

NEW LIFE FOR THE ANACOSTIA RIVER WATERSHED

THE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

ABOUT THE FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

The Anacostia River Watershed is one of seven locations selected for help from the nation's new Urban Waters Federal Partnership. The goals of this partnership are to reconnect urban areas—particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed—with their waterways and to improve collaboration among the federal agencies working to improve those waters and the surrounding communities. Specifically, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership will:

- Break down government program silos to energize existing programs and create meaningful new ones.
- Recognize and build on local efforts and leadership, by engaging and serving community partners.
- Work with local officials and effective community-based organizations to leverage area resources.
- Learn from early and visible victories to fuel long-term action.

For more information, visit: www.urbanwaters.gov

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The federal partners believe a deeper connection to local water bodies will bring a new cycle of community hope and energy resulting in healthier urban waters, improved public health, strengthened local businesses, new jobs, as well as expanded educational, recreational, housing, and social opportunities. Led by DOI and EPA, eleven Federal agencies—with authorities ranging from economic development, infrastructure, and environmental and public health protection—will work together to align programs, activities, and expertise supporting local initiatives.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW

Below are planned or already underway federal and local projects to improve water quality, restore habitat, enhance local economies, and work with local communities.

Reducing Food Deserts—With a grant from USDA and partnering with the University of the District of Columbia (DC), Groundwork Anacostia DC is working with residents to promote urban gardening and create eco-friendly yards in place of traditional “industrial lawns.” Residents are using their property to grow food that supports healthy eating and cooking practices. This program is essential in the Groundwork

Anacostia service area, which has an obesity rate of 44% in Ward 8 (compared with Ward 3 rate of 10%) and lacks grocery stores.

Planting Trees and Educating Youth—Since 1990, DC and USDA Forest Service have partnered to plant and maintain public trees in the Anacostia River Watershed. Current efforts with the city and Casey Trees include urban tree canopy assessment, goal setting and implementation. In addition to thousands of trees planted, partnerships between the District, NOAA, USDA, Casey Trees, and Living Classrooms have supported conservation education for school children throughout the District.

Economic Development—DC and the Washington, DC Economic Development Partnership have developed a five-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for DC guided by the Economic Development Administration. The general goal of this strategy is to maximize economic opportunity for residents by creating and retaining jobs and fostering private investments. The Strategy will bring together annually the public and private sectors to create an economic roadmap and be used as an evaluation benchmark in the global economy.

Restoring Urban Streams—DC and the Fish & Wildlife Service, with support from EPA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, are working to restore the Watts Branch Stream—one of the most ecologically vulnerable subwatersheds in one of the most economically challenged areas of DC. This project is already improving fish and wildlife resources and water quality flowing into the river.

Reducing Trash—EPA recently approved a new Total Maximum Daily Load for trash for the Anacostia, making it the first interstate river in the nation with an enforceable trash diet. Each year, hundreds of tons of debris are illegally dumped or washed into the Anacostia River with stormwater. To comply with the Clean Water Act, Maryland, DC, and EPA worked collaboratively with nonprofit groups to develop a TMDL that requires capturing or removing 1.2 million pounds of trash from the watershed annually.

Improving Water Quality—DC proposed one of the greenest MS4 Storm Water permits in the nation. EPA is working in earnest to finalize the permit this spring to govern the next five years of stormwater controls. Many green features are incorporated as enforceable requirements of the permit, along with on-site retention of storm events.



ABOUT THE COMMUNITY AND ANACOSTIA RIVER WATERSHED

The Anacostia River watershed is home to 43 species of fish, some 200 species of birds, and more than 800,000 people. The river flows through Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland and past the Capital in the District and suffers from trash, toxics, sewage, runoff, oil, heavy metals, and fish with tumors and severely degraded wildlife habitat.

At 176 square miles, the watershed is one of the most urbanized in the United States. It has lost over 70% of forestland and 6,500 acres of wetlands. Impervious surfaces now cover 25% of the watershed

But the river and its watershed hold enormous potential—parts of it are beautiful providing wildlife habitat and recreational amenities.

Toxics Cleanup—Several sites, including federally owned land, along the Anacostia River contribute to existing ecological and public health concerns—such as fish consumption advisories—that impact the economic and social vitality of the region. NOAA, EPA, the Department of Defense, and DOI are working with state and local authorities to clean up these sites. For example, EPA has been working with the General Services Administration to clean up the Southeast Federal Center site—one part of the site has already been transformed into a beautiful waterfront park.

Monitoring Water Quality—The USGS and DC are monitoring the quality of water in the watershed. Through water sampling and analysis, scientists are tracking levels of nutrients, sediment, metals, bacteria, and organics—with the goal of reducing pollutants and improving water quality.

Environmental Justice—EPA is building on its Environmental Justice work with a variety of partners, including DC and local interest groups that are recipients of Collaborative Problem Solving and Environmental Justice Small Grant awards. The three areas of focus for the project include—Green economy/Green Jobs, Children’s Environmental Health, and Contaminated Properties. The Agency is providing \$100,000 over the next two years to help alleviate the environmental and human health challenges facing the Ward 8 community.

WHAT’S NEXT

More Community Collaboration—Starting with diverse local constituents who have demonstrated leadership in the watershed, Federal partners will meet with communities, the private sector, and nonprofits to identify local priorities and projects the Federal partnership can support through leveraging technical assistance, training, education, and funding to improve water quality, revitalize neighborhoods, and enhance local economies. Specifically, Georgetown University, Casey Trees and USDA are offering an Urban Tree Canopy Assessment workshop focusing on planning tools for green infrastructure and water runoff in fall 2011.

The Federal Partners will select several **Stream Reaches** to focus the Anacostia River pilot. These are small stretches of the river and surrounding watershed, where *Federal partners* have existing or planned efforts and can interact with local advocates of the Anacostia River to maximize resources and improve the health of the urban community that lives with the river. These stream reaches will be nested in the watershed to emphasize the influence of actions in the upper watershed and river reaches on the rest of the river.

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The partnership includes: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of the Army (Army Corps of Engineers), U.S. Department of Commerce (Economic Development Administration and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Corporation for National and Community Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Transportation.

More Access—The National Park Service and the District Department of Transportation are working to develop the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail. A continuous 16-mile trail on both sides of the Anacostia River with a proposed pedestrian bridge, the Riverwalk Trail will be a recreational space and transportation alternative for residents of the District of Columbia. The 10-foot-wide trail will allow cyclists and pedestrians safe access to and across the river.

Safer Walkways/Greener Infrastructure – The Federal Highway Administration is working with DC to reconstruct the 11th Street Bridge in the Deanwood neighborhood. In addition to building a bridge that provides a shared path for pedestrians and bicycles, the project will improve water quality and habitat. The development will include bioswales that mimic natural stream channels, permeable pavement that reduces pollutants and stormwater from reaching the river, and bioretention cells that provide green space. Moreover, the Federal Partnership will evaluate opportunities to better connect the public to the River through future green infrastructure approaches.

Anacostia Watershed Restoration Partnership –Federal agencies continue to be key members of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Partnership—and we are exploring how to bring in more agencies. USACE was essential in developing the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Plan. EPA has already provided key funding to significant projects endorsed by the Partnership (e.g., toxics, performance measures, storm water management plans). The Federal partners are now looking at the roughly 3,000 projects identified in the plan to help prioritize future efforts.

Green Streets-Green Jobs-Green Towns—EPA recently cosponsored and conducted a Green Streets-Green Jobs-Green Towns Forum to aid local governments and partners moving toward more sustainable design of roads and streets to reduce stormwater and enhance community livability. EPA and partners want to duplicate model green streets already implemented in Edmonston and Bladensburg, MD to achieve more beautiful neighborhoods and less stormwater pollution.

Community Health Surveys—CDC/ATSDR will offer guidance and technical assistance to local health officials and community members in conducting a community-based environmental health assessment and creating an accurate and verifiable profile of the community’s environmental health status.

More Education –Led by National Park Service, the Federal Partnership will provide environmental education and green job training programs to DC youth. Local young people will be given summer job and volunteer opportunities to educate children living in and around the Anacostia River Watershed about their local environment.

For more information on the Anacostia Urban Waters Federal Partnership, please contact:

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