



START THE ANACOSTIA  
RESTORATION TODAY

# Anacostia Watershed Society

(301) 699-6204 Fax (301) 699-3317

Email: [robert@anacostiaws.org](mailto:robert@anacostiaws.org)

<http://www.anacostiaws.org>



**Testimony of Robert E. Boone, President, Anacostia Watershed Society  
Before the Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the District of Columbia**

April 15, 2008

Dear Chairman Davis and Members of the Subcommittee;

Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today regarding the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (WASA). My name is Robert Boone, and I am the President and Founder of the Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS), a non-profit environmental organization that is working to restore the Anacostia River to a swimmable and fishable condition. The Anacostia River flows from Maryland's Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, into the District of Columbia, where it then joins the Potomac River, and ultimately, the Chesapeake Bay.

As an urban river, the Anacostia is faced with many pressures and pollutants as a result of its highly developed and urbanized watershed. One of the main impacts is the pollution from the input of human sewage into the river during rainstorms. In the District of Columbia, a combined sewer system serves roughly one third of the city, and it carries both sanitary sewage and stormwater runoff through a network of underground pipes. During a rainstorm of approximately one inch or more, this system is quickly overwhelmed by increased stormwater volume, and as a result discharges its contents, as it was originally designed to do, into the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, as well as Rock Creek. This event is known as a combined sewer overflow, or CSO. In the Anacostia River alone, over two billion gallons of stormwater mixed with raw sewage overflow into its waters every year. An additional one billion gallons enters into the Potomac River and Rock Creek annually. This is a serious water quality impact, as well as a potential human health impact due to the dangerous bacteria and pathogens found in raw sewage. Ultimately, all of this pollution ends up in the Chesapeake Bay, adding further burden to this already overstressed estuary.

The District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (WASA) is a major stakeholder in the quality of life of our area residents as well as in the restoration of the Anacostia River, Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay. WASA provides all of the drinking water and wastewater sewer services in the District of Columbia, including responsibility for the combined sewers. WASA also operates the Blue Plains Wastewater Treatment Plant, a regional facility which receives and treats wastewater from the District of Columbia, as well as from Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland, and from portions of Fairfax and Loudon Counties in Virginia.

WASA is currently working to implement its Long Term Control Plan (LTCP), which is a multi-year effort to address the problem of combined sewer overflows into our area waterways. The plan calls for the construction of large underground storage tunnels beneath the city. These would be similar in size



to the tunnels which carry Metrorail train cars throughout our region. They would function as temporary holding tanks for the CSO's after a rainstorm causes an overflow and would prevent this effluent from contaminating our waterways.

The estimated cost for constructing these tunnels is now over two billion dollars, and the timeline for completion has been stretched to 2025. WASA is faced with the challenge of funding such an enormous capital project, without the prospect of large sources of outside cash. As a result, these costs will be assigned to the WASA ratepayers who use the sewer system. While this might sound like a logical solution, a critical ratepayer is missing from this scenario, and that is the Federal Government.

Washington, DC is unique to other cities in that it has an enormous federal infrastructure in order to support the workings of our nation's government. A huge part of this infrastructure is all of the toilets and sinks which are found in the federal government's buildings, and which discharge their wastewater into the WASA combined sewer system. It is estimated the approximately 40% of the volume in the CSO system can be attributed to the federal government infrastructure in Washington, DC.

I am very pleased that your committee is holding this hearing, and I strongly believe that this presents an opportunity for Congress to step forward and assist in the restoration of our nation's waterways. A commitment of federal funding is needed to pay for WASA's Long Term Control Plan. To date, federal payments have helped to address some of WASA's shorter term needs, but there has been no commitment for the much larger sum of money that will be needed to fix WASA's CSO problem by paying for the Long Term Control Plan. I believe that Congress has a responsibility to pay its fair share of the cost of this project due to the enormous contribution of effluent contributed by the federal infrastructure every year.

I urge the delegations from Maryland and Virginia to work with the District of Columbia on securing federal appropriations for the repair of the combined sewer system. This will result in a remarkable improvement in water quality in the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers as well as the Chesapeake Bay. Millions of dollars have been spent on the restoration of these waterways, and to allow the impact of this pollution to foul our waters for another two decades would negate much of the progress that has been made to date, and would devalue the investment and heart commitment that has been put into restoring these waterways by so many agencies and organizations.

I urge all members of Congress to see the urgent need to take responsibility for the federal city, and for the polluting impact that it is having on the waters of the United States. Blue Plains is the largest advanced wastewater treatment plant in the world, and we should be working to improve it, and to make it a model for how all wastewater treatment plants should operate. Federal funding could be used to upgrade the capacity for Blue Plains to remove greater levels of nutrients such as phosphorous and nitrogen, pharmaceuticals, and other pollutants that are still plaguing the Chesapeake Bay. As the nation's largest estuary, which provides so many vital services to our planet, the Chesapeake Bay is truly a national treasure. We cannot allow pollution from our sewer systems to continually degrade this resource. The opportunity stands before Congress to honor the spirit of the Clean Water Act, and take responsibility for reversing years and years of pollution impacts into our nation's waters by funding the retrofit of WASA's combined sewer system, and by funding improvements to the regional Blue Plains wastewater treatment plant. It is our responsibility as stewards of the planet for our future generations.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.