



Environmental Education on the Potomac

Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup Talking Points

The Alice Ferguson Foundation has spearheaded the Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup since 1989.

- The Potomac River Watershed Cleanup connects people to their local watershed through stewardship.
- The Potomac River Watershed Cleanup has grown from a small shoreline cleanup at Piscataway National Park to a watershed wide network. What started as a few cleanup events along the Potomac River is now a regional event spanning Maryland, Virginia, the District of Columbia, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania.
- One of the largest regional events of its kind, the Potomac Cleanup provides a transforming experience that engages residents and community leaders and generates momentum for change.
- Since 1989 the Potomac River Watershed Cleanup has:
 - Engaged more than 150,000 volunteers
 - Collaborated with more than 500 community partners
 - Prevented more than 7 million pounds of trash from entering the Potomac River
- The majority of trash we pick up is plastic. The most common items picked up at trash cleanups include:
 - Food packaging
 - Plastic bottles
 - Plastic bags
 - Styrofoam
 - Tires and car parts
 - Bulk items such as household appliances

How does trash get into the river?

In the Potomac River Watershed, trash ends up on the ground through:

- Illegal dumping
- Littering
- Unsecured/uncovered trash truck loads
- Curbside collection overflow

Trash that is on the ground in the Potomac watershed is transported to the Potomac River through stormwater, which washes trash off of streets, into storm drains and eventually into the River and its tributaries.



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What is a watershed?

A watershed is an area of land that drains into a body of water.

The Potomac River watershed includes parts of Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and the entire District of Columbia. The streams, creeks, rivers, and other bodies of water flowing into the Potomac River are called tributaries. The major tributaries to the Potomac River include the Shenandoah River, Anacostia River, South Branch River, Monocacy River, Savage River, Cacapon River, Occoquan River, Antietam Creek, and Conococheague Creek. The Potomac River watershed drainage area covers 14,760 sq. miles. The Potomac River is a tributary to the Chesapeake Bay.

How does litter and trash affect the community?

Proper waste management can provide clean land, safe waters, and healthy lives for a community. Improper waste management can negatively impact a community.

Litter and trash...

- attract rats and other vermin that carry harmful diseases.
- can leach chemicals into the water we drink.
- costs jurisdictions significant amounts of money on cleanup efforts.
- negatively impacts local business and tourism.
- is deadly to wildlife.

Piece by piece litter adds up and makes the places we go everyday unsafe and unhealthy.

What happens once trash gets into the water?

Once trash reaches the water, it is very difficult to retrieve. Currents carry the trash through our local tributaries, where it ultimately can end up in the ocean.

The majority of trash is comprised of plastic, a petroleum-based material. Plastic does not decompose, meaning it will never completely break down. Plastic photodegrades, meaning it breaks down into smaller pieces by the action of sunlight. Sun, wind, and waves all contribute to plastic breaking down into smaller pieces called microplastics. Microplastics adsorb toxic chemicals. When aquatic species consume microplastics, toxic chemicals bioaccumulate up the food chain.

The Potomac River is a river worth protecting. The Potomac River flows 338 miles, from the Allegheny Mountains to the Chesapeake Bay, ultimately joining the Atlantic Ocean.

Thank you for doing your part for trash free waterways and trash free communities!