



Partnerships to Clean and Restore the Anacostia River

The Anacostia River basin, located in Maryland and the District of Columbia, is one of the most heavily altered watersheds in the Chesapeake region. Centuries of development, dredging, filling, and conflicting resource uses have so degraded the Anacostia system that it has been labeled one of the 10 most contaminated rivers in the country. Chemical contamination and apparent toxic impacts have also made the Anacostia one of three Regions of Concern in the Chesapeake Bay. Fish are not safe to eat and water is not safe to drink in most of the river. Over 95% of the tidal wetlands have been lost, significantly affecting the survival of natural resources in the Anacostia Watershed.



NOAA's Assessment and Restoration Division (ARD) has formed partnerships with regional stakeholders and other NOAA offices to evaluate the effects of contaminants and develop appropriate

actions to restore the Anacostia River. Protection and restoration of trust species and their habitats in the Anacostia contributes to NOAA's national effort to recover protected species, build sustainable fisheries, and sustain healthy coasts.

Since 1999, ARD has been an active member and chair of the Technical Subcommittee of the Anacostia Watershed Toxics Alliance (AWTA), a unique voluntary partnership of government, industry, nonprofit and community organizations. In collaboration with AWTA, NOAA ARD developed the Anacostia Watershed Project - an evolving, comprehensive database and geographic information tool - to evaluate the volume of contaminated sediments and their fate and transport in the river, and improve the Anacostia Alliance's ability to identify and address significant data gaps. This decision-making tool provides the basis for understanding the site, assessing risks, and proposing methods for recovery and monitoring. In addition to providing technical scientific expertise, data management tools, and facilitation of

project management and services, ARD has played a pivotal role within the alliance to develop a long-term contaminated sediment management strategy and budget for the cleanup and restoration of the Anacostia River.

ARD's leadership role in AWTA activities has provided additional opportunities for NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration (OR&R) to become involved in restoration projects in the Anacostia. In the summer of 2001, the District of Columbia Department of Health asked NOAA to begin a site investigation of potential contamination at Poplar Point, one of the few areas of open, relatively undisturbed habitat along the lower reaches of the Anacostia River. The ultimate goals of this project are to return the Stickfoot Sewer to an open stream, restore tidal flushing to riparian wetlands, and to provide public access to the river.

In order to provide the site-specific water level and tidal data essential for planning tidal habitat restoration, NOAA's National Geodetic Survey (NGS) and Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services (CO-OPS) established reference points for global positioning system (GPS) and tidal datum services at Poplar Point. NOAA performed this task in a most novel and cost-effective manner, by transferring benchmarks from the Navy Yard across the river via special access to the METRO underground railway system. NOAA also used GPS to provide precise positioning coordinates for existing groundwater monitoring wells, developed a topographic map to help determine surface water flow patterns and provide information for selecting feasible restoration alternatives, and conducted a photographic surveying mission for the site.

ARD is also working, in collaboration with NOAA Fisheries, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Maryland Department of Transportation, to initiate a public-private participation project for riparian wetland and forest restoration along the Anacostia. This project, associated with the mitigation plan for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Construction project, will restore critical assimilative capacity to the river system, serving as an integral part of the contaminated sediment management strategy.

NOAA brings a breadth of expertise and experience to the effort to clean up and restore the Anacostia, as well as a shared commitment with all of the Anacostia River restoration partners to rebuild the region's natural resources, habitats, and the services they provide.

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NOAA's Office of Response & Restoration—Protecting our Coastal Environment

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