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A reporter for The Evening Star, Charles Pierce, straddles the Potomac River near its spring

source marked by the large stone with the plaque in the foreground.

## POTOMAC REPORT

# City's Water Future Is Uncertain

By CHARLES D. PIERCE  
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**BLACKWATER FALLS STATE PARK, W. Va., Oct. 1.**—Near here is something Washington's Virginia-bound commuters have long been looking for—a spot where the Potomac River can be crossed in one quick step.

The Potomac, world famous as a symbol for Washington, begins 10 miles from here as a tiny spring in the lonely splendor of West Virginia's Allegheny mountains.

The Fairfax Stone, a boundary marker, pinpoints the source of the Potomac in an isolated clearing surrounded by maple trees now dressed in the red and gold foliage of fall.

### Narrow at Source

The spring sends a rivulet of water along a bed lined with the white and lavender blooms of wild asters. Some 15 yards away this infant Potomac disappears under a dense stand of arching trees to begin its approximately 300-mile course to Chesapeake Bay.

At the headwaters a man can easily straddle the stream which later becomes the broad river flowing past the Nation's Capital.

Accessible only over a dirt road that winds past the scars of abandoned coal strip mines slowly being healed by the growth of new timber, the spring is on the northwest edge of the Potomac Basin.

The 14,670-square mile basin collects the rain drainage from portions of four States—Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia and Pennsylvania—and the District of Columbia and funnels it into the Potomac.

### Court Settled Dispute

On the other side of the basin edge, rain water descends to become part of the Ohio River system.

At its source on a ridge near Backbone Mountain, the river is known as the North Branch of the Potomac.

For many years there was a bitter boundary dispute between Maryland and West Virginia involving the question of whether the North Branch or the South Branch of the Potomac should be considered as the river's source.

This protracted controversy was finally settled when

the U. S. Supreme Court decided in 1910 that the Fairfax Stone stood at "the first fountain of the Potomac."

The North Branch of the Potomac flows northeast from its source to Cumberland, Md., and then joins with the South Branch near Green Spring, W. Va., to form the main body of the river.

From there it runs northeastward to Hancock, Md., and then southeastward to Washington.

### Flow is Irregular

The second largest river in the Eastern United States, the Potomac has an average annual flow of 2,600 billion gallons of water, with the average daily flow of the river at Washington more than seven billion gallons.

If this flow were uniform, the Washington area would never have to worry about its future water supply.

However, the volume of water in the river fluctuates tremendously from year to year and season to season.

A record low flow of 594 million gallons a day was recorded in 1930, but in the flood of 1936 a total of 275 billion gallons swept by Washington in a single day.

Few of the swarms of commuters who cross the Potomac daily realize its tremendous importance to the Nation's Capital. Throughout history great cities have faded or bloomed depending on their water supplies.

### Future Uncertain

The Potomac not only provides a source of drinking water but also carries away Washington's wastes and provides boating recreation for thousands.

Studies by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers have shown that within the next 10 years the Potomac may not be able to meet all needs adequately because of the population boom in the Washington area.

The engineers contend that the answer to this problem is to regulate the river by dams. Opponents of dams argue that future water needs can be met by using new methods to remove all pollution from the Potomac.

The people of the Potomac Basin will have an opportunity to decide which approach they favor when the Army Engineers publish their detailed recommendations and report on the Potomac later this year.