



# County of Fairfax, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 6, 2023

TO: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Larry Zaragoza, DEnv, Chair *Larry Zaragoza*  
Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC)

SUBJECT: Initial Steps for Addressing Regional Drinking Water Supply Vulnerability

### BACKGROUND

The Potomac River supplies 78% of the drinking water in the region. While the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) and Fairfax Water have alternative sources, the Potomac provides 100% of drinking water to the District of Columbia and Arlington County (via the Washington Aqueduct) The District of Columbia and Arlington County do not have any off-Potomac reservoir storage.

At present there are upstream reservoirs which release stored water during droughts to increase the Potomac River flow. The water utilities share the costs of upstream reservoirs. The three largest suppliers, the Washington Aqueduct, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) and Fairfax Water, participate in the cooperative system which manages the Potomac allocations during low flow periods. There are water utilities that withdraw upstream of the three major utilities and are not part of the cooperative system. We need to note that as demand and withdrawals from other utilities increase, it may require a new shared multi-purpose infrastructure including complex new agreements amongst the water suppliers.

The regional water supply faces two significant risks:

- severe drought due to climate change
- major spill contamination

If the Potomac River drinking water withdrawals were restricted it is important to note that Arlington and the District of Columbia have a one day supply available, Fairfax County and the WSSC have a four-to-five-day supply available. It is imperative that we begin to address this local, regional and national drinking water supply vulnerability.

We ask the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors to:

1. Support Senate Bill 2443 and ask the Virginia Delegation to support this bill, which is pending in the US Senate. The Report<sup>1</sup> (S. Rep. 118-72) contains the language that would appropriate \$500,000 for the study of a back-up water supply for the District of Columbia area. It was a Congressionally Directed Spending request by Virginia Senators Kaine & Warner and Maryland Senators Van Hollen and Cardin that made it into the Appropriations Committee bill. See page 180 of the Report.
2. Recognize that this is a first step in addressing this issue and be aware that further action will be required.
3. Share with the citizens of Fairfax County the message to *Use Water Wisely*.

cc: Rachel Flynn, Deputy County Executive  
John Morrill, Acting Director, Office of Environmental and Energy Coordination  
Christopher Herrington, Director, Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES)  
Tracy Strunk, Director, Department of Planning and Development (DPD)  
Bill Hicks, Director, Land Development Services (LDS)  
Matthew Hansen, Director, Site Development and Inspections Division, LDS  
EQAC

---

<sup>1</sup> (<https://www.congress.gov/118/crpt/srpt72/CRPT-118srpt72.pdf>)