

International Journalists Tour Local River For Answers to Global Problems

On April 23, 2012, the Chesapeake Bay Field Office and several other partners hosted a pontoon boat tour of the Anacostia River in Washington D.C. The 11 international journalists, of the Earth Journalism Network, were eager to discover successful ways protect and restore aquatic ecosystems.

Genevieve LaRouche, Supervisor of Chesapeake Bay Field Office welcomed the group with a short introduction to the mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as its role in the Anacostia River watershed.

The Anacostia River watershed is one of seven locations selected for Urban Waters Federal Partnership. This partnership reconnects urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, with their waterways by improving coordination among federal agencies and collaborating with community-led revitalization efforts to improve our Nation's water systems and promote their economic, environmental and social benefits.

The journalists were then given an overview of the people, resources and issues of the Anacostia watershed. Alex Romero and Stephen Syphax of the National Park Service provided a historical perspective of the past and current uses of the river. Jim Foster, of the Anacostia Watershed Society, piloted their pontoon boat and described community-based efforts to protect and restore the river.

Fred Pinkney, Chesapeake Bay Field Office, discussed how fish can be used as indicators of pollutants in the waterway and as a way of monitoring progress being made to reduce these threats. The presence of liver and skin tumors on bullhead catfish is used to monitor contaminants in the river sediment. He demonstrated where to look for skin tumors on several specimens.

The group was then able to watch as Danny Ryan and colleagues from the D.C. Department of the Environment used their electroshocking boat to sample several fish species. These included the native longnose gar and brown bullhead catfish and the invasive blue catfish. The crew discussed threats posed by blue catfish and northern snakehead to native species.

In addition to addressing contaminants in the Anacostia River, the Chesapeake Bay Field Office is in the process of restoring Watts Branch, a severely degraded stream in the Anacostia River watershed.

Piped and concrete-lined storm drains altered Watts Branch, making it unstable and causing severe erosion. In-stream structures were installed to improve channel habitat and reduce bank erosion. The floodplain was recreated to store floodwater and reduce runoff. A streamside buffer of native plants provides stability and valuable habitat for a host of species.

For more information about contaminant issues affecting the Anacostia River contact:

Fred Pinkney

410/573-4544

Fred_pinkney@fws.gov

For more information about stream restoration in the Anacostia watershed contact:

Mark Secrist

410/573-4551

Mark_secrist@fws.gov