Regional Water Utility Leaders Launch Landmark Study to Strengthen Water Supply for the National Capital Region

*$25 Million **Secure the Source** Study to Focus on Large-Scale Solutions - Providing Several Weeks of Emergency Backup Drinking Water Supply for Regional Customers Served by the Potomac River*

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Laurel, Md. – June 9, 2026 – Regional water utility leaders from WSSC Water, Fairfax Water, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and government leaders today announced the launch of a $25 million regional study to evaluate potential secondary water supply alternatives for the Potomac River. The study, branded *Secure the Source*, will focus on large-scale solutions for the region – providing several weeks of emergency backup water supply for the more than 5 million Washington metropolitan regional customers in Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. who rely on the Potomac River for their drinking water.

This initiative began with the recent approval by the Assistant Secretary of the Army - Civil Works for regional water utility leaders to start this landmark study, which will include 35 percent design with associated environmental impact assessments. The next step is standing up a diverse group of stakeholders across the entire region to work in partnership to ensure the successful completion of the study.

SECURE THE SOURCE STUDY AT A GLANCE

- **$25 million regional two-year study.**
- **Historic regional effort** to secure the region's drinking water future – thereby safeguarding public health and economic vitality.
- **Goal:** Provide several weeks of backup drinking water storage capacity for more than 5 million people who rely on the Potomac River for drinking water.

“The Potomac River has served this region exceptionally well for generations," said WSSC Water General Manager & CEO Kishia L. Powell. "However, planning for the future means recognizing that a single source of supply, no matter how reliable, carries inherent risks. This study will help identify a large-scale solution that strengthens the region’s resilience and ensures uninterrupted water service during an emergency."

To be conducted in partnership with regional water providers, state and local governments, federal agencies and other stakeholders, the *Secure the Source* study will identify a backup water supply to mitigate against extended disruptions to the Potomac River water supply. It will evaluate the pre-screened large-scale regional alternatives developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Baltimore District including:

- No action
- Travilah Quarry (MD)
- Blue Plains Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant - Advanced Water Reuse (D.C.)
- Luck Stone Quarries B&C (VA)

“The Secure the Source study represents a critical, collaborative step toward protecting more than 5 million people who depend on this shared resource,” said Jamie Hedges, General Manager/CEO of Fairfax Water. “By working together now, we can strengthen our regional resilience and ensure that safe, dependable drinking water is always there when our customers need it most.”

“Ensuring a safe, reliable, and uninterrupted water supply to the National Capital Region is the core of the Washington Aqueduct's mission,” said Rudy Chow, General Manager of the Washington Aqueduct. “While our current systems are resilient, a secondary water source is an urgent necessity to provide the critical operational redundancy required to safeguard our nation's capital against future disruptions. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, is pleased to provide technical assistance to this regional effort as our utility partners spearhead vital long-term water security solutions.”

“This effort is exactly the kind of decisive action that Maryland and the nation’s capital region needs to secure its water supply at a time of growing stresses and threats,” said Serena McIlwain, Secretary of the Maryland Department of the Environment. “A sustainable, reliable water supply is essential to sustain life and grow our economy, and this feasibility study is a pivotal step to secure that water supply for generations to come.”

“Water is the foundation of public health, economic vitality and national security," said Michael Nardolilli, Executive Director of the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB). "This study is about ensuring that future generations inherit a water system that is resilient, reliable and prepared for the challenges ahead."

MAJOR REGIONAL WATER SUPPLIERS
RELYING ON THE POTOMAC RIVER

1. WSSC Water
2. Washington Aqueduct
3. Fairfax Water

More than 5 million residents, visitors, businesses, federal agencies, military installations and institutions throughout the Washington metropolitan region depend on uninterrupted access to safe drinking water from the Potomac River. Utility leaders are expediting the pursuit of a large-scale solution that will provide several weeks of backup drinking water storage capacity for the entire metro region.

“This effort reflects what our region does best - working together across jurisdictions and utilities to plan for our shared future,” said Clark Mercer, Executive Director of COG. “Building on proven regional investments like Jennings Randolph Reservoir and Blue Plains, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to strengthen our water supply and support the region for decades to come.”

The effort builds upon decades of regional collaboration and prior investments designed to enhance drought resilience and water supply reliability. The study's findings will provide decision-makers with the technical, environmental and engineering information needed to determine the most viable path forward for long-term water security.

"Good governance means planning ahead and preparing for challenges before they become crises,” said Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich. “More than five million residents depend on the water supply from the Potomac River every day. This study is an important step toward ensuring that we have the infrastructure and resiliency needed to protect public health and maintain critical services during emergencies. I appreciate the leadership of WSSC Water, Fairfax Water, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and our regional partners for working together on this critical issue.”

While decades of planning and investment have strengthened the region's water infrastructure, evolving challenges - including any major contamination event, deliberate attack by a bad actor, climate variability such as, prolonged drought, infrastructure failure, natural disaster and other emerging risks - require a renewed commitment to long-term water security.

“Past investments have strengthened our water future, but today’s planning alone can’t meet tomorrow’s challenges,” said Prince George’s County Executive Aisha N. Braveboy. “Completing this study is essential to identify the infrastructure needed to protect Prince George’s County and the region for decades to come.”

The Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) estimates that a prolonged disruption (one month) to the Capital Region's water source could result in a loss of up to $15 billion in gross regional product and hundreds of millions in tax loss.

The National Capital Region is home to the nation's capital, major military installations, federal agencies, international organizations and one of the country's most dynamic economic centers. Regional leaders emphasized that maintaining reliable access to drinking water is essential not only to residents and businesses, but also to the continuity of critical government and military operations.

Upon completion in two years, the study is expected to position the region to pursue future federal, state and local investments necessary to design and construct the recommended alternative. Such a large-scale effort to provide regional water security comes with a large investment price tag and the region will need to work together to secure funding to complete the construction of the selected alternative.

Current U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Study
The region previously pursued and received congressional authorization and funding of a study to analyze options for a secondary source of drinking water. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) lead this effort. However, USACE is now following a framework under which their studies must be completed within 3 years and cost $3 million or less. Because of this, the scope of the study was reduced to assessing upgrades at the Dalecarlia Reservoir that would provide up to an additional approximately 12 hours of water reserve for the Washington Aqueduct exclusively. While this will provide some increased resilience, regional water utilities recognize the need to pursue larger-scale regional solutions that will provide several weeks of storage capacity, ensuring customers throughout the region have access to clean, safe drinking water during time of crisis and putting our region on par with the drinking water resilience of other major metropolitan areas in the U.S.

About WSSC Water:
Established in 1918, WSSC Water is the largest utility in Maryland and the eighth largest water and wastewater utility in the nation. We provide safe, reliable drinking water and wastewater services to 1.9 million residents in Prince George's and Montgomery counties through approximately 475,000 customer accounts across a nearly 1,000-square-mile service area. WSSC Water operates and maintains more than 11,000 miles of drinking water and sewer mains. In more than a century of service, WSSC Water has never had a drinking water quality violation.

As a not-for-profit public utility, WSSC Water is focused on serving customers, not shareholders. Every dollar collected is reinvested directly into infrastructure, technology and our workforce to strengthen reliability, improve service and protect public health for generations to come.

About Fairfax Water:
Chartered in 1957 by the Virginia State Corporation Commission as a public, not-for-profit water utility, Fairfax Water is governed by a 10-member Board of Directors composed of Fairfax County

citizens and appointed by the elected Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. A General Manager, supported by a staff of over 514 water professionals, manages the day-to-day operations of Fairfax Water. Fairfax Water is Virginia's largest water utility and one of the 25 largest water utilities in the country, serving one out of every four Virginians who obtain their water from public utilities. Over 2.2 million people in the Northern Virginia communities of Fairfax County, Loudoun County, Prince William County, Herndon, Vienna, Alexandria, Falls Church, Fairfax City, Fort Belvoir, and Dulles International Airport depend on Fairfax Water for reliable drinking water.

Fairfax Water draws raw water from two primary sources: the Potomac River and the Occoquan Reservoir, which is fed by the Occoquan River, a tributary of the Potomac. Fairfax Water owns and operates two of the largest water treatment facilities in Virginia, with an average daily water production of 170 million gallons and a combined maximum production capacity of 345 million gallons per day.

About the Washington Aqueduct:
The Washington Aqueduct, a division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, is a federally owned and operated public water supply agency that has served the National Capital Region since 1859. Operating two D.C.-based water treatment plants, the Aqueduct produces an average of 135 million gallons of safe drinking water daily for approximately one million regional users. The agency fulfills this mission by providing a dependable supply to its three wholesale customers: DC Water, Arlington County, and Fairfax Water. Grounded in a rich engineering heritage, this vital federal asset integrates a unified security posture with modern processes to ensure national security and long-term regional water resilience.

About ICPRB:
The mission of ICPRB is to protect and enhance the waters and related resources of the Potomac River basin through science, regional cooperation, and education. Through regional cooperation and partnerships, ICPRB is protecting the river and improving the quality of life in the watershed.

ICPRB is tasked with monitoring the level of the river as well as coordinating releases from upstream drinking water reservoirs to supplement the flow.

About COG:
Founded in 1957, COG is a nonprofit association, with a membership of 300 elected officials from 24 local governments, the Maryland and Virginia state legislatures, and U.S. Congress. Every month, more than 1,500 officials and experts connect through COG to develop solutions to the region's major challenges and plan for the future. The Board of Directors is COG's governing body and is responsible for its overall policies. In addition, a wide network of city and county managers, police and fire chiefs, housing and planning directors, environmental officials, chief equity officers, public health officials, transportation planners, and more, coordinate through COG's committees, partnerships, and working groups.

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