



Potomac RIVERKEEPER®

River Watch

The Newsletter of Potomac Riverkeeper, Inc.
Volume 5 Issue 1, Winter 2008



Shenandoah RIVERKEEPER®

PRK Fights Lax terms of Hagerstown Wastewater Permit

Potomac Riverkeeper has been working on correcting the problems at the Hagerstown Wastewater Treatment Plant since 2004, when a compliance review indicated the plant had been violating its discharge permits for four years.

Because of our intervention, an administrative "slap on the wrist" turned into a judge's order to clean up the plant with a penalty that was ten times higher than the original.

Since then, PRK and its legal team have met with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) and at each step in the process have sent MDE comments on the new pollution permit that is being created. We want the permit to reflect what is truly needed to protect Antietam Creek and the Potomac.

On January 16, 2008, PRK, represented by the University of Maryland's Environmental Law Clinic, once again wrote MDE stat-



Above, left to right: Corianne Iacovelli, Ed Merrifield, Michael McKeefery, Kerry Rogers and Jonathan Cheng

ing that this new permit should (among other things) not allow:

- *blending and releasing raw sewage with stormwater runoff (which violates the Clean Water Act)*
- *creating ambiguous water quality standards while the plant undergoes upgrades*
- *using unproven electrical equipment without studying its effectiveness and without using a backup generator.*

Write your own comments!

Potomac Riverkeeper, with students from the University of Maryland's Environmental Law Clinic, published *Writing for Your Watershed* earlier last year.

The guide explains how you can make comments similar to the ones we made about Hagerstown. Download a free copy at: WWW.POTOMACRIVERKEEPER.ORG/PUBLICAITONS!

These three issues need to be addressed before the permit (which is currently available for public comment) will adequately protect Antietam Creek. We will continue to press for better water quality standards, and work towards achieving the goals of the Clean Water Act.

Stay up to date about this issue by signing up for our e-Newsletter and by checking out our website: WWW.POTOMACRIVERKEEPER.ORG.

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Mark Your Calendar: March 7, 2008

Potomac Riverkeeper is bringing the **WILD & SCENIC ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL** to the metro area! Now in its sixth year, the festival will feature films, food, give-aways and a raffle! We will help kick-start your spring outdoor activities with a collection of films highlighting water issues and citizen action.

JOIN US AT POTOMAC PADDLESPTS
11917 MAPLE AVENUE
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20852
FRIDAY, MARCH 7 FROM 7-10 PM
LOCAL SPONSOR: PATAGONIA OF GEORGETOWN

Tickets and program information are available through our website (WWW.POTOMACRIVERKEEPER.ORG). Buy two today and bring a friend!



40 Years to Upgrade is Too Long

Over the past years, I have explained to many groups why the nearly four million people who live in the Washington Metro area need to pay attention to the water quality upriver. It was upriver that the problems of fish kills and male fish having female characteristics were first discovered. Scientists tell us that these problems are directly influenced by pollution in our waters. It's easy to understand that the same water causing these problems is coming downriver and either going by or into our drinking water intakes. I am, however, surprised by the number of people who don't know about problems that exist with DC water quality.



Every year in the District of Columbia, two and a half billion gallons of water with untreated, raw sewage flow into the Potomac River, Anacostia River, and Rock Creek! Yes, this is the type of sewage that flows directly out of industrial plants and out of our bathrooms. This flow comes from nearly 60 different pipes spread over about one-third of the District. The greatest outpourings come from a pipe on the Anacostia and a pipe on the Potomac, each spewing over 600 million gallons.

These sewer overflows, which are supposed to occur only when it rains, happen more frequently than most people realize. For example, there is a sewer overflow pipe on the Potomac just above Washington Harbor in Georgetown that spills sewage into the Potomac 73 times a year. That's once every five days on average. It only takes one-tenth of an inch of water to get this pipe spewing, and its flow usually continues for about four and a half hours.

So, in both quantity and frequency of raw sewage, we've got a major problem in DC. The DC Water and Sewer Authority is in charge of cleaning up this mess. We are at the beginning of a 40 year plan to stop about 96% of the problem. The plan is to create large tunnels to hold the water and sewage until it can be processed by the sewage treatment plant. This plan is not what it could be in either percentage (which should be 100%) or time (which could be lowered to 15 years). The problem, as always, is lack of funding to do it better and faster.

Now let's see. Where should the District of Columbia—our Nation's Capital City—the "Federal City"—go to get the money to help clean up this mess 100% and at a much faster rate than planned? Yes, our federal government can and should help speed up this process. Please talk to those you know who might be able to help. Let's not give up the dream of healthy rivers and streams.

Ed Merrifield



Eatin' Burgers and Talkin' Chicken Waste, a Typical Tuesday...

I met with Broadway's town manager on January 15 to discuss ongoing pollution levels coming from the town's recently purchased wastewater treatment plant. Broadway bought the plant from the now defunct SIL Cleanwater, L.L.C. SIL sold the facility in bankruptcy because they couldn't afford the upgrades necessary to end four years of pollution permit violations. Here's the rub: the Commonwealth of Virginia wrote a consent decree that waives most pollution limits until the plant upgrades can be completed, and the deadline is January 1, 2011!

With my fellow Riverkeeper Ed Merrifield and our resource organization Waterkeeper Alliance, I have been battling this consent decree since it was drafted by Virginia's attorneys in September, and have considered challenging the legality of the relaxed permit.

Broadway's manager is not comfortable right now with more concrete language in the consent decree, and has fought against our efforts. We think if he OK'd new language, the state would be compelled to go along. Instead, I feel the manager would rather wait to see what pollution reductions the facility can achieve in the interim (now that a phosphorous removal system has been installed) before considering new language in the decree.

Broadway is in a tough spot, but I don't want to wait until 2011 before we guarantee that all steps have been taken to remove as much pollution as possible from this system. To get at this consent decree legally, Broadway could find itself in the middle of the legal battle.

Overall, the lunch meeting was constructive--even though I had to choke down my burger during the difficult parts. Discussion is still open, and I have an open invitation to see what upgrades they've already installed up at the facility. I'm going to spend my time right now estimating what future pollution and violations are going to look like. What will happen next very much depends on those predictions.

John A. Kelle

Last year, we celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of 1972's Clean Water Act. The CWA remains one of the most groundbreaking pieces of legislation within the entire environmental movement; it is from this law that organizations like PRK draw their rights to sue polluters and clean up our nation's waterways when all else fails.

The anniversary was not without a bittersweet reflection, however, of how far we have come in accomplishing some of the goals we set out to accomplish all those years ago. We agreed to permit polluters until 1985, at which point—we hoped—all discharging would be illegal. In 2007, unfortunately, permitting pollution is still alive and well. We set out to take care of non-point source (runoff) pollution, but exempted agricultural operations, who were among the most prolific contributors to this problem. It's been uphill at times, but the fight to clean our nation's rivers and streams continues.

There is reason to believe we are winning. Two stories from our own Potomac Watershed illustrate the wide (and sometimes unlikely) swath of people who are working to fulfill the promises we made one quarter of a century ago. The reasons for their actions are as diverse as the group itself, and only strengthens our cause. People of all varieties are working for change.

After all, what are we turning our rivers and streams into by doing nothing?



VA Farmers, Environmentalists Agree on Best Practices

Coalition supports State funds to help farmers upgrade facilities

An unlikely coalition of environmentalists, farmers, and politicians are teaming up to press Governor Timothy Kaine and members of the Virginia General Assembly to fund a program aimed at reducing non-point source (runoff) pollution to the Chesapeake Bay.

Runoff pollution that carries fertilizers, chemicals, soil and waste to rivers and streams in Virginia is largely due to farming operations. Environmentalists and farmers alike recognize this fact, and are asking for \$100 million in state funds annually for the next decade.

The money, supplemented by contributions from the farmers, would be used to implement "best management

practices" for farmers, including: fencing off livestock to keep them out of rivers and streams, using vegetation (riparian buffer zones) to filter runoff, and using cover crops to absorb excess fertilizers.

Governor Kaine has indicated he would be willing to commit funds for the first two years of the program, but is reluctant to do more because of budget concerns. The coalition—which includes the Chesa-

apeake Bay Foundation, the Virginia Farm Bureau, and the Virginia Agribusiness Council—is pushing for 10 years of funding to accommodate the unpredictable nature of income from farming. The average Virginia farmer makes about \$49,000 a year, and crop failures can lead them to operate at a loss.

For more information, check out the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Website: www.cbf.org.



Waste from one cow is equal to waste from sixty humans (average).

e u • t r o p h • i • c a • t i o n (noun)—excessive nutrients in a lake or other body of water, usually caused by runoff of nutrients (animal waste, fertilizers, sewage) from the land, which causes a dense growth of plant life; the decomposition of the plants depletes the supply of oxygen, leading to the death of animal life.



Groups Weigh in on how to Spend Environmental Fund

Environmentalists testified that the new \$50 million Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund in Maryland, formerly known as the Green Fund, could be spent alleviating nitrogen and phosphorus pollution in the Chesapeake Bay.

The environmentalists suggested farmers could modify livestock diets and plant “cover crops” to absorb the rainwater that carries nutrients to rivers and streams.

Some farmers feel they are under attack for earning a living, and even the Maryland’s Deputy Secretary of the Environment said those specific nutrients are down 56% and 71% over the last twenty-two years, respectively. Environmentalists countered, however, that nitrogen and phosphorus are still a problem. They said of all the nutrient pollution in the bay, 38% comes from farms.

Farming in an environmentally-sensitive way is not always easy, and we believe that farmers need our help and support to implement practices that will keep nutrient pollution out of the bay.

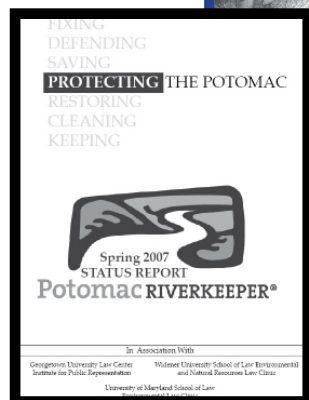
For more information, go to: www.mdldcv.org.



Industrial chicken coops (top) produce industrial waste (magnification), which is hazardous (bottom). The waste can make its way to our rivers and streams and increase algae, deplete oxygen, and choke aquatic life (inset).

Another Year of Successes for PRK, Inc.

Thanks to all of our members, volunteers and donors, PRK made progress in 2007 in our fight against pollution in our watershed. Here are some highlights:



- Two 60 day notices to sue two poultry processors in the Shenandoah
- Cleanup of lead contamination in Great Seneca Creek after a four year battle
- Dozens of on-going actions to enforce permit and regulatory compliance
- Pilot stormwater runoff project launched in the Shenandoah to catch illegal runoff from construction sites
- Hundreds of calls from volunteer Riverwatchers about the spring fish kills in the Shenandoah
- Three Riverwatcher trainings for 56 volunteers
- 518 new members!
- "Protecting the Potomac" Status Report released
- Citizen how-to guide, "Writing for your Watershed," created to teach people how to make public comments on pollution permits
- Hired Director of Operations

Increasing our Presence in the Watershed and Online

The internet is facilitating many changes in our organization. We've begun a monthly e-Newsletter, which you can subscribe to by sending an email to DAMIEN@POTOMACRIVERKEEPER.ORG. You can join, renew, and donate on our website (WWW.POTOMACRIVERKEEPER.ORG). And we are expanding our presence on facebook.com.

Facebook is an online community that allows users to interact with, post information about, and donate money to their favorite causes. When you join our Facebook group, you are connected to other members of PRK and can send messages, post stories about pollution, and participate in online conversations with a few simple clicks. If you would like to join us on Facebook, go to www.facebook.com and search for Potomac Riverkeeper. Membership (for Facebook and our online Facebook group) is free! All you need is an email address!

If you subscribe to our e-Newsletter, and did not receive our most recent issue (emailed January 23, 2008) than you may want to make sure that our address (RIVERKEEPER@PRKN.ORG) is on your safe-sender list or that we are in your contacts list.

lululemon athletica's Charity Day Raises almost \$3,000 for PRK

On November 4, PRK was asked to participate in a fundraising event at lululemon athletica, the clothing outfitter at Tyson's Corner. Every time someone selected PRK out of a list of four organizations, lululemon made a \$100 contribution.

Thanks to lululemon, and to all the visitors who chose us, PRK raised \$2,900! We would like to extend a special thank you to Vanessa King, who reached out to our organization and made this day possible!



Student Tests Four Mile Run for Optical Brighteners

Little did Nicole Broder know that a boat ride with the Potomac Riverkeeper, Ed Merrifield, would lead to stomping around Four Mile Run in the cold collecting water samples. Nicole, a 9th grader at HB Woodlawn in Arlington County, needed a science project topic. Ed suggested testing for optical brighteners in a stream.

Optical brighteners are found in most name brand laundry detergents. If they are found in water, it could be an indication that other contaminants have also made their way into the water through the waste water treatment system. Testing for optical brighteners is often used to see if a septic system is leaking.



Nicole decided to test the water in Four Mile Run, an urban stream running through Arlington County. She chose 5 sites and took 5 samples. Her results showed low dissolved oxygen at all sites, high nitrates and phosphates at some sites, and optical brighteners at two sites – one downstream from the County's waste water treatment plant and one at the intersection of a major street.

Nicole concluded that the stream is showing signs of stress and that further testing and research should be done to determine why optical brighteners are in the water.

Annual Party & Auction Date Set for June 1

"At the River's Edge"

Potomac Riverkeeper's Annual
Auction and Party!



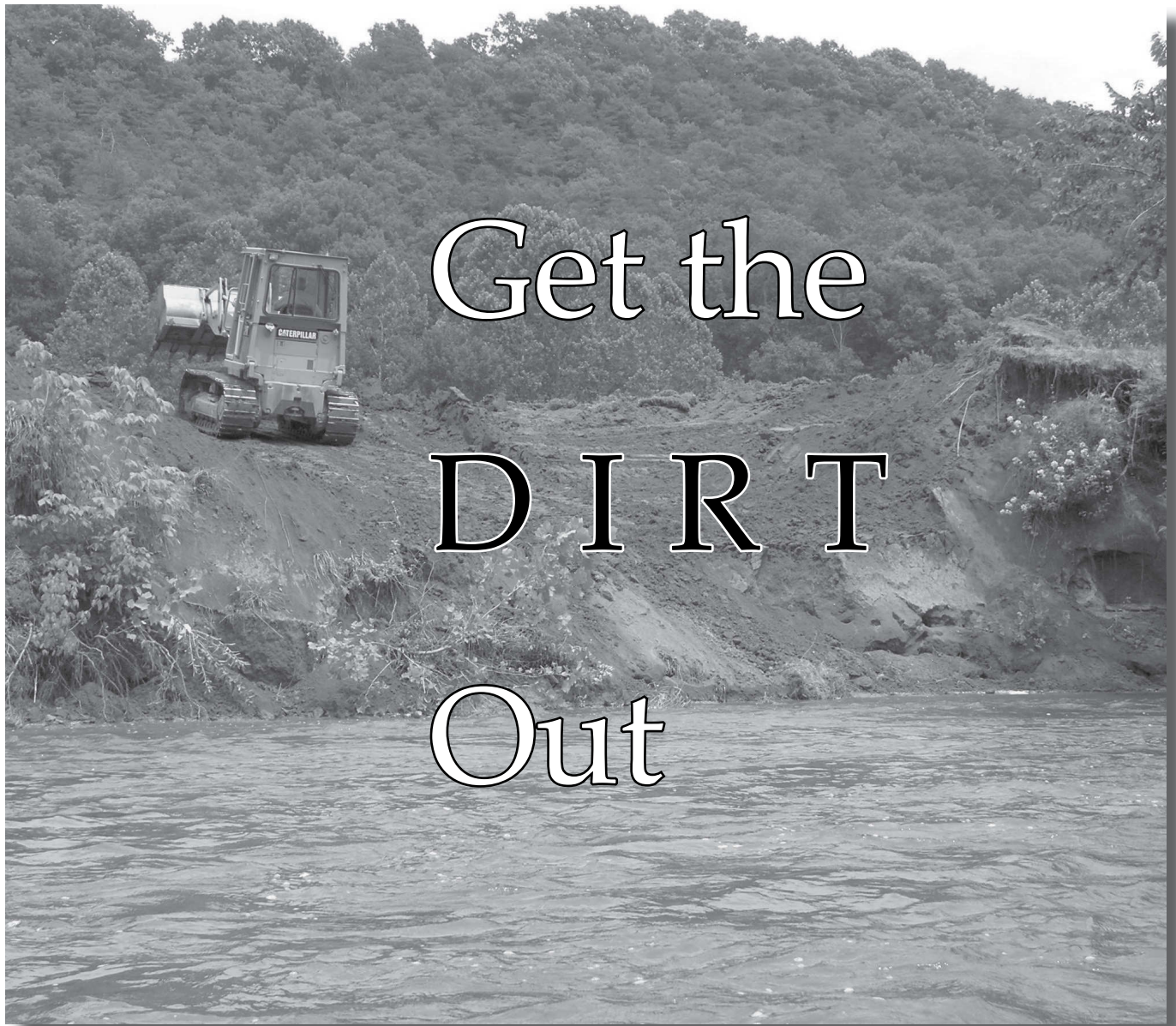
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Sunday, June 1st
The Potomac Boat Club

It may still be cold outside, but PRK's annual party & auction will be here before you know it! Join us on June 1st at the Potomac Boat Club in Georgetown for good food, friends, and great auction items! Last year's event was a huge success, with members and friends raising \$50,000 for Potomac Riverkeeper, Inc.

Last year, in addition to many generous donations from over 100 people, guests bought airline tickets, vacation packages, and a kayak! If you are interested in being a corporate or individual sponsor or volunteering, please email Nadia at NADIA@POTOMACRIVERKEEPER.ORG.





With the pace of development predicted to accelerate over the next several years, the damage done to our rivers from construction runoff will also increase unless we act to stop it. Our current rules governing construction runoff are inadequate and rarely enforced. Maryland Riverkeeper groups and the University of Maryland's Environmental Law Clinic are sponsoring "GET THE DIRT OUT," a full-day symposium where participants will learn all they need to know to identify runoff problems and how to get them corrected. The session is also intended to train participants to go back and train others in their communities.

"GET THE DIRT OUT" symposium
Friday, February 29, 2008
University of Maryland Law School
500 W. Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD
9am to 5pm

Admission is free! For more information, contact Michael Wright: mwrigh006@umaryland.edu.

Upcoming Cleanup Events

- **FEBRUARY 16** – cleanup Belle Haven & Dyke Marsh (National Park Service--George Washington Memorial Parkway, www.nps.gov/gwmp)
- **FEBRUARY 23** – cleanup in North Arlington/Falls Church (Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment, www.arlingtonenvironment.org)
- **MARCH 8** – cleanup on Four Mile Run (Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment, www.arlingtonenvironment.org)
- **MARCH 15** – cleanup Belle Haven & Dyke Marsh (National Park Service--George Washington Memorial Parkway, www.nps.gov/gwmp)
- **APRIL 5** – The 20th Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup (see below)



Spotlight On: Potomac River Watershed Cleanup

On April 5, 2008 the Alice Ferguson Foundation will host the 20th Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup between 9am and noon. Since 1989, more than 35,000 volunteers have teamed with 250 partner organizations to tug 1,230 tons of trash from the watershed's streams, rivers and bays.

Last year's haul of almost 232 tons included more than 13 tons of recyclables, 889 tires, 11 shopping carts, eight car bumpers, three bed frames, two recliners, \$50 in foreign currency, and, yes, even the proverbial kitchen sink.

This year's cleanup will take place at over 300 sites in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and West Virginia – all part of the lands, or watershed, that drain into the Potomac. Locations include fields, forests, parking lots and other 'inland' sites, where the trash can be removed before it enters creeks and other waterways.

Potomac Riverkeeper is forming a team (or teams) to help clean up the watershed. One team will partner with **REI OF FAIRFAX** at a site in Bull-Run Regional Park. If you would like to join, send an email to DAMIEN@POTOMACRIVERKEEPER.ORG. We also need site leaders. For more info about the annual cleanup, visit www.fergusonfoundation.org.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

C&O Vent System is Outdated and Ineffective...and it Stinks!

by Mac Thornton, Vice Chair of the Board of Directors

For over 40 years, sewers running through our National Parks along the Potomac have been purposely venting large quantities of stinky sewer gases. Now PRK is spearheading a renewed citizen effort to stop this outrage. Built in the early 1960's, the Potomac Interceptor (PI) Sewer line runs from Dulles Airport to the District. The PI was designed with highly unusual vent structures to disperse hydrogen sulfide and other corrosive gases from the sewer line. The theory was that this would extend the life of the sewer pipe. Thirty-two of the vents exist along the C&O Canal downstream of Great Falls, with an additional eight vents in Great Falls Park, Va., all on National Park Service (NPS) lands.



Following a lawsuit and other citizen action dating back to 1997, the owner of the line, the DC Water and Sewer Authority (WASA), designed a structural solution in 2000 to abate the odors. In the Maryland parks, four new buildings (each about 20' by 20') would house large fan units with charcoal filters to pull out and treat gases from the sewer line. Most of the vents would be capped, except for 10 vents for intake of air only.

WASA recently issued a letter saying it is diligently attempting to obtain regulatory approvals, but new and changing demands from other agencies, principally NPS, have frustrated efforts. PRK and the Potomac Conservancy have had discussions with Park officials, and they say WASA has been complicating efforts by switching subcontractors and taking months and years to address NPS concerns.

The sites of the four buildings are: (1) near the Old Angler's Inn parking lot (needs elevation and grading of building), (2) just downstream of the Beltway (needs fire suppression system), (3) Little Falls Pumping Station site (needs to avoid lane closures on the Clara Barton Parkway during construction) and (4) Fletcher's Boat House site (needs Commission on Fine Arts approval).

PRK and others will be approaching Federal and state public officials to jumpstart the regulatory approvals.

PRK STAFF:

Ed Merrifield
Potomac Riverkeeper & Exec. Dir.
Jeff Kelble
Shenandoah Riverkeeper
Robin Broder
Director of Operations
Nadia Elguindy
Development & Programs
Damien Power
Communications & Outreach

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

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Rena Steinzor
Mac Thornton
Katherine Ward
G. Cabell Williams III

Contact Us

POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER

ADDRESS:

1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036

MAIN OFFICE LINE: 202.222.0707

FAX LINE: 202.783.0444

EMAIL ADDRESS:

keeper@potomacriverkeeper.org

WEBSITE:

www.potomacriverkeeper.org

SHENANDOAH RIVERKEEPER

ADDRESS:

Shenandoah Riverkeeper
P.O. Box 405
Boyce, VA 22620

MAIN OFFICE LINE: 540.837.1479

FAX LINE: 540.837.1479

EMAIL ADDRESS:

keeper@shenandoahriverkeeper.org

WEBSITE:

www.shenandoahriverkeeper.org

☐ Yes! I want to volunteer!

Name _____

Address _____

City, State Zip _____

Email _____

Phone _____ I am available _____ (date or times)

My interests are...

- ☐ Riverwatcher _____ (river section)
☐ Event Assistance ☐ Office Assistance
☐ Other _____

Tell us about yourself....

- ☐ I can help with computer/internet tasks
☐ I paddle (kayak, canoe, etc.)
☐ I'm a fisherman ☐ I'm a photographer
☐ I live near a river/stream _____ (location)
☐ Other _____

Potomac Riverkeeper • 1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 600 Washington DC 20036

Give us a call!



Potomac RIVERKEEPER®
Shenandoah RIVERKEEPER®

Spot Pollution? Dial Our Hotline At:

301-POTOMAC

YES! I want to protect and restore the Potomac River! Enclosed is my tax-deductible membership gift to help POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER and keep our Nation's River clean!

☐ \$35 Regular ☐ \$50 Family ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$500 ☐ Other _____

Name _____

Address _____

City, State Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

- ☐ Please send me information about your Riverwatcher program today!
☐ Do not trade my name

Please make checks payable to **Potomac Riverkeeper**. Thank you!

1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 600 Washington DC 20036

To become a member online, go to WWW.POTOMACRIVERKEEPER.ORG

Fishing “Rodeo” on the Shenandoah



In early April, Shenandoah Riverkeeper Jeff Kelble and a number of fishing guides will host a fishing “rodeo” (or catching competition) on the Shenandoah River.

The event will feature food, drink, and—of course—our members and friends casting their lines in hopes of a good catch! The rodeo is a first for our organization, and the reason for its inception is simple: let’s get out and enjoy these rivers we spend so much time saving! What is a better way to renew our passion—and raise funds—for clean water than to remind ourselves why we love the Shenandoah?

The rodeo is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, April 12. To get more information, send an email to JEFF@SHENANDOAHRIVERKEEPER.ORG or visit our website for updates.



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1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036



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