



The Shenandoah and the Potomac Rivers meet at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia.

ISTOCK

Every Person, Every Tributary

By Robert N. Whitescarver

Harper's Ferry, West Virginia: There is a lot of history here—and a lot of water. I can't drive through the town on U.S. Route 340 without stopping to walk across the pedestrian bridge spanning the Potomac River there. It's a religious kind of thing for me, walking across the nation's river, hearing and feeling the energy from the rolling water.

I look downstream at the hole this great river carved through the Blue Ridge Mountains. It's an awesome sight. Thomas Jefferson wrote, "The passage of the Potomac through the Blue Ridge is perhaps one of the most stupendous scenes in nature."

The river water below me came from rain-water that flowed across or through six million acres of land. The land and the soil within are the regulators of the entire hydrologic cycle. Land, with robust healthy soil, produces clean water. Just downstream to the right, the water from another two million acres joins the Potomac; it's the Shenandoah River. The farm I live on with my wife Jeanne, our dog Dexter, and a commercial herd of beef cattle is part of the beginning of that river 135 miles upstream.

I have a picture of Harpers Ferry in my office in Swoope, Virginia. It was taken from Maryland Heights, and it shows the two rivers coming together. I like to show it to people and tell them that the water flowing across and through our farm empties into the South Fork of the Shenandoah River. I tell them, "The Chesapeake Bay begins here, in Swoope, Virginia." The restoration of the river and the Bay begins with what we do on our farm.

We are on an ambitious path to clean up our streams. It's called the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint.

The Bay starts in tens of thousands places just like ours throughout the 64,000-square-mile watershed. Every person and every tributary make a difference, and every person and every tributary will have to participate in order to achieve a restored Bay.

All of the tributaries joining together to form the Potomac River overcame the physical barrier of the Blue Ridge Mountains. All of us, joining together, can overcome the social barriers preventing a restored Bay—apathy and ignorance.

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Clean Water Blueprint. It's working. We've reduced nitrogen and phosphorus pollution levels by half since the 1980s; despite the fact that the population in the Bay watershed increased thirty percent.

In fact, according to CBF's recent report, *The Economic Benefits of Cleaning Up the Chesapeake*, a restored Bay will generate \$130 billion for our economy annually—\$22 billion more per year than not achieving a restored Bay. This is incredible.

Quite simply, there are no downsides to a restored Bay.

As I stand here on the bridge over the Potomac looking downstream, I see the sediment-laden waters of the Shenandoah joining the nation's river. When I see brown water, I lament that so much more needs to be done.

Someone upstream didn't understand, or didn't care, that what they do on their land profoundly affects what's in the water and everyone downstream. It's going to take all of us to reach every person, every tributary.✈

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