Anacostia Watershed Project

Marine Debris Cleanup and Prevention

Prepared by

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Anacostia Watershed Society
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

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Anacostia Watershed Marine Debris –Workplan
Submitted by
NOS Office of Response and Restoration (Damage Assessment Center, and Coastal Protection and Research Division) and NMFS Restoration Center

In conjunction with local partners
Anacostia Watershed Society, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, USEPA

NOAA contacts
Primary: Lisa Pelstring 301.713.3038 x195 Lisa.Pelstring@noaa.gov
Backup: Rich Takacs, Rich.Takacs@noaa.gov and Simeon Hahn, Simeon.Hahn@noaa.gov

Proposal Addresses: Community-Based Cleanup, Prevention, and Education/Outreach Categories

Geographic Location: Washington, DC, Southeast, main stem of the Anacostia River, with a focus on Watts Branch, a tidally influenced subwatershed. Watts Branch, located in both Washington, DC and Prince George's County, is 3.8 square miles in size and is 29% impervious. It is one of the most economically disadvantaged and environmentally degraded subwatersheds in the Anacostia.

I. Statement of Need

Encompassing 176-square miles within the District of Columbia and Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland, the Anacostia watershed is one of the most densely populated and ethnically diverse watersheds within the Chesapeake Bay drainage basin. Although occupying only 0.3 percent of the Chesapeake Bay watershed area, the Anacostia's 800,000-plus residents represent nearly six percent of the Chesapeake's total human population.

Two centuries ago, the Anacostia River was 40 feet deep at its headwaters and had 10,000 square miles of wetlands surrounding it. Now it is ankle deep at the headwaters and wetlands have been reduced to 65 square miles, all due to human impact (The Sustainable Washington Alliance). The Anacostia has been identified as one of the ten most polluted urban rivers in the country and has been cited nationally as exemplifying urban watershed problems, including thousands of tons of trash and debris.

For the last 30 years, as cleanup efforts focused on the Potomac, the Anacostia has been referred to as "the forgotten river" and was recently listed as a Watershed of Concern by the Chesapeake Bay Program. Despite concerted efforts among public and private partners dating back to 1987 to cleanup and restore this urban watershed, the Anacostia still faces an uphill battle to become a fishable and swimmable river. An estimated 20,000 tons of trash enter the river every year (Prince George's County Department of Environmental Resources). From 1998-2004, the Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS) collected roughly 600 tons of trash and over 7500 tires. During the 2004 Earth Day clean-up event (their largest clean-up ever), AWS collected 43 tons of trash,

over 200 tires, and engaged 1100 volunteers. Marine debris in the Anacostia has chemical, physical, and social impacts—interfering with the establishment of aquatic plants, leaching toxics that impact flora and fauna, creating hazards to wildlife through ingestion or entanglement, and resulting in less river-related recreation by residents.

In 2002 a formal strategy was developed by AWS, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), the District of Columbia and other partners to begin addressing the debris problem and crafting a strategy for trash reduction and prevention (*Restoring the Anacostia Watershed: A Comprehensive Approach for Reducing Trash Levels*, November 2002). And in 2003, a Trash Treaty was signed by Mayor Williams and Prince George's and Montgomery county executives to focus more local resources on debris prevention. Through this proposal, we hope to augment past and current efforts identified in the strategy and the treaty and offer short-term and long-term projects for funding for a specific segment of the Anacostia Watershed—the Watts Branch. Specifically, we address three components in the grant guidelines:

1. Community-based cleanup activity,
2. Education and Outreach, and
3. Prevention

Partners (NOAA, AWS, COG, and EPA) will address the above categories through the following short- and long-term goals:

1. Increase long-term citizen and student stewardship through education, involvement, and support of trash reduction strategies.
2. Finalize a draft *Comprehensive Strategic Action Plan for Trash Reduction in the Anacostia River*.
3. Garner necessary public support through our partners to promote ongoing efforts for additional debris-related activities, such as increased street sweeping throughout the watershed and development of a trash TMDL/Total Maximum Daily Load for the main stem of the Anacostia River.

Watts Branch Subwatershed

The Watts Branch subwatershed is 3.8 square miles in size and roughly 29% impervious. The community is almost entirely African-American and it is one of the more economically disadvantaged and environmentally degraded subwatersheds in the Anacostia. Rapid bioassessment studies of the District portion of Watts Branch have characterized the stream's benthic and fish communities as poor. Watts Branch, whose lower reach is tidally influenced, continues to be one of the Anacostia's most trashed subwatersheds and the site of frequent illegal dumping.

From 1989 to 2000, the District of Columbia spent roughly $0.5 million to stabilize stream banks, reforest riparian areas, install stormwater quality inlets and fix leaking sewers. Despite these efforts, trash levels remain high. There remains an unmet need to increase personal stewardship so as to reduce non-point source pollutant loadings at their source. As renewal and development opportunities are realized throughout the Anacostia watershed, NOAA and partners will work with other local and regional institutions to ensure debris in the river is addressed. Project funding is being sought for implementing a suite of community outreach and education initiatives targeted at Watts Branch in the Anacostia Watershed.

II. Scope of Work

A. Short-term Outcomes – *Education, Outreach, and Community-Based Cleanup*

Below is a description of community-based and student cleanup and education projects that will be implemented in a 6-12 month period. The objectives of these projects are to 1.) build awareness and knowledge of the local watershed 2.) build awareness of specific actions that students and residents can take to reduce trash, and 3.) build local capacity for future cleanup efforts on the Anacostia.

Watershed Explorers: Partners propose to identify 2 schools in the Watts Branch community—elementary, middle, or high schools—to target for implementing the Watershed Explorers Program. This innovative, hands-on program provides students with an opportunity to protect the Anacostia River and to increase their understanding of the local environment. The curriculum meets national standards, can be taught in all local schools, has a specific component that addresses debris in rivers, and has already been implemented successfully in schools throughout the Anacostia watershed. Students receive in-classroom lectures and participate in discussions with hands-on experiments focusing on problems with the Anacostia Watershed, Anacostia history, and solutions to debris and other threats. Students then participate in a river tour where they conduct water quality tests and see first-hand the flora and fauna in and along the river, and the debris that impairs plants, wildlife, and human activities. The final segment of the program is conducting a cleanup event and doing storm-drain stenciling. These efforts help build local stewardship by enabling students to put into action what they have learned in the classroom—reinforcing their commitment to making the river and its watershed a cleaner, healthier and more aesthetically pleasing place to reside.

Community-Based Trash Cleanups: Partners will implement two volunteer cleanup events in the Watts Branch subwatershed. Involving, working with, and informing watershed residents about the environmental damage caused by improper disposal of trash and other pollutants is a critical first step and an effective way to *control the problem at its source*. These cleanups promote increased awareness of the watershed as a valued resource, and foster an appreciation for its potential to serve as a haven for wildlife and for human recreation. Partners will work with existing institutions within the communities—churches, community centers, student groups, neighborhood commissions, local business, local "Friends" groups, etc. to promote stewardship. Local groups we will partner with include:

Washington Parks and People
Earth Conservation Corps
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Casey Trees Foundation
Clean Water Fund
Anacostia Watershed Citizens Advisory Committee

Anacostia Trash Strategy and Cleanup Commitment: As part of this proposal, partners will finalize a trash strategy and implement a Spring 2006 event to highlight the final trash strategy and demonstrate a "recommitment" for a clean Anacostia River. The DRAFT *Comprehensive Strategic Action Plan for Trash Reduction in the Anacostia River* was first developed in draft form by COG/AWRC and Anacostia partners. With funding, COG will convene a committee featuring the District, Prince George's and Montgomery Counties, and other agencies and interest groups to review and enhance and finalize the existing document. COG will convene a series of three to six meetings with the committee/workgroup to produce the final report.

The release of the report will coincide with a re-commitment event and feature senior NOAA leadership, and other key congressional representatives and senators, as well as other partner agency leads, and county executives. NOAA, COG, and AWS will assist and help coordinate efforts with partners and NOAA public and legislative affairs to extend invitations to the above and to the Nationals Baseball Team to participate in the *Commitment for a Clean Anacostia.* (The stadium site is proposed on the banks of the river.) Information materials and press packets will be developed and distributed, with a framed map of the Anacostia presented to Congressmen Hoyer and Gilchrest and Senator Sarbanes for their efforts to restore this degraded river and the Chesapeake Bay.

Time frame for implementation: 6-24 months

III. Outcomes

The benefits from these projects are many, and have been described above in the project sections. But perhaps the most important benefit to be emphasized is increasing stewardship in an ethnically diverse, lower income neighborhood. When residents begin to realize the full potential of the river—aesthetically, recreationally, economically, and socially—these residents will begin to hold local, state and federal agencies more accountable for the state of their resources. Lower-income residents confront often overwhelming concerns—income worries, neighborhood crime, neglected school facilities, etc.—that more affluent areas do not face. While the state of the Anacostia River is certainly an environmental issue, it is also a social or environmental justice issue when industrial facility sitings and population, income, and other demographic data are considered. It goes without saying that these lower-income neighborhoods along the Anacostia deserve a clean, accessible, aesthetically pleasing and safe river as those residents along the Potomac. NOAA and partners can make a significant contribution to planting, nurturing, and growing the seeds of stewardship among residents in neighborhoods that are typically neglected—near a river located only 2000 yards from Congressional offices, and arguably in NOAA's own backyard.

IV. Detailed Budget

See individual project descriptions (and Appendix A) for budget estimates.

Previous Funding
NOAA and partners have already contributed significant resources in the Anacostia watershed. CPRD has dedicated significant staff time and resources since 2000 to work in the Anacostia Watershed with the Toxics Alliance, a public/private partnership to address contaminants in the river. CPRD has developed a GIS tool that will be expanded with FY05 funding from OR&R ($25,000) to augment the GIS tool with restoration data layers and make this tool available to the public through the internet.

Funding Mechanism
Both AWS and COG partners will receive funding through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. We will work with NFWF to implement a pass-through grant, with funding estimated to be released from the Foundation in September 2005.

External Partners
Anacostia Watershed Society. AWS is a citizen environmental group that has been instrumental in providing environmental education, community outreach, pollution prevention and other restoration-related activities throughout the watershed. POC: Jim Connelly, Executive Director 301-699-6204

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Anacostia Watershed Restoration Committee. The AWRC coordinates and implements restoration projects throughout the watershed. The Committee has established a framework to guide a more lasting restoration effort through a Six-Point Action Plan that has become the guidance document for the restoration effort, and environmental indicators are being used to track restoration progress. POC: John Galli, Principal Environmental Engineer, 202-962-3348

Anacostia Watershed Project, Office of Wetlands and Watersheds, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA has been leading efforts to coordinate local, county, state, and federal efforts to help restore the watershed. POC: Terri White, EPA Anacostia Watershed Coordinator, 216-285-4302