



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Potomac River of several decades ago witnessed raw sewage discharges, large algal blooms, fish kills, and stormwater pollution that brought trash, nutrients, and sediment to large stretches of the river. During the Water Emergency Conference in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson said the state of the Potomac River was "disgraceful", adding "We have got to do something about it." Since that time, great strides have been made in cleaning up the Potomac and its tributaries, restoring fisheries, and removing and preventing trash from entering the waters. As these problems are being addressed, however, the basin's aquatic habitats and water resources face new challenges.

The challenges facing the basin will continue to grow and change and will not necessarily adhere to political boundaries. As such, planning that holistically considers the entire hydrologic system is key for responsible and sustainable management of this precious resource. Proactive, adaptive, and comprehensive water resources planning for the future of the basin's water and land resources is essential.

The Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin is charged by its [Compact](#) to conduct studies on pollution and other water problems; to cooperate with and assist other agencies in the formulation of plans and activities; and to disseminate to the public information about those problems and recommended actions.

This Potomac Basin Comprehensive Water Resources Plan seeks to identify surface water and groundwater resources issues of interstate and/or basin-wide significance and develop associated management recommendations ([Section 1](#)) to provide an interstate perspective for decision-making. It builds on existing state and local planning efforts and on an understanding of the basin's characteristics ([Section 2](#)), to facilitate ensuring sustainable and reliable drinking water supplies, protecting and improving water quality, managing land use sustainably as it relates to water resources, and protecting ecological health.

Within these four challenge areas ([Section 3](#)) are 14 recommended actions that ICPRB, in concert with other agencies, should take. One overarching recommendation relates to all challenge areas:

- Develop an inventory of roles, responsibilities, and areas of authority and discuss how effectively current programs and activities are being carried out

To ensure sustainable water uses and supplies, implementation recommendations focus primarily on further evaluating basin-wide conditions.

- Report on basin-wide water uses, projected demands, and consumptive demands
- Conduct additional studies on water uses that fall below state water reporting thresholds
- Pursue actions that would contribute to a more sustainable and resilient water supply, including an evaluation of the potential impact of climate change and reviews of existing interstate water management agreements

To protect and improve water quality, recommendations focus on promoting information sharing and education as well as fully assessing current activities and roles.

- Promote water quality information sharing
- Educate citizens and professionals about water quality in the Potomac basin
- Pursue actions that would contribute to protecting and improving water quality, such as identification of common water quality goals and recommending roles and actions for other agencies

To manage human land use for sustainability, this plan's recommended actions focus on research and dissemination of information to complement these activities.

- Research timely land use related information for decision-making
- Effectively disseminate scientific data and information compiled by ongoing research
- Pursue actions that would contribute to managing human land to protect water quality, water use, and aquatic health, for example, applying a watershed approach for mitigation and restoration and tracking, promoting and increasing riparian buffer protection

To protect ecological health, this plan's recommended actions focus on promoting coordination and information sharing as well as fully assessing current activities and roles.

- Share across jurisdictions the data, analysis results, and other information from successful restoration approaches
- Coordinate across jurisdictions plans and programs that protect ecological value
- Support and coordinate programs that identify, protect, conserve, restore, enhance, and connect natural areas, especially along waterways, for example, considering ecologically valuable waters in all land and water use planning and improving coordination between multiple, diverse restoration efforts
- Pursue complementary actions that would contribute to protecting ecological health, including actions involving identification of stressors and protection of refugia

Some problems impact more than one challenge area, including floods and droughts, source water protection, climate change, and the water-energy nexus. Implementation activities under the plan's four main challenge areas are expected to help address these cross-cutting issues.

There is a role for everyone in sustainably using and managing the basin's water resources. [Section 4](#) proposes roles and responsibilities for different levels of government, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, drinking water utilities, commercial entities, and individuals. ICPRB's role in the plan's implementation is to act primarily as a catalyst and partner in carrying out the plan's recommendations. To that end, ICPRB commits to actively engaging the states, federal government, and basin stakeholders in implementation of this plan. This is a living process that involves the ongoing, adaptive updating and recalibration of the basin-wide plan. Successful implementation will require funding, which is a challenge for ICPRB and partner agencies and organizations. In addition to implementation of recommended future activities, an ongoing commitment to fully execute existing sustainable water resources initiatives at all levels is critical.

Milestones and activities over the next 15 years for each of the four challenge areas are identified in [Section 5](#). This section necessarily is focused on ICPRB activities because we cannot make commitments for others. Many of these milestones and activities, however, involve collaboration between ICPRB and other agencies and organizations. This list will be a guide for successive ICPRB annual workplans and periodic strategic plans that will produce measurable progress towards a sustainable future.

A wide and varied array of stakeholders contributed to this plan ([Section 1](#)); they come from all parts of the basin representing diverse perspectives from governmental agencies to environmental advocacy groups and concerned citizens. As a first step, they concurred on a vision statement:

This plan provides a roadmap to achieving our shared vision that the Potomac River basin will serve as a national model for water resources management that fulfills human and ecological needs for current and future generations. The plan will focus on sustainable water resources management that provides the water quantity and quality needed for the protection and enhancement of public health, the environment, all sectors of the economy, and quality of life in the basin. The plan will be based on the best available science and data. The ICPRB will serve as the catalyst for the plan's implementation through an adaptive process in collaboration with partner agencies, institutions, organizations, and the public.

