

ANACOSTIA REBIRTH

Restoration for
the River

Risk Reduction
for the
Community



The waters that give rise to the Anacostia River begin in the northern most reaches of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. The Northwest and Northeast branches are free-flowing streams that join to form the tidal Anacostia River near the historic port of Bladensburg, Maryland. The tidal river flows 8.4 miles to its confluence with the Potomac River near the southern tip of the District of Columbia. Along its course, a number of smaller streams contribute directly to the tidal river, although most of these streams are now enclosed in storm sewers.

The Anacostia watershed was once a thriving center of Indian culture set amidst the Piedmont and Coastal Plain provinces in the early 17th century. The Nanchotank Indians, a semiagricultural tribe, lived at the confluence of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers in what is now Washington, DC. Containing healthy populations of American and hickory shad, white and yellow perch, red-breasted sunfish, striped bass, catfish, and herring, the fish of the Anacostia River provided the Nanchotank Indians and others living in the surrounding region with a seemingly limitless food source. Lush forests and abundant wildlife complemented the crystal clear river that flowed into the Potomac and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, large portions of the watershed were cleared for tobacco, corn, and cotton farming. Severe erosion resulted and sediment accumulated in the Anacostia. By the mid-nineteenth century, ships could no longer navigate up river to the once thriving port of Bladensburg.

Since the late nineteenth century, ecological problems in the Anacostia watershed have largely resulted from an expanding human population and the associated changes in land use and land cover. Today more than 800,000 people live in the Anacostia watershed—an average population density of 4,570 people per square mile. The ongoing loss of forest and wetland habitat, alteration of stream flow, increases in nonpoint source pollution, and discharges of combined sewer overflows and industrial waste have all contributed to the decline in the ecological health of the watershed.

A study completed in 1990 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers determined that the main causes of the ecological degradation of the Anacostia River were (1) lack of environmental controls during the extensive urbanization of the watershed in the twentieth century and (2) past activities of the Corps of Engineers in flood control, channelization, navigation implementation, debris removal, and aquatic-vegetation control. Between 1902 and 1960, those activities destroyed approximately 2,600 acres of wetlands, 99,000 linear feet of aquatic habitat, and 700 acres of bottomland hardwood forest in the Anacostia watershed.

Progress and planning under the

Anacostia Ecosystem Initiative



A Program of the
U.S. Environmental
Protection Agency, Region III



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LOCAL RESTORATION EFFORTS

By 1990, when the United States Army Corps of Engineers released its findings on the degradation of the Anacostia River (summarized in the text on the cover), the process of restoring the watershed was already under way. The Anacostia Watershed Restoration Committee was formed in 1987 under the authority of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Agreement signed by the District of Columbia, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, the State of Maryland, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In 1991, the Committee adopted a plan entitled *A Commitment to Restore Our Home River: A Six Point Action Plan to Restore the Anacostia River*. That restoration initiative established six scientifically based goals for restoring and protecting the Anacostia River watershed. It emphasized the need for interagency and intercommunity cooperation in achieving the goals.

Since 1991, the Anacostia River watershed has experienced certain improvements in water quality and its ability to sustain critical habitat and aquatic life. More importantly, there has been a groundswell of environmental, public and civic group activism to clean-up the River and protect the watershed from further degradation. The Anacostia is no longer the "forgotten River." It is clearly undergoing a rebirth with local groups leading the way.

FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT

Small waterways like the Anacostia River do not often command the direct or targeted attention of Federal environmental protection programs. Their welfare is left to local initiatives, exemplified by the work of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Committee and the public-interest groups, private citizens, and local officials that have supported it. These special problem areas often escape Federal attention when the impacted communities do not muster sufficient political clout. The combined influence of those two factors is demonstrated by the disparate attention paid at the Federal level to pollution of Washington's two main waterways prior to 1990. The millions of dollars spent on restoring and protecting the large, high-profile Potomac River and the successes achieved there stand in sharp contrast to the modest Federal resources applied to cleaning up the Anacostia River.

Eventually, the extent of the Anacostia's plight and the consequences of neglect—to the capital city's image, to the water quality of the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay, and to the quality of life in the communities that line the river's banks—were spotlighted in a Report to Congress prepared by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1992. Based on the recommendations in that document, the Anacostia watershed was designated by the President of the United States as one of seven ecosystems in the nation requiring priority restorative attention. Recommendations from this White House Ecosystem Management Task Force included a stronger and more coordinated Federal role in the restoration. EPA began to work in earnest with the Army Corps of Engineers and others to bring the full benefit of Federal involvement to the Anacostia watershed restoration.

In July 1994, the *Agreement of Federal Agencies on Ecosystem Management in the Chesapeake Bay* (developed by the Chesapeake Bay Program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region III) was signed by 23 Federal agencies and departments. A line item in that document pledged the signers' full support of a Federal workplan to clean up the Anacostia in cooperation with the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Committee. That item reflected the fact that the Anacostia River is linked to the Chesapeake Bay via its outflow into the Potomac River, which in turn flows into the Bay.

Three months later, in September 1994, the Environmental Protection Agency, Region III, introduced its *Anacostia Ecosystem Initiative*. This was the culmination of some three years of work from the time the Agency first espoused the restoration of the Anacostia River watershed in the early 1990s. The Initiative would allow the Agency to sign on as a full partner in the local restoration effort.

ANACOSTIA ECOSYSTEM

U.S. Environmental Protection

Beginning with the Special Report to Congress in 1992, prepared by the Chesapeake Bay Program, the EPA began to apply its expertise in ecosystem management principles directly to the effort to strengthen the Federal presence in restoration activities. Federal participation allows for the establishment of an Urban Watershed Model that can be used in other urban areas throughout the country.

In September 1994, the EPA Region III announced the *Anacostia Ecosystem Initiative*. The four main features of the Initiative are: watershed restoration; multi-media risk reduction; environmental justice; and public education and involvement.

Activities under the Initiative can be broken down as follows:

- To identify and target compliance and enforcement activities at Federal facilities in the watershed.
- To assist in coordinating restoration activities at Federal facilities in the watershed.
- To seek greater controls over combined sewer and storm water discharges.
- To ensure equal protection from environmental hazards of the watershed community regardless of race, ethnicity, or economic status.
- To provide a full-time liaison to the Anacostia community to seek out and report local concerns and interests.

GOALS OF THE INITIATIVE

Watershed restoration

Multi-media risk reduction

Environmental justice

Public education/involvement

STEM INITIATIVE

Agency, Region III

PROGRESS TO DATE

COMMUNITY LIAISON APPOINTED

In May 1995, EPA Region III hired a community liaison for the Anacostia River restoration project. The liaison has established a base at the Kramer Middle School in Anacostia, and divides time between that location and home base at EPA Region III's Chesapeake Bay Program office in Annapolis. The liaison has regular contact with citizens, community leaders, and interest groups to maintain a two-way flow of information and ideas associated with the day-to-day and long-term aspects of the restoration project. The liaison also assists in delivering environmental science education to the District of Columbia's school children.

EPA REGION III BECOMES A FORMAL PARTNER

In May 1996, the relationship between EPA Region III and the local groups working on the Anacostia River's restoration was formalized in a *Memorandum of Understanding* signed by the Region III Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Chairman of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Committee. The two parties to the Agreement pledged to cooperate in continuing the restoration of the Anacostia River and in providing diligent outreach and environmental services to the river's bordering communities. As a result of the agreement, EPA Region III became a non-voting member of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Committee.

KEY STRATEGIES FORMALIZED

Two achievements in 1996 stemmed directly from the *1994 Agreement of Federal Agencies on Ecosystem Management in the Chesapeake Bay*. Key strategies were developed with considerable Federal leadership and participation:

- *Special Tributary Strategy for Federal Lands in the District of Columbia.*
- *Biennial Federal Workplan for the Anacostia River Watershed*

In addition, a third strategy was completed in October 1996 with extensive public participation:

- *Regional Action Plan for Toxics*

Special Tributary Strategy for Federal Lands: On March 25, 1996, the *Special Tributary Strategy for Federal Lands in the District of Columbia* was signed by 18 high-level Federal officials at the U.S. National Arboretum on the banks of the Anacostia River. The voluntary agreement calls for improved control of stormwater runoff on all Federal lands in the District of Columbia. It also supplements the District's strategy to meet the 40% nutrient reduction goal of the Chesapeake Bay Program.

Biennial Federal Workplan: On November 22, 1996, a draft *Biennial Federal Workplan for the Anacostia River Watershed* was introduced by EPA Region III's Chesapeake Bay Program and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Baltimore District) in cooperation with the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Committee.

The workplan translates the goals of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Committee's *Six-Point Action Plan* into specific actions to be undertaken by Federal agencies and facilities that impact water quality in the Anacostia and watershed. The workplan emphasizes that the Federal agencies cannot singlehandedly restore and protect the Anacostia River watershed. Success will depend on the continuation of efforts by state and local agencies, private landholders, and citizens organizations.

The primary purpose of the workplan is to provide guidance necessary to ensure that Federal actions are:

- Coordinated and collaborative in their approach;
- Compatible with and supportive of actions of other Federal and non-Federal participating groups;
- Designed to address effectively the restoration priorities defined in the *Six-Point Action Plan* and others that may subsequently arise;
- Able to be routinely tracked and documented in terms of cost and progress.

Success will depend on

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private landholders, and

citizens' groups.

Regional Action Plan for Toxics: In October 1996, the District of Columbia completed a *Regional Action Plan for Toxics*. The plan defines a series of steps that organizations may take to minimize toxic loading into the Anacostia River and to rectify past damage to the river. The plan incorporates inputs from local citizens and interest groups that were obtained during interviews and public forums. The work was supported by grants from the Chesapeake Bay Program.

INSPECTIONS CONDUCTED AT FEDERAL FACILITIES

In 1995, EPA Region III conducted multi-media inspections to determine compliance under various environmental statutes at the Washington Navy Yard, the Southeast Federal Center, and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. Subsequently, there were high-level meetings with Navy personnel



to address the outstanding compliance issues at the facility. Section 7003 of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act was used as the basis for an Order addressing hazardous-waste contamination of soil, ground water, and surface water. In June 1996, the Navy agreed to contract for immediate clean up of contaminated sediments in three outfall locations and to perform additional clean up in 1997.

Follow up of compliance issues involving the Southeast Federal Center continues. A special Federal appropriation of \$15 million was directed to environmental remediation at this location.

Two other Notices of Violation under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act were issued to the Navy in June 1996 and are pending resolution. They concern violations at the Washington Navy Yard and the Anacostia Naval Station.

Assessments conducted at the Washington Navy Yard site indicate that the contamination there in the presence of a subsistence fishery and other sensitive environments would qualify the site for inclusion on the Superfund National Priorities List. In July 1996, EPA Region III requested District of Columbia concurrence with the listing and subsequently received it in October 1996. Meanwhile, progress toward clean up continues under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act action.

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing is presently in compliance.

CONTROL OF COMBINED SEWER OVERFLOW IMPROVED

A new operating permit for the Blue Plains sewage-treatment plant is now strengthening the monitoring, public notification, and control of combined sewer overflows in the District of Columbia. The new permit was issued by the Environmental Protection Agency in January 1997, following certification by the District of Columbia. It incorporates controls on combined sewer overflow and nutrients in the Anacostia that are in line with national policy. The permit also defines Biological Nitrogen Removal pilot plant requirements that will further reduce nutrient pollution in the Potomac River basin and, consequently, in the Anacostia River, since the basin is a tidal system.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Since the start of its *Anacostia Ecosystem Initiative* in 1994, EPA Region III has channeled over \$1 million to projects designed to generate community involvement and awareness in the issues associated with the Anacostia's pollution and restoration. Examples include support for the *Toxics Action Plan* and *Biennial Federal Workplan* described previously. Further examples include fish advisory signs along the river, educational canoe trips for school children, science fairs and festivals, comparative risk studies on overall health risks, and environmental justice projects.

In addition to those individual, relatively small grants, EPA Region III, through its Chesapeake Bay Program and Non-Point Source Program, has channeled more than \$2.5 million to the District of Columbia and Maryland for environmental protection work.

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
FISHING NOTICE
REGULACIONES PARA LA PESCA**

► A District of Columbia fishing license is required to fish in these waters.
Para pescar en el Distrito de Columbia se necesita una licencia.

► District of Columbia fishing regulations are in effect for these waters.
Estos vigentes las regulaciones de pesca en el Distrito de Columbia.

HEALTH ADVISORY/PRECAUCIONES PARA SU SALUD

WARNING

► Fish from these waters contain PCBs and other chemical contaminants. Los peces de esta zona contienen PCBs para químicos contaminantes.


► Do not eat catfish, carp, or eel from these waters. No se puede comer: "catfish," "carp," ni el anguila ("eel") de estas zonas.

► You may eat 16 pounds per month of largemouth bass or 16 pounds per week of sunfish or other fish. Se puede comer: 16 libras por mes de robalo ("largemouth bass") o 16 libras por semana de "sunfish" u otros peces.

► Check to eat younger and smaller fish of legal size. Always clean fish, trim away fat, and cook fish to hot drains away. Retira la grasa y cocínalos del pescado. Comenlos para comer los peces de menor tamaño legal. Siempre limpia el pescado, quita la grasa y cocínalos a fuego fuerte.

The practice of catch-and-release is discouraged.
Desaconsejamos la práctica de pescar y devolver el pez al agua.

SWIMMING BAN/PROHIBIDO NADAR



Swimming is prohibited in these waters due to high levels of bacteria. Se prohíbe nadar en esta zona por los niveles altos de bacterias en el agua.

For more information, call: Fisheries Management Branch (202) 646-6268. Para más información comuníquese con la división del programa de pesca al teléfono (202) 646-6268.

Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs
Environmental Regulatory Assistance
Water Resources Management Division
Fisheries Management Branch
1100 Metro Center 10th fl. NW, S.E. 10th St.
Washington, D.C. 20003

See the back panel for *Future Plans* ➤

How to find out more about the ANACOSTIA ECOSYSTEM INITIATIVE



The staff of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region III, will be happy to respond to questions and comments about the *Anacostia Ecosystem Initiative*—the restoration project itself and related community involvement. Below is a list of contacts and their areas of expertise.

REGION III CONTACTS

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Eric Ashton, *Federal Facilities Coordinator*
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Jim McCreary, *Hazardous Waste Sites Study*
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Elaine Harbold, *Blue Plains Permit/CSOs*
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Reginald Harris, *Environmental Justice*
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Written correspondence to these individuals should be addressed to:
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LOCAL AREA CONTACT

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Chesapeake Bay Program
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1 800 YOUR BAY, ext. 772



U.S. EPA Headquarters Library
Mail code 3201
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20460

Visit the Initiative's web site at
<http://www.epa.gov/chesapeake/anacostia/>

FUTURE PLANS

In November 1996, EPA Region III issued an updated workplan for the *Anacostia Ecosystem Initiative*. The overall goal to restore the Anacostia River and its watershed remains the same, with planning for the following objectives:

- To target U.S. Environmental Protection Agency programs to the benefit of the project.
- To minimize pollution from combined-sewer-overflows.
- To provide public outreach and education.
- To assist and coordinate restoration activities at Federal installations in the watershed.
- To pursue reduction of environmental risk to the public from air, soil, and water contamination.

TARGETING ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY PROGRAMS

The Anacostia Working Group within EPA Region III will continue to coordinate activities across all programs and divisions. The Group will identify issues that EPA Region III can help to resolve and opportunities for channeling resources for the benefit of the Anacostia watershed restoration.

The comprehensive assessment of historical hazardous waste sites, begun in July 1996, will continue aggressively, resulting in targeted investigations of dozens of sites that have attracted the concern of the citizens of the Anacostia community and the Environmental Protection Agency. Periodic status reports will be delivered to the community by meetings and facts sheets. Brownfields will be assessed for their redevelopment potential and clean-up or stabilization needs.

In March 1997, EPA Region III will launch the "Compliance Snapshot" report for the Anacostia. This public report will tally the facility-by-facility status of compliance with various environmental laws. By making this readily accessible to the public, EPA is providing an additional Right to Know database.

In cooperation with leaders and river restoration personnel in the Anacostia community, EPA Region III will continue its development of environmental indicators and measures of progress that was initiated under this *Anacostia Ecosystem Initiative*.

The feasibility of addressing sediment remediation in the Anacostia River as part of the process of nominating deserving sites for inclusion in the Superfund National Priorities List will be investigated. Prior compliance/enforcement proceedings will be followed up and targets for new pollution inspections will be sought as resources allow.

Enforcement lawyers and managers will be provided ready access to a current Supplemental Environmental Projects lists of Anacostia River projects for use in their settlement negotiations.

The automotive service and repair facilities will be assisted and pollution-prevention workshops will be conducted in the District of Columbia to reduce toxics and oil pollution in the Anacostia River. Specifically, the sources of oil/grease pollution to Hickey Run will be investigated by sewer tracing in conjunction with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and the District of Columbia. Compliance/enforcement procedures will be initiated as warranted.

COMBINED-SEWER-OVERFLOW CONTROL

EPA will closely monitor newly issued discharge permits for the watershed. Monitoring of combined-sewer-overflow loads into the Anacostia River will be enhanced and information on the discharges will be disseminated to foster scientific study in the area. Technical-exchange meetings among the several interested agencies and groups will be convened to review long-term control strategies. Funding,

monitoring, and other issues pertinent to long-term resolution of the problem will be explored with all the interested parties.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

EPA Region III will continue to fund and support the liaison for the communities that border the Anacostia River. The community liaison will continue to establish regular contact with citizens, community leaders, and interest groups to maintain a two-way flow of information and ideas associated with the day-to-day and long-term aspects of the Anacostia River restoration project. Special emphasis will be placed on bringing the story and the science of the Anacostia River restoration project to the school children of the area.

At least two major public meetings/forums per year will be conducted in the Anacostia community, and program and project managers will be encouraged to conduct similar outreach sessions. The meetings will be oriented toward enhancing feedback to EPA Region III concerning its programs and to building consensus on the assignment of priorities to the community's perceived needs.

Fact sheets, newsletters, news releases, etc, will be issued and the Internet site will be used to deliver current news and information to the public about the Anacostia River restoration project and the current condition of the river.

Staff members will dedicate time to supporting the Science in Education program in the District of Columbia's schools and launching an environmental science curriculum at Kramer Middle School in Anacostia.

COOPERATION FROM FEDERAL INSTALLATIONS

EPA Region III will assist in the finalization of the *Biennial Federal Workplan for the Anacostia River Watershed* in April 1997, to ensure that it will serve effectively as a needs and assessment master plan for environmental restoration work at Federal installations in the Anacostia watershed.

RISK REDUCTION FOR THE COMMUNITY

The *District of Columbia Environmental Characterization Report* will be distributed to interested parties and the public by April 1997, following completion of peer review and local-community review. The report will be used as a benchmark for future risk assessment in the District of Columbia.

A working session attended by representatives of EPA Region III, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments is scheduled for early 1997 to discuss implementation of the *Regional Action Plan for Toxics*, which was completed in October 1996. EPA Region III will press for the document to be expanded by a "Phase Two" effort that would provide a parallel plan for the Maryland portion of the watershed. Inclusion of that information would make the document a truly comprehensive action plan for the entire Anacostia watershed.

EPA will continue to explore, along with the various partners under this Initiative, various means to officially designate the Anacostia as a National Urban Watershed Restoration Model in legislation and policy directives. This will promote the exchange of successful techniques and lessons learned with other urban river restoration efforts across the United States.