

South Branch of the Potomac River Update

Recent reports of dead and dying fish in the South Branch of the Potomac River are being investigated, according to state environmental and natural resources officials. The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection and the Division of Natural Resources have been concerned about fish health in the South Branch of the Potomac River watershed since a 2002 fish kill.

According to Bret Preston, assistant chief of the DNR Wildlife Resources Section, the recent kill is comprised mostly of northern hogsuckers and golden redhorse suckers. Other species reported include fallfish and sunfish. Dead fish have been reported from the North Fork of the South Branch and the South Branch of the Potomac River at a number of locations, including the Smoke Hole section of the river. DNR and DEP staff are collecting fish and water quality samples coinciding with this recent kill, and have been collecting these data as part of an ongoing fish health assessment in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey Leetown Fish Health Center and Water Science Center, U.S. EPA, and the West Virginia Department of Agriculture.

A substantial fish kill in the Shenandoah River and its tributaries in Virginia is being investigated by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. The Shenandoah has experienced recurring fish kills similar to those on the South Branch during the past few years. Both states are actively cooperating and conducting research.

Anglers and other river users are encouraged to report sightings of distressed or dead fish to the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection's Spill Hotline at (800) 642-3074 or they can complete an online reporting form at www.potomacwaterwatch.org).

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