

Fisheries enforcement task force on the Potomac

In spring 2000 and 2001, a multiagency task force conducted a fisheries enforcement operation on the Potomac River and adjacent national park system lands administered by the George Washington Memorial Parkway and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park. The operation took place in the Little Falls-Chain Bridge area that straddles the Washington, D.C.-Maryland-Virginia border (see photo). During the seven days that the task force was active each year, citations were issued for 560 violations. These included the illegal catch of striped bass and shad, use of cast nets, snagging, fishing without a license, and a multitude of *Code-of-Federal-Regulations* public use violations associated with alcohol, litter, graffiti, fires, and nighttime closures. Hundreds of pounds of highly prized anadromous striped bass were seized, some of which were donated to a homeless shelter.



The fisheries enforcement task force operated on the Potomac River and lands administered by the George Washington Memorial Parkway and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park.

The task force was formed as a result of tips to an environmental crimes hotline and complaints about public use violations on NPS-administered lands. This stretch of the Potomac River is very popular for fishing because it is particularly narrow and fish are highly concentrated during the spring spawning runs. With the construction of a fish weir on the nearby Little Falls Dam, species such as striped bass, shad, and perch are now able to use an additional 10 miles of excellent spawning habitat up to the base of Great Falls.

As a result of the task force operation, the National Park Service and other natural resource agencies were able to get a better understanding of visitor use patterns in the area as well as to gather intelligence on commercial fish poaching and other fisheries violations. This information is being used to target educational and enforcement activities to reduce poaching and ensure that critical fish species are able to reach the newly accessible spawning habitat. Before the start of law enforcement efforts, the National Park Service estimated that over 200 striped bass were being poached in the area each day. The Park Service is now working with the Potomac Conservancy and other organizations to reduce poaching through education. The task force members included NPS rangers, U.S. Park Police, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Virginia Marine Resources Commission, Maryland National Capital Park Police, D.C. Harbor Police, and Arlington County Police. **P**
S