

Potomac Interceptor Response Update

Community Meeting
May 18, 2026



Maryland
Department of
the Environment



Incident Response and Cleanup Roles



DC Water: Operates and maintains Interceptor, emergency operations, physical repairs, and cleanup.



EPA: Primary oversight/regulator of DC Water, even for assets in MD. Issues permits for Interceptor and Blue Plains treatment plant. Lead federal response coordinator.

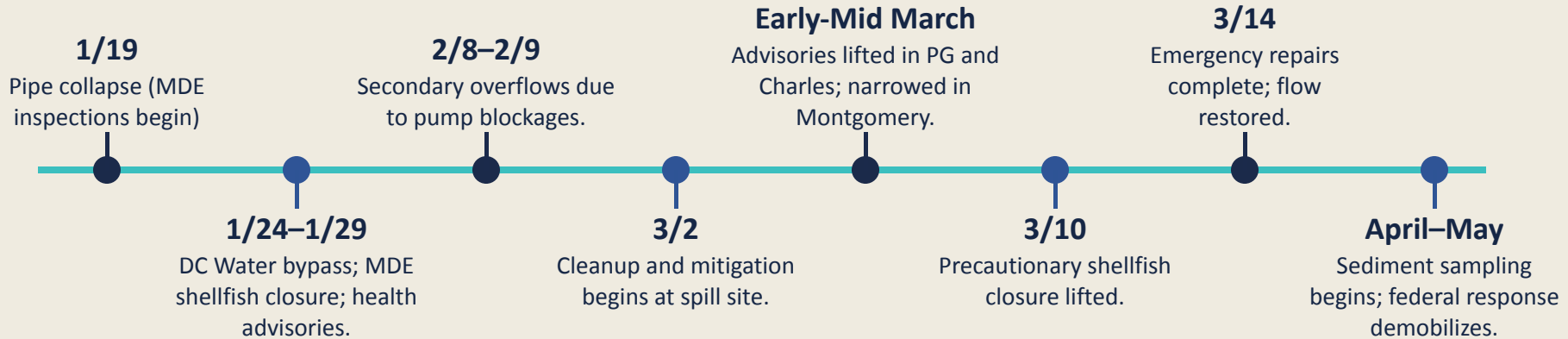


MDE: Lead regulator overseeing impacts to state waters, water quality monitoring, legal enforcement, as well as shellfish area impacts.



MDH & Regional Partners: State and County health departments coordinating local public health determinations and recreational contact advisories.

Timeline of Events



NOTE: Permanent repairs to the impacted pipe section are expected to take through 2026.



Incident Impacts

Status	Category	Impact
●	Drinking Water	Water utilities confirmed no contamination of treated supplies.
●	Shellfish Harvesting	Precautionary closure issued Jan 24; lifted Mar 10. Regular MDE shellfish monitoring continues.
● ●	Recreational Advisories	Water contact advisories in DC, Prince George's County, Charles County lifted by Mar 14. Montgomery County maintains a narrow advisory in area closest to spill location.
●	Water Testing	Daily and weekly E. coli sampling ongoing; results measured against established health standards. Levels generally returned to below standards by late February. Spikes after precipitation events occur in some locations, which is expected.
● ●	Sediment Testing	Largely positive results but elevated bacteria markers identified at one location (Minnie's Island, just below spill site) in mid-April sampling. Additional investigation needed. Note: there are no health-based standards for bacteria in sediment.
●	Aquatic Life & Other Organisms	No observed impacts to wildlife or aquatic organisms at time of spill. Working with DNR and university partners to monitor for early algal blooms, which could impact aquatic life. MDE is requiring DC Water to evaluate long-term impacts.



Resolved / No Impact



Monitoring Ongoing



Gap / Action Required



Key Maryland Oversight Actions

- Daily inspections, corrective measures, and close coordination with federal, state, local, and regional partners.
- Federal economic disaster declaration requested by Governor Wes Moore for the Maryland oyster fishery from the U.S. Department of Commerce.
- Issued an oversight letter to DC Water requiring a comprehensive remediation plan with public input.
- Received DC Water's draft restoration plan, which is under review and open for public comment.
- Referred the incident to the Maryland Office of the Attorney General.
- Filed a complaint in state court over unpermitted contaminant discharges into Maryland waters.



Sediment Monitoring Locations



Water Quality at Sediment Sampling Locations

E. coli (MPN/100 mL) — April 2 & 14, 2026

	Above Wash. Aqueduct	Old Angler's Inn	Carderock Area	Lock 10 (Cabin John)	Minnie Is. Channel	Minnie Is. Canoe Ldg.	Pier, West Sycamore	Sycamore Island	Little Falls Area	Lock 6, Kayak Input	Lock 6, Kayak T/O
Apr 2, 2026	7	6	—	3	—	—	—	12	10	13	10
Apr 14, 2026	21	14	10	6	26	27	12	35	21	9	8
May 14, 2026	36	55	20	47	44	24	219	214	435	82	44

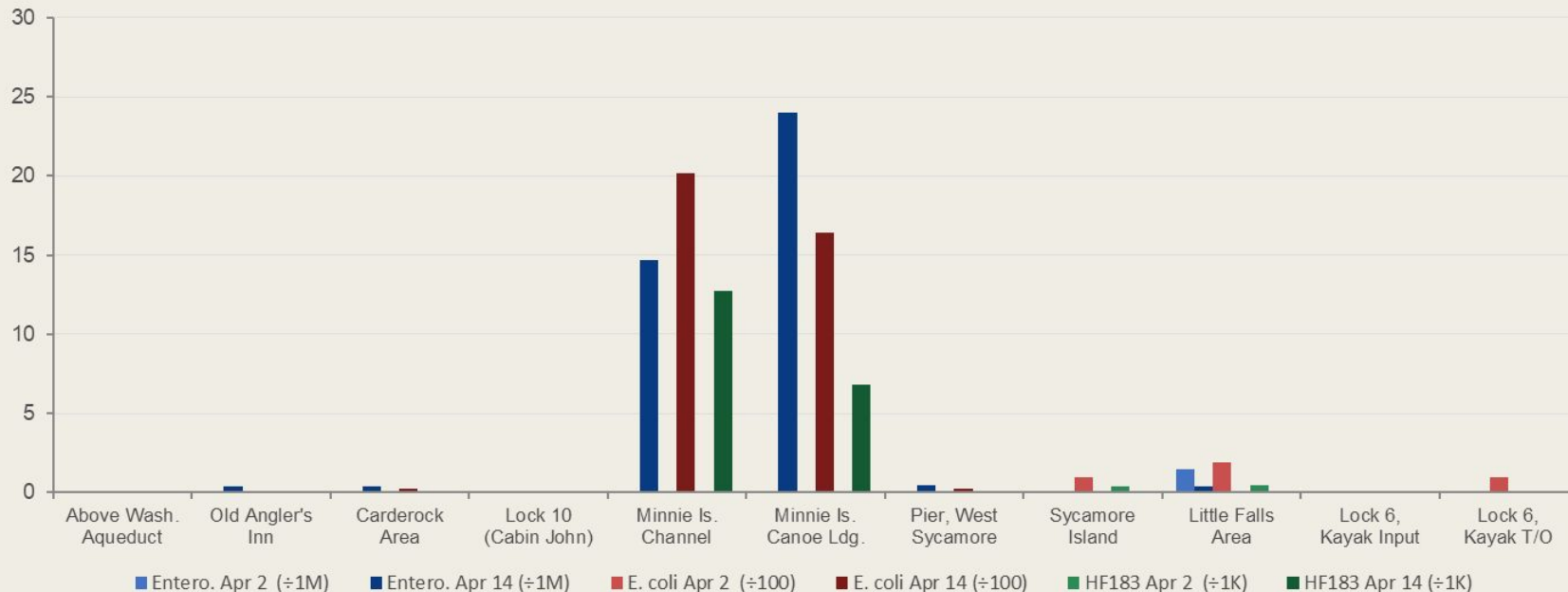
EPA recreational water contact criterion: 410 MPN/100 mL (E. coli, geometric mean)

✓ **Key Takeaway:** Most water *E. coli* results at sediment sampling locations were well below the 410 MPN/100 mL EPA recreational contact criterion on both April 2 and April 14. Water quality data does not indicate a public health risk from water contact at these locations.



Sediment Sampling Results (April 2 & 14)

All Three Pathogens — Normalized Scale (see note below)



Note: Each pathogen is normalized to a round scale so all three are visible on the same axis. Enterococcus values ÷ 1,000,000 | E. coli values ÷ 100 | HF183 values ÷ 1,000. All bars show relative concentration — site-to-site trends are directly comparable across pathogens. Zero = below detection (BD) or below quantification limit (BQL).



Understanding Sediment Data: Key Limitations



- No health-based standards
- Very different exposure pathways
- No standardized test methods
- DNA detects both live and dead organisms

Bottom line: Sediment data provides useful signals for investigation but cannot by itself determine public health risk or confirm contamination source.



What the Data Tells Us, and More Sampling

What the Data Shows

Water quality: E. coli levels have mostly met safe recreation standards since March 17, with brief spikes after rain.

Sediment: Human-source bacteria were mostly not detected, but higher levels were found at Minnie's Island on April 14, along with increases in other bacteria.

What We Don't Know

More Data: Data shows more testing is needed. MDE collected new samples on May 14.

Trends: Checking if the levels are staying the same or changing over time.

Source Check: MDE is looking into whether the results are spill-related or unique to Minnie's Island and other areas like it.

Upcoming

Review Results: Analyze May 14 sediment samples and compare them to April results.

Ongoing monitoring: Continue checking E. coli levels in the water through the summer.

Further investigation: Keep sampling to identify trends and incorporate guidance from public health experts.





Summary

- Finalize DC Water remediation plan with public input and MDE oversight.
- Ongoing water and sediment monitoring to ensure public safety.
- Evaluation of short- and long-term impacts to designated uses in the Potomac.
- Comprehensive restoration of impacted areas, where intervention is appropriate.
- Ensure accountability for violations.
- Require complete rehabilitation of the Interceptor to prevent future events.



Transparency & Public Engagement

Open Data

Regular updates and publicly accessible monitoring data and remediation plans at mde.maryland.gov and dcwater.com.

Community Engagement

Engaging regularly with elected officials, community organizations, and impacted river-users, and incorporating local knowledge and concerns into response efforts. MDE will host monthly town halls through summer.



Share your feedback with MDE

Ask questions and share input on ongoing potomac.interceptor@maryland.gov



PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE

HEALTH GUIDANCE **FOR AREAS AFFECTED BY THE POTOMAC INTERCEPTOR COLLAPSE**



DHHS
MONTGOMERY COUNTY



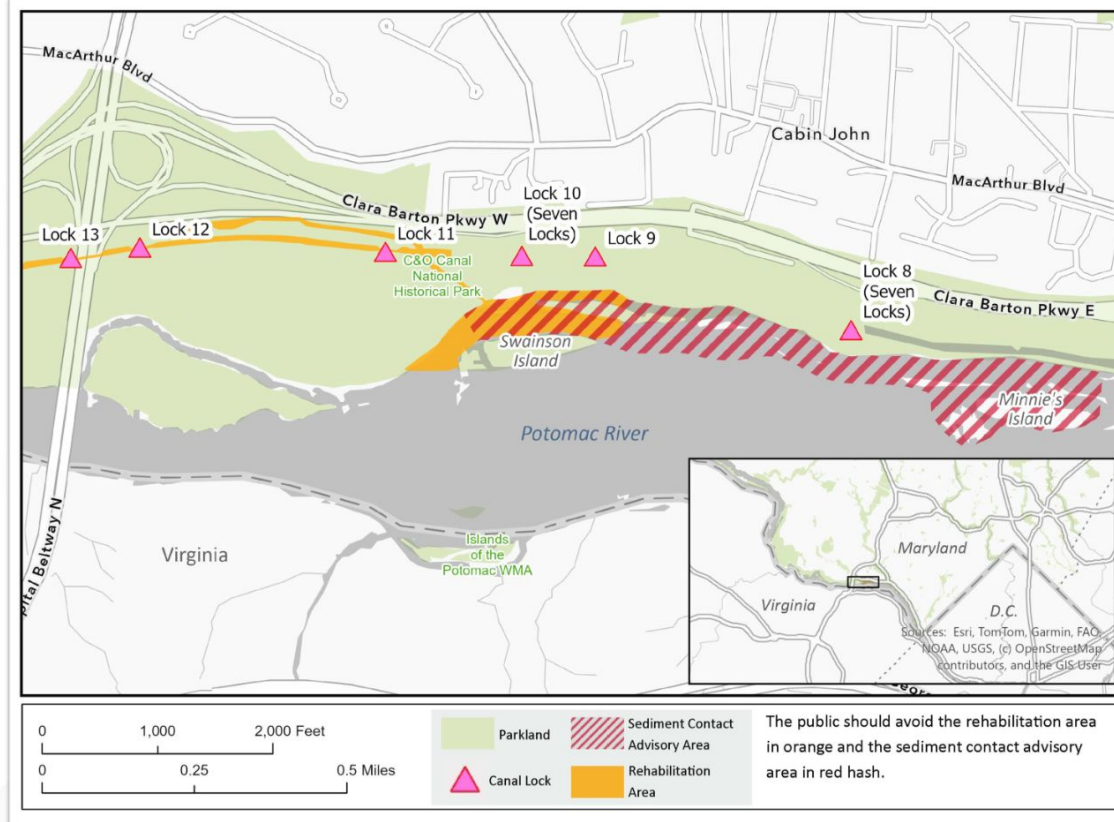
County Health Officer
Dr. Kisha Davis

Updated Health Advisory

- **Advisory for the water lifted:** Monitoring shows bacterial levels are routinely back within EPA safety limits.
- **Advisory remains for shoreline sediment:** Avoid the shoreline and sediment between Lock 11 through the shoreline surrounding Minnie's Island. Keep children and pets away from these areas.



Advisory Area Guidance



DHHS
MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Advisory Area Guidance

If Sediment Exposure occurs:

- **Practice Immediate Hygiene:** Wash skin and hands with soap and clean water after any contact.
- **Clean Pets:** Thoroughly rinse paws and fur if a pet touches the water.
- **Seek Care:** Consult a doctor or veterinarian if symptoms like vomiting, rashes, or irritation occur.
- **Disinfect clothing or routinely handled items that come in contact with sediment in the areas of the current Health Advisory.**



General Health Guidance

- **Awareness of Bacteria Levels in the Potomac:** Natural bodies of water contain varying levels of harmful bacteria.
- **Rainfall Warning:** Bacteria levels often surge for 48–72 hours after significant rainfall. Use additional caution during these windows.
- **Prevent Ingestion:** Everyone should try to avoid ingesting any water from the Potomac River. Additional caution should be used for pets, children, and those with underlying health conditions.
- **Protect Wounds:** Open sores or cuts are more likely to develop infections when exposed to bacteria in water or sediment.



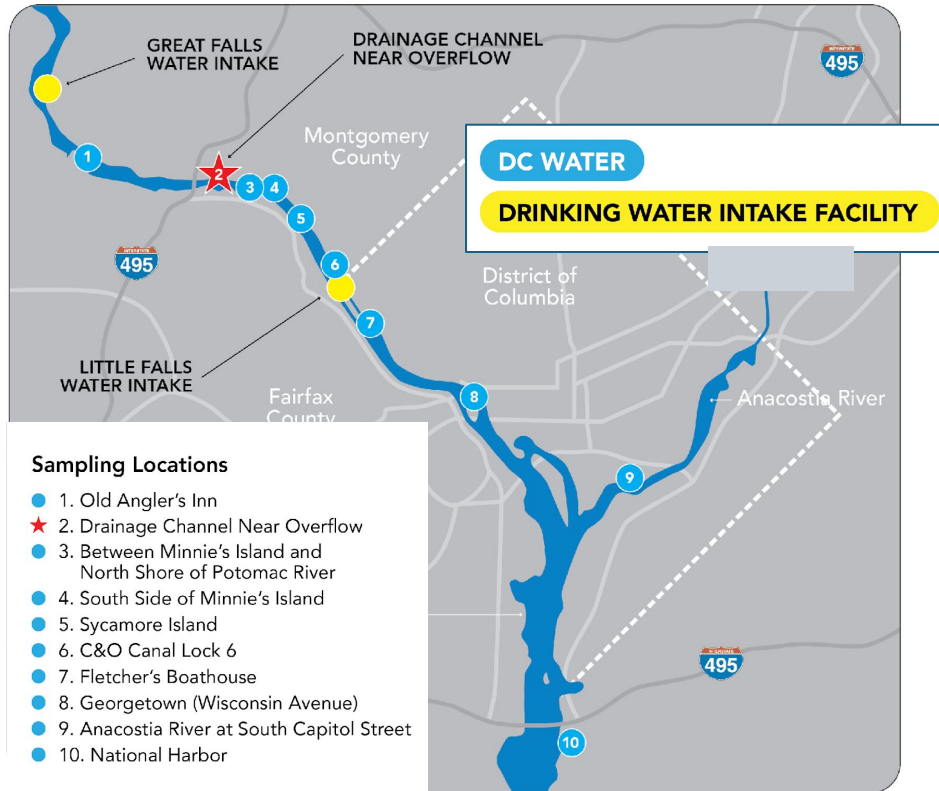
POTOMAC RIVER



Briefing on the Potomac Interceptor

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY

Potomac River Bacteria Sampling



-Daily Sampling at 10 Locations testing water for E. coli

-E. Coli is typically used as a microbial water quality indicator as it indicates fecal contamination

-Sampling start dates

- Locations 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10 on January 29
- Minnie Island Locations (3, 4) on February 18
- Sycamore Island (5) and Lock 6 (6) on March 4

-Results posted at DC Water's and DOEE's websites



Potomac River Bacteria Sampling

Sample Date	E. Coli (MPN/100 ml)									
	Old Anglers Inn	Near Drainage Channel @ Overflow (Swainson Island)	Between Minnie's Island and north shore of Potomac River	South Side of Minnie's Island	Sycamore Island	Lock 6	Fletcher's Boathouse	Georgetown @ Wisconsin Ave	Anacostia @ S. Cap St	National Harbor
4/17/2026	13	29	12	6	33	3	150	228	101	17
4/18/2026	9	91	40	9	24	9	20	110	64	6
4/19/2026	8	27	10	9	40	51	12	88	17	15
4/20/2026	10	40	30	28	17	14	13	126	10	11
4/21/2026	1	4	28	6	11	11	42	36	96	16
4/22/2026	5	16	28	4	10	3	10	105	63	10
4/23/2026	5	21	41	8	13	6	13	62	37	18
4/24/2026	6	8	34	32	10	9	46	34	46	9
4/25/2026	4	17	17	11	10	6	291	14	299	32
4/26/2026	21	20	25	8	11	41	488	39	276	40
4/27/2026	12	11	11	5	14	15	84	96	11	6
4/28/2026	9	30	38	36	16	10	167	124	101	7
4/29/2026	10	20	23	2	29	16	214	63	113	20
4/30/2026	36	137	236	411	133	66	261	548	152	39
5/1/2026	17	28	16	12	67	54	206	214	210	49
5/2/2026	92	73	33	10	30	8	89	175	76	53
5/3/2026	18	26	56	11	12	10	34	155	365	54
5/4/2026	8	23	6	4	12	9	56	67	172	16
5/5/2026	9	16	19	67	14	11	190	205	345	39
5/6/2026	6	1,550	770	7	6	17	17	32	108	10
5/7/2026	8	43	8	6	68	26	88	40	461	22
5/8/2026	8	32	34	6	20	9	143	72	206	14
5/9/2026	28	18	10	5	75	40	1550	61	38	15
5/10/2026	6	18	10	1	12	6	308	365	93	75

Sample Date	Sample Time	E. Coli (MPN/100 ml)					Three Sisters
		Between Minnie's Island and north shore of Potomac River	Sycamore Island	Lock 6 @ Feeder Channel	Fletcher's Boathouse		
4/11/2026	8-10am	15	10	30	65	Not sampled	
	10am-12pm	46	22	68	25	Not sampled	
	12pm-2pm	32	45	42	12	2	
	2pm-4pm	8	55	33	8	Not sampled	
	4pm-6pm	36	18	16	45	Not sampled	
4/18/2026	8-10am	37	33	10	15	Not sampled	
	10am-12pm	32	28	11	20	Not sampled	
	12pm-2pm	14	44	5	20	Not sampled	
	2pm-4pm	16	36	9	50	12	
	4pm-6pm	20	38	6	64	Not sampled	
4/25/2026	8-10am	30	36	6	185	Not sampled	
	10am-12pm	22	9	5	32	1	
	12pm-2pm	10	6	1	15	Not sampled	
	2pm-4pm	5	5	1	26	Not sampled	
	4pm-6pm	8	5	1	5	Not sampled	

In response to public inquiries, DC Water completed Saturday interval sampling in certain high-use areas.

*Consistent with public health and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards, swimming is not recommended when *E. coli* levels exceed 410 MPN/100 mL.

Return of the River

DC Water submitted an updated PI Repair and Rehabilitation Plan to MDE on April 29, 2026. Key takeaways:

- Daily water quality sampling results at 10 sites plus intensive weekend sampling at high public use areas confirm bacteria levels consistently within the typical range for recreational use
- Nutrient load analysis conducted by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) determined that the nutrient load resulting from the overflow accounted for less than 0.5% of the annual nutrient input to the Potomac River
- The Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) reported the affected flow – given the Potomac’s natural flushing capacity - is no longer present in the river
- In coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Park Service, the initial clean-up and reseeded have been completed in the areas directly impacted by the overflow, along the drainage channel, culvert, and tributary to the river

*Plan is available for review at DC Water’s webpage

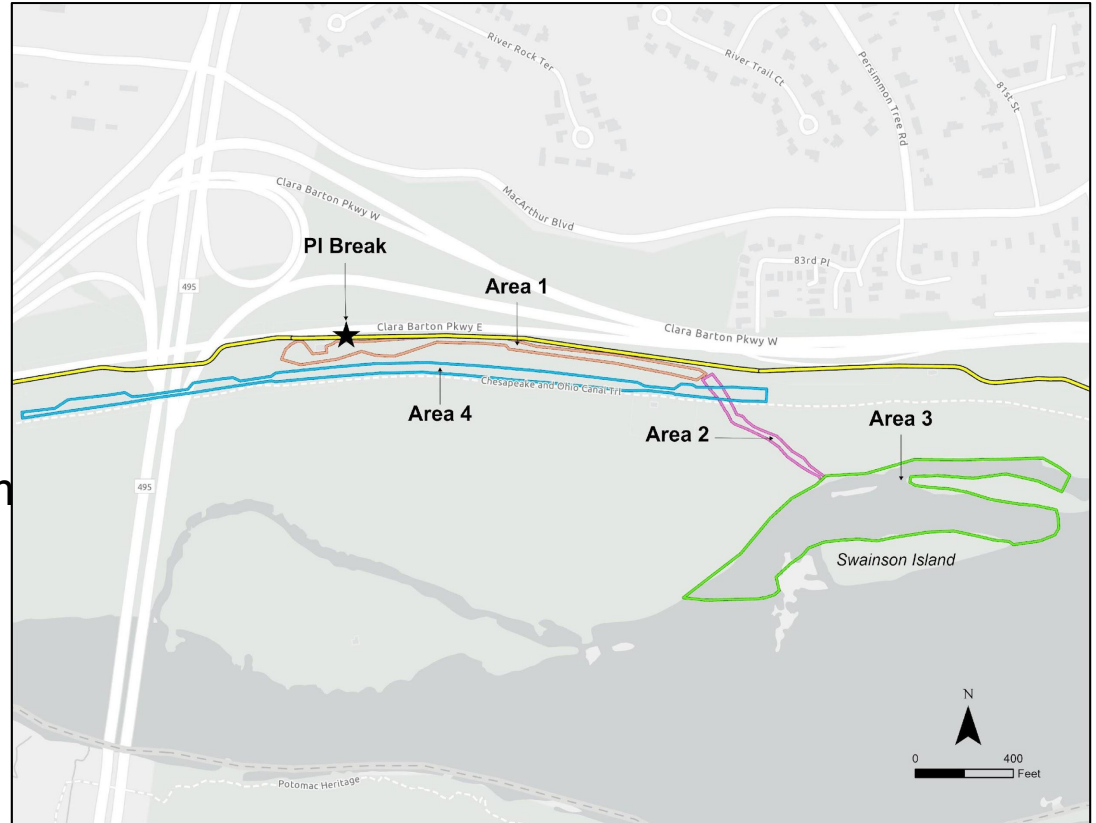
Clean-Up Areas

Uncontrolled Overflow Areas

- Area 1 = Drainage channel along Clara Barton Parkway
- Area 2 = Culvert under C&O Canal and tributary to the Potomac River
- Area 3 = Potomac River from shore to Swainson Island

Controlled Bypass Area

- Area 4 = C&O Canal



BRIEFING ON THE POTOMAC INTERCEPTOR
Rehabilitation Plan

Area	Phase I Activities	Phase II Activities	Phase I Completion Target	Phase II Completion Target	Final Planting Target
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Install clear water diversion Remove initial contamination Temporarily stabilize Complete soil testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rehab (topsoil, grading, seeding) Plant trees and shrubs Remove temporary Canal access routes (after Area 4 is complete) 	May 2026	June 2026	Fall 2026
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Install clear water diversion Wash the Rock Run Culvert Remove debris Temporarily stabilize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rehab (topsoil, grading, seeding) Complete repairs to Rock Run Culvert 	Completed March 2026	June 2026	N/A
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual inspection Remove debris Repeat contamination removal after waters recede 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue water quality testing daily through July 5 and then transition to weekly testing through September 10. 	Completed March 2026	N/A	N/A
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove solids/debris Clean Locks and Levels Remove material to clay liner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspect and repair of clay liner Repair Locks and Levels Rehab (topsoil, grading, seeding) 	June 2026	Fall 2026	N/A

Coordination with MDE

Proposed Actions:

- Continue daily water quality testing daily through July 5 at the ten existing sampling sites and then transition to weekly testing through September 10
- Substantial completion of first phase of comprehensive environmental restoration by late summer 2026
- The second phase of restoration is expected to be completed in the fall. This includes a comprehensive plan to:
 - Replant native herbaceous species, shrubs, and trees
 - Regrade temporarily impacted wetlands
 - Restore natural hydrology
 - Repair the C & O Canal's clay liner, add topsoil for the base and sides, and restore structural features.

Rehabilitation Photos

After Overflow

During Initial Clean Up

Completion to Date

Area 1



Area 2



Rehabilitation Photos

After Overflow

During Initial Clean Up

Completion to Date

Area 3



Area 4





Planned Capital Improvement Program for the Potomac Interceptor

NEAR TERM PROJECTS

PROJECT AREA & SCOPE*	APPROX. COST	SCHEDULE	STATUS
PI Rock Run MH18 to MH15 Break Emergency Repair	\$9.5M (End of March) \$12M (Projected)	Jan 2026 to Mar 2026	Work Complete
PI Rock Run MH20 to MH15 Rehab	\$9.5M Environmental Rehab \$35M Pipe Rehab	Apr 2026 to Jan 2027	Environmental Rehab: Areas 1-4 Ongoing Pipe Rehab: NTP Mar 2026 (Pipe Fabrication)
PI Cabin John MH6 to MH1.6 UPIRS MH4252 to MH4256	\$165M	2026-2028	Developing Scope Documents to Issue Contract/Task Order
PI Northeastern MH40 to MH31.5 Rehab	\$250M	2027-2029	In Procurement: Developing Scope Documents
PI Muddy Branch MH411 to MH410 Emergency	\$20M	May 2026 to	Developing Scope Documents to Issue Contract/Task Order

*Subject to refinement as additional condition assessment data is gathered and reviewed