

POTOMAC RIVER & CHESAPEAKE BAY REPORT CARDS - 2018

(as of 7/13/18)

Summary

Consensus from several recently released “report cards” indicates that water quality in the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay is gradually improving; however, additional pollutant reduction efforts are still needed to continue these improving trends. Recent report cards on the health of the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay show positive trends in the various indicators under the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), a pollution diet established to restore and maintain water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and the tidal waters of its associated tributaries. Data derived from the Chesapeake Bay Program’s (CBP) nontidal and estuary water quality monitoring stations and the Bay Program’s watershed model were used to prepare these 2018 report cards issued by the Potomac Conservancy and University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES).

The **Potomac Conservancy** gave the Potomac River an overall grade of “B”, the highest grade it has awarded in the 10-year history of its report card. The **UMCES** annual report card gave the Chesapeake Bay a grade of “C” (54%) and the Potomac River, an overall grade of C-. The UMCES Potomac grade is based on an overall score of 54 out of 100, which combines individual scores for several factors, including nutrient and sediment levels, measurements of water quality indicators and the abundance of various natural resources. The Potomac Conservancy and UMCES reports use different indicators and methods to assess and evaluate conditions.

The **Chesapeake Bay Foundation** (CBF) issues report cards every two years. The most recent report in 2016 gave the Bay an overall score of 34 out of 100, which is the highest score in the 18-year history of that report card. CBF’s score is based on a similar mix of indicators to those used by UMCES. An updated report will be released next year.

The report cards all cite major investments in nutrient pollution controls by local wastewater treatment plants as a key reason for the improvements. However, dedicated efforts to reduce pollution in other sectors through best management practices (BMPs) and a decrease in the atmospheric deposition of nutrients also played a factor. It is important to note that despite these positive scores, the Potomac River and the Bay have not fully recovered from the poor conditions of previous decades and further reduction efforts are necessary to achieve the goals of the Bay TMDL.

COG Staff Analysis

Although these reports are based on water quality monitoring data and other available data about the watershed, the various scores and grades represent different interpretations of that data and differing viewpoints about the importance of the various indicators. COG staff recently held a Water Resources Technical Committee Workshop: [Integrating Monitoring and Modeling Data for WIP Development](#) that examined recent data and trends in the Potomac Estuary. In future updates to COG’s Potomac Water Quality Fact Sheet, staff plans to document this data in further detail.

Additional Resources

- University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science Report Card: <https://ecoreportcard.org/report-cards/chesapeake-bay/health/>
- Potomac Conservancy Report Card: <http://www.potomacreportcard.org/>
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation State of the Bay Report: <http://www.cbf.org/about-the-bay/state-of-the-bay-report/>

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