

Shenandoah River

Endocrine disrupting compounds affect growth, metabolism and reproduction in organisms such as humans and fish...found in pesticides, veterinary products, pharmaceuticals, personal care products...and have become so widespread...they have even been detected in the urine of infants.

Potomac report renews regional river concerns

Fish 'intersex' pollutants already discovered in human infant urine



Shenandoah Riverkeeper Jeff Kelble talks with Steve Reeser and Matt Henderson, not pictured, as DEQ biologist Ted Turner works on fish sample in this 2007 file photo.

By Roger Bianchini
Warren County Report

The third annual "State of the Nation's River" report was released by the Potomac Conservancy on Nov. 11. While regionally, the report focused on pollution issues in the Potomac, the group also looks at surrounding rivers that impact the Potomac watershed, including the Shenandoah River, which is as vital to the water supply of Front Royal, as the Potomac's is to the Washington D.C. Metropolitan

area.

While not an entirely new revelation, the basis of the report re-raises alarming concerns about the future health impacts of a variety of familiar human health and agricultural products.

From the 'canary' to your children

Scientists speaking with reporters on a conference call coinciding with the 2009 State of the River report's release said the prevalence of the intersex con-

dition in over 80 percent of Potomac River fish studied is the "canary in the coal mine" warning of [human] health problems ... because of endocrine disrupting compounds.

Endocrine disrupting compounds are chemicals that affect growth, metabolism and reproduction in organisms such as humans and fish. They are found in pesticides, veterinary products, pharmaceuticals, personal care products and biosolids. These contaminants have become so widespread in the environment that they have even been detected in the urine of infants.

Since approximately 90 percent of D.C.-area drinking water comes from the Potomac River and many other nearby municipalities get their water from surface sources, the participating scientists said it is critical that steps be taken to limit the amount of these chemicals entering the rivers of the greater Potomac basin.

From bad to worse?

In 2007 at the outset of its annual updates on the health of the region's watershed, Potomac Conservancy graded the health and well being of the Potomac watershed at a grade of D+. The river's overall health status will be revisited in 2011. In the intervening years, annual updates to the State of the Nation's River report highlight issues of importance to residents of the Potomac River

region.

The 2009 report revisits the emergence of new contaminants discovered in recent years as fish kill and sexual abnormalities are investigated by various state and private sector agencies, including our own Shenandoah Riverkeeper, Jeff Kelble. What has

been discovered in an alarming percentage, from 80 to 100 percent in some species and areas, are the presence and physical and genetic impact of an alarming array of chemical pollutants generated by everything from chicken and cow manure to pharmaceuticals flushed through wastewater

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Shenandoah River

treatment facilities not designed to, and consequently unable to remove them from release into both ground and stream watersheds.

This paper has been covering the deteriorating state of the Shenandoah River since March 2007, when the banner headline "What's Killing Our River" dominated our front page. In a subsequent interview with this reporter first broadcast on WZRV 95.3, and published here in "Late May 2007," Kelble told us that Shenandoah River fish kills were first reported in 2004 and continued to jump from branch to branch annually.

"Personal care products, antibacterial soaps; these can all have an effect – in low levels in

the watershed in the rivers they can get into the fish ... and are recognized [by the fish's system] as having hormonal properties that would mimic the fish's natural hormones in their bodies. And that can cause problems with immunity; it can also cause problems with intersex," Kelble explained.

Gone fishing?

"Our fish, most all the [male] fish we collect – most all of the centrarchidae, or the perch family, meaning the smallmouth bass and the red-breasted sunfish are intersex, meaning they have eggs or immature eggs developing in their testicles," Kelble pointed out of Shenandoah River samples.

"Endocrine disrupting compounds are major pollutants in the Potomac watershed, and we need to exercise the utmost caution when introducing these compounds into our rivers, streams and, ultimately, our drinking water," said Dr. John Peterson "Pete" Myers, chief scientist for Environmental Health Sciences of Charlottesville, Va.

"Water treatment facilities are not yet required to screen for endocrine disrupting contaminants, so they end up in our tap water," Myers said. "We aren't sure exactly what level of exposure causes harmful effects to human health, but if the intersex fish phenomenon is any indication, there's a critical need for regulatory agencies and decision makers to start addressing this issue."

At present, there are no water quality standards for endocrine disrupting contaminants. "The federal government has already taken steps to limit so-called legacy pollutants from damaging the natural environment and human health," said Potomac Con-

servancy President Hedrick Belin. "It now needs to employ 21st Century scientific testing and update the regulatory framework to deal with the emerging threat of endocrine disrupting compounds found in the Potomac River and its tributaries."

Land use impacts

The State of the Nation's River report also explains that land uses are providing a critical pathway for such chemicals to enter our water supply. Endocrine disrupting compounds are most prevalent in rivers and streams in industrialized, agricultural, and/or urbanized areas, with particularly high concentrations near sewage treatment plants or other sources of wastewater. Virtually every place where water and chemicals combine becomes a potential source of endocrine disrupting compounds entering sources of drinking water.

Recently during work sessions on the Front Royal Limited Partnership rezoning request for the Happy Creek area, the Front Royal Planning Commission was pre-

sented with material indicating that current town zoning codes preventing clustered development in favor of more spread out, one-acre residential lots, conflicts with current planning theories on the protection of ground watersheds from the type of pollution discussed in the new report. According to materials presented to the town planners by FRLP development consultants and land use

professionals, the Environmental Protection Agency has accepted since 2007 that clustering with the preservation of larger swaths of surrounding land is the better developmental strategy to protect ground-watersheds feeding into local streams and ultimately rivers like the Shenandoah and Potomac.

(Partially from a release)

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Correction

In our previous issue we referenced a story from another newspaper that said that Oasis Winery was sold in 2007 and we referred to Oasis co-founder Dirgham Salahi as Tareq Salahi's "late father."

In fact the 2007 purchase did not go through and, as we discovered in a recent visit, Mr. Salahi is very much alive and quite charming.

We apologize to the Salahi family for our error.



Happy 18th birthday to my oldest granddaughter, Felicia Burke!

– Mamaw Lawson

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