

## Potomac River Watershed

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### Potomac River Mainstem, North Branch, South Branch, and Cacapon River

#### Potomac River Mainstem

The Potomac River is formed by the junction of the North and South Branch at Green Springs in Hampshire County, West Virginia.

##### Fast facts:

Drainage area in West Virginia: 3,490 square miles.

River Miles in West Virginia : 115 miles



#### Opequon Creek Watershed

Opequon Creek starts in Virginia and flows north through West Virginia, into the Potomac River. Approximately 56 percent of the watershed is in West Virginia and 44 percent is in Virginia.

##### Fast facts:

Drainage area: 341 square miles.

River Miles: 64 miles

##### Inset graphics or text:

Orchards.

#### South Branch of the Potomac River

The South Branch begins in Highland County, Virginia and flows into West Virginia to its confluence with the North Branch. Some of West Virginia's best agricultural land is within the South Branch basin.

##### Fast facts:

Drainage area: 1,450 square miles.

Length: 120 miles

##### Inset graphics or text:

- ☐ The South Branch is noted for excellent smallmouth bass fishing. Native brook trout are found in many headwaters.
- ☐ The migration observatory at Dolly Sods is one of the longest used bird-banding migration stations in the eastern United States.

**Water Quality Concerns:** Scientists are struggling to determine the cause of intersex fish and periodic fish kills in the South Branch. The fish kills primarily affect adult smallmouth bass, redbreast sunfish, and rock bass. Possible causes include pollution from agriculture and wastewater treatment plants, parasites, and contaminants known as endocrine disrupters. Nutrients from many sources have led to excessive aquatic plant growth in the South Branch during the summertime. This process, known as eutrophication, blocks penetration of sunlight, leads to depletion of oxygen in the water, and as a result, fish kills.

## The Cacapon River Watershed

The Cacapon River begins on West Mountain in Hardy County. The river takes two names: at its source, it is called the Lost River. At mile point 77.3, the Lost River goes underground for two miles and reappears as the Cacapon River.

Cacapon is a native American name meaning *Medicine Waters*.

### Fast facts:

Drainage area: 692 square miles.

Length: 110 miles

### Inset graphics or text:

- ☐ The Cacapon River is a favorite destination for canoeing, fishing, wildlife and outstanding scenery.
- ☐ The Wood Turtle, *Glyptemys insculpta*, has a restricted range and is found along the Cacapon River. When feeding on earthworms, wood turtles employ a unique technique called “worm stomping.” By lifting and dropping its shell on the ground, or by an alternating foot stomp, they create vibrations in the ground. The vibrations produced by the stomping cause earthworms to surface, at which point they are quickly snatched for a meal.
- ☐ Trout Pond is the only natural lake (not impounded by a dam) in West Virginia.

## North Branch of the Potomac River

The North Branch, one of the parent tributaries of the Potomac River, originates on Backbone Mountain near the Fairfax Stone at an elevation of 3,300 feet.

### Fast facts:

Drainage area: 465 square miles.

Length: 100 miles

### Inset graphics or text:

Boating and fishing opportunities are provided by Jennings Randolph Lake in Mineral County and Mount Storm Lake in Grant County. Mount Storm Lake is a cooling water impoundment for the Mount Storm Power Station.

**Water Quality Concerns:** Acid mine drainage mainly from abandoned mine sites is a common form of water pollution in this watershed. The acidic water is rich in heavy metals such as iron and aluminum and is toxic to aquatic life. Acid mine treatment efforts in West Virginia and Maryland have improved water quality.