study and other efforts in the watershed, investigate the factors contributing to the supersaturation problem and the feasibility and effectiveness of retrofitting

Goal 2. Manage and protect the physical and biological environment within the North Branch watershed to provide high quality fish and wildlife habitat and scenic beauty.

Objective Inventory and archive baseline data on fish and wildlife habitat, land uses, land ownership, and human population density that will facilitate sound decision-making.

Action Items Collect inventory data on fish and wildlife habitats, land uses, land ownership, and human population in the watershed.

Develop a Geographic Information System for the watershed to foster better informed and balanced decisions.

Objective If desired by local citizens, foster and support the development and implementation of comprehensive land use planning for the watershed.

Action Items Assess public sentiment regarding land use planning in the watershed.

Support county planning agencies with GIS and other decision -making tools.

Objective Secure protection and management capability for fish and wildlife habitats and scenic areas inventoried as high priorities in the watershed.

Action Items Establish criteria to identify high-priority fish and wildlife habitats for potential public acquisition.

Encourage the states of West Virginia and Maryland to seek and make available within existing programs funding for public acquisition of high-priority fish and wildlife habitats in the watershed.

Purchase or lease high-priority fish and wildlife habitats from willing sellers, particularly those bordering on the mainstem of the North Branch, for management by state fish and wildlife agencies.

Purchase conservation easements from willing sellers to protect high-priority habitats that cannot be acquired through fee simple purchase or lease.

Goal 3. Provide, enhance, and promote diverse recreational opportunities in the North Branch watershed.

Objective Develop and maintain a world-class, year-round trout fishery in the mainstem of the North Branch from its headwaters to its confluence with the Savage River.

Action Items Establish and maintain a standing fisheries work group composed of representatives from the Maryland Division of Freshwater Fisheries, the West Virginia Wildlife Resources Section, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and angling publics.

Identify reaches and segment the management of the mainstem North Branch to provide diverse angling opportunities.

As water quality and fisheries are sufficiently improved, recognize and afford intensive management of the fishery through designation as a special management area.

Annually monitor the health of the North Branch aquatic ecosystem with particular emphasis on its trout fishery.

Objective Increase public access to a seasonally diverse array of wildlife-associated recreational opportunities.

Action Items Manage wildlife habitat on public lands in the watershed to emphasize both game and nongame species.

Maintain biologically appropriate hunting seasons for a diverse array of big and small game animals.

Establish two interpretive Watchable Wildlife Areas in the watershed.

Purchase or lease additional public lands from willing sellers, emphasizing lands bordering the mainstem North Branch.

Enhance public access to Jennings Randolph Reservoir and the mainstem river corridor, both above and below the reservoir.

Support appropriate road improvements to the region to facilitate increased tourism.

Objective By the year 2000, increase the recreational use of Jennings Randolph Reservoir by a minimum of 100 percent above current levels.

Action Items By 1996, complete a study to estimate current levels of recreational use on Jennings Randolph Reservoir accruing from boating, fishing, and other diverse sources; identify the factors limiting use; and provide recommendations to increase use by a minimum of 100 percent above current levels. The study should recognize the lake level fluctuations dictated by the reservoir's project purposes.

Implement the recommendations of the recreational use study of Jennings Randolph Reservoir.

Objective Maintain quality boating opportunities in the watershed.

Action Items Improve the condition and maintain the number of currently used boating access sites on the mainstem of the North Branch Potomac River.

Provide a program of whitewater boating that takes advantage of water releases.

Continue to provide public information on the timing of whitewater boating releases from Jennings Randolph Reservoir.

Conduct a study to determine the optimum level of boating opportunities compatible with the broad array of recreational opportunities within the watershed.

Objective Increase efforts to promote the public recreational opportunities available in the watershed.

Action Items As water quality and fisheries are sufficiently improved, recognize and promote use of the fishery through designation as a special management area.

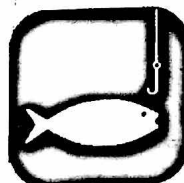
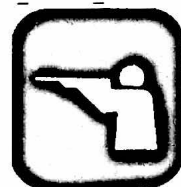
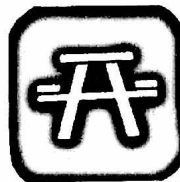
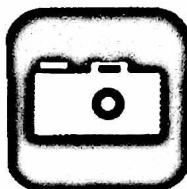
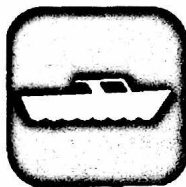
Seek opportunities to gain national exposure in the sporting and outdoor press for the watershed restoration initiative and

the diverse recreational opportunities that are being developed.

Through the Task Force, coordinate the production of a brochure, a videotape, and other promotional items featuring the restoration and enhancement of recreational opportunities in the watershed.

Recommend the establishment of an interpretive facility at Jennings Randolph Reservoir featuring the historical and ongoing restoration of the watershed's resources and the recreational opportunities that they sustain.

Coordinate with state and local tourism agencies to promote recreation in the watershed.



Goal 4. Increase the local economic benefits from recreational use of the watershed.

Objective Ensure that publicly accessible recreational opportunities in the watershed support local economies, initially contributing at least one half million dollars in retail expenditures annually to local economies.

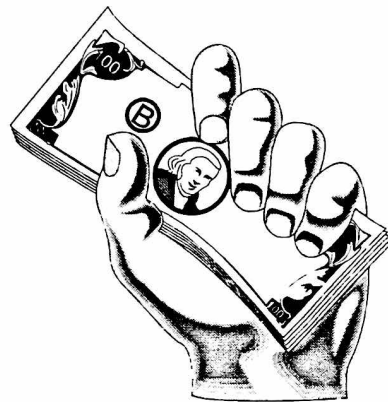
Action Items Promote the concept that publicly-managed recreational opportunities are products to which the private sector can add value and thus market.

Through the Task Force, develop a standing marketing work group to identify opportunities and potential funding sources for local individuals and companies to market recreational activities in the watershed.

Utilize the marketing work group to conduct a series of local public workshops on recreational marketing opportunities in the watershed.

Utilize small business development loans to provide adequate venture capital for new, recreationally-based, local businesses.

Estimate and periodically monitor recreational use and development of natural resource based opportunities to evaluate progress toward achieving economic objectives.



Goal 5. Provide a continuing forum for a cooperative effort by government agencies and private entities to resolve conflicts and promote management synergy within the watershed.

Objective Maintain the North Branch Task Force for as long as is necessary to achieve the objectives of the establishing agreement and of this plan.

Action Items Convene quarterly task force meetings to evaluate progress toward plan objectives.

Annually review with the Governors of the respective states and the Chairman of the ICPRB the progress that has been made toward objectives and evaluate the desirability of continuing the Task Force.

Objective Increase the coordination efforts between the Task Force and other agencies and entities whose activities can potentially affect the fish and wildlife resources of the watershed and the recreational opportunities that those resources sustain.

Action Items Seek immediate Task Force representation in the ongoing U.S. Army Corps of Engineers study of environmental restoration needs and opportunities in the watershed.

Seek passage of the Jennings Randolph Reservoir Project Compact to provide consistent enforcement of natural resource and boating laws and regulations in the reservoir area by Maryland, West Virginia, and the federal government.

Coordinate with the ongoing U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reallocation study of the water storage in Jennings Randolph Reservoir.

Monitor efforts to implement the Tributary Strategy for Nutrient Reduction in the Upper Potomac River and coordinate with those efforts as necessary to achieve the goals of this plan.

Coordinate with efforts of federal and state agencies, private industry, and others as appropriate, to reduce acid mine drainage in the North Branch watershed.

Objective Maintain regular channels of communication between the Task Force and local publics.

Action Items Develop a database of local publics.

Initiate a semi-annual Task Force newsletter to be provided to interested publics.

Conduct periodic open houses for interested publics to meet informally with the Task Force members, stay abreast of Task Force plans and activities, and provide input on specific watershed proposals.

Develop a speakers list of Task Force members, local advocates, technical experts, and others to communicate the objectives of the Task Force to civic organizations, schools, chambers of commerce, sportsman's groups, conservation groups, and others.

Develop an outreach effort for the Task Force or its representatives to attend local county commission meetings and other functions as necessary to interface with local publics.

Establish a cooperative public education program with private sector representatives to explain how privately-owned resources are being managed compatibly with publicly-owned resources and to educate users about their responsibilities when on private land.

Catalyze the establishment of a locally-driven watershed association to assist county governments in their planning efforts.

