



RECLAIMING THE EDGE

urban waterways & civic engagement





Reclaiming the Edge: Urban Waterways and Civic Engagement is funded in part by the Smithsonian Institution Women's Committee, the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities—an agency supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Headquarters and Region 3 Offices of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Cornell Douglas Foundation.



Cover Image:
Learning to paddle a voyageur canoe on the Anacostia River
Photograph by Keith Hyde, US Army Corps of Engineers, 2011
Wilderness Inquiry, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Back Image:
Earth Day, Washington, DC, 2012
Photograph by Susana A. Raab, Anacostia Community Museum

Director's Statement



Photograph by John Francis Ficara

Reclaiming the Edge: Urban Waterways and Civic Engagement is the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum's 45th anniversary exhibition and marks the official public launch of the museum's new mission—to challenge perceptions, broaden perspectives, generate new knowledge, and deepen

understanding about the ever-changing concepts and realities of “community.” This exhibition moves ACM into a new era of issues-focused research, exhibitions, and programs that reflect the history, daily life, and potential future of communities on the banks of the Anacostia River in Washington, DC—issues and situations that resonate within urban communities throughout the world.

Reclaiming the Edge is based on the findings of two years of community-inclusive research through the ACM Community Documentation Initiative (CDI). ACM research and curatorial staff have investigated how people engage with urban rivers in Southeast DC, and in other similar riverbank communities, by documenting community involvement with the Anacostia River and its watershed. The research is being highlighted through this culminating exhibition that will surely reinforce a sense of citizen ownership and responsibility for the Anacostia River. Ultimately the exhibition and associated public programs could serve as a catalyst for direct action to improve local and national urban waterways.

Specifically, *Reclaiming the Edge* examines issues associated with densely populated watersheds and how factors relating

to that density have turned rivers from pristine waterways of fresh waters into murky, polluted tributaries creating challenges for public health. It examines how rivers, natural borders, and barriers have contributed to economic, racial, and social segregation. The exhibit spotlights the diversity of the folk culture spawned by river communities. It explores new experiences in city planning and waterfront development and assesses the role the river plays in wildness and an environmental “place” within the urban experience. This exhibition will not only help audiences understand the American experience but also foster understanding and sustenance of a biodiverse planet.

Preparation for this exhibition has been generously supported by a variety of funding sources including the Smithsonian's Grand Challenges and the SI Women's Committee. Other supporters for this project include the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the DC Council on the Arts and Humanities, the Cornell Douglas Foundation, and our many community partners.

I extend a heartfelt thanks to the staff, interns, and volunteers of the Anacostia Community Museum who have contributed to this important exhibition and have been active participants in forging a new direction for the museum. I also extend a special thanks to our many Smithsonian colleagues who have contributed to this project. ACM is especially grateful for the many members of this community that have worked to support and sustain this important institution.

Camille Giraud Akeju
September 2012

Introduction

Reclaiming the Edge: urban waterways and civic engagement

In ancient times as people moved from place to place, rivers served as the original highways. Rivers allowed people to explore interior lands with more ease than trekking over rough terrain. Eventually people settled along waterways that could be used and exploited as highways of commerce and connections to other settlements.

Popular waterways drew industry to the river's edge, and human enterprise nearly exhausted the natural abundance there. In time, urban progress favored different routes of commerce: railroad tracks, concrete highways, airways, and even radio waves, electronic signals, and cyberspace. Rivers—once cherished and used by all—often suffered misuse and ill treatment as they ceased to be unifying transportation arteries and became waste conduits for growing urban centers.

Worldwide, communities today are confronting and solving the problems that plague their waterways today. Nearly every river in our industrializing high technology world society confronts the problems of rampant population growth and housing shortages, sewage, antiquated public policies, pollution, and toxic poisoning of low-income populations living on the river's downstream end. The struggle to have a clean river is a common one, experienced by urban centers with rivers as diverse as the Los Angeles River, California; Suzhou Creek, Shanghai, China; the Thames, London, England; the Ohio at Louisville, Kentucky; the Allegheny and the Monongahela, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—or the Anacostia River, Washington, DC.

The Anacostia River flows from the Maryland suburbs of Washington to its mouth at the Potomac River near downtown Washington. The Anacostia has “slow flow” problems, and its sluggish currents depend on the movements of the tides. Its watershed is home to over 2.4 million residents, including the most economically distressed in Washington.

Locally, in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia, ordinary residents—along with advocacy groups, governmental agencies, and other stakeholders—are reaching out to neighborhoods and organizing to clean up urban rivers and streams. These communities strive to achieve the goals of swimmable, fishable, and sustainable waterways for their cities and citizens—goals common to urban situations everywhere.

SECTION 1 It's Our River

It's Our River. Our cities and towns are situated along rivers and streams. Often these waterways mark the geographic boundaries and set the physical identity for the places where we live and work. For all of us who live near urban rivers—or in the watersheds that drain into those rivers—we carry in our heads and our hearts notions about what our rivers mean to us and how we interact with nearby waterways. We expect our

rivers to be streams of fresh, flowing water. We look for natural beauty along the riversides, with birds wheeling overhead, fish swimming and jumping in the waters, and lovely flowers and trees along the riverbanks. We think our urban waterways will provide peace and solitude in the midst of our hectic daily lives in the already big—and in the still developing—cities that we call “home.”



Fishing
Photograph by
Bruce McNeil

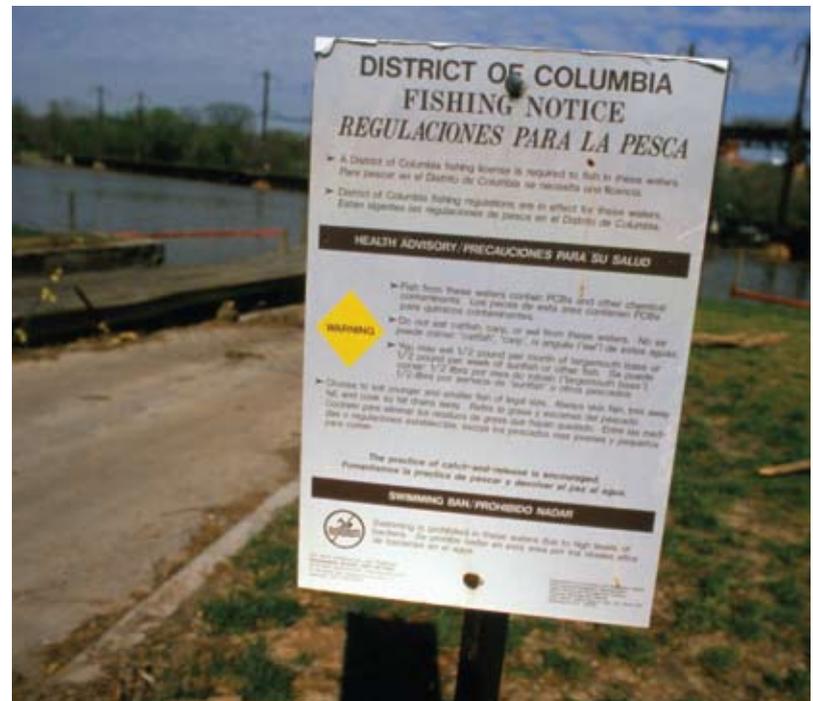
SECTION 1 It's Our River

It's Our River. In the Washington metropolitan area, we are blessed with many streams and rivers. Two of the most prominent rivers surround and define Washington, DC, the nation's capital: The Potomac on the west side of the city is well-known and highly regarded as a major natural resource, often mentioned in tourist descriptions of Washington. On the east side of the city is the Anacostia (also known historically as the Eastern Branch of the Potomac)—also a major natural resource flowing through much of the nation's capital, but for political and historical reasons, little-known, hardly mentioned as a city amenity, and often regarded as the city's backdoor and sewer conduit. The Anacostia is also a key part of the city's social and racial ecology.

In many ways the Anacostia River has been the poster child for urban waterways and their associated populations that have been neglected, forgotten, and environmentally mistreated. But now we are taking charge and taking better care of the Anacostia, because the river and its watershed are among the most important tributaries to the Potomac and to the Chesapeake Bay. The Washington metropolitan area encompasses nearly 5.6 million residents with more than 600,000 persons in the District of Columbia alone, many of whom work, play, and relax along the river. We are becoming more and more aware of how important a healthy Anacostia River is to the well-being of this region.

It's Our River. As we fish for perch, catfish, and other species, we sometimes eat what we catch, but most of the time we let the caught fish go free. We boat and paddle, in yachts, canoes, and kayaks, and we race in dragon boats and racing sculls. We look for familiar as well as rare birds, and we seek out special flowers and orchids along the shore. We bike and hike and sit and meditate along all 8.5 miles of this river. The river calls us, and, guided by the river's spirit, we commune with nature in the midst of urban hustle and bustle.

It's Our River.



Do Not Eat Fish

Photograph ©Sam Kittner 1996; courtesy of Greenpeace USA

SECTION 2 The River's Richness

Around the world explorers and settlers founded cities near waterways. Rivers and streams provided water for human use and natural connections through wilderness for commerce and transportation of goods and people. Long before the first Europeans and Africans landed on Anacostia's shore, the local Native American populations viewed the river as a life force full of richness. At the moment of European contact, the Anacostia River watershed was a thriving center of Native culture. Calling themselves the Nacotchtank, these coastal Indians lived a

semi-agricultural life at the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers.

Captain John Smith, the famed explorer of the Chesapeake region, reported American Indian warehouses brimming with corn and other staples. Beaver pelts and forestry products were among the first items extracted from the Anacostia River region for major European markets.



Shad Fishing—Fishers & Catch, n.d.
*Library of Congress,
Prints &
Photographs Division,
LC-DIG-ggbain-18896*

SECTION 2 The River's Richness



Until the early 1800s, the Anacostia River, with a depth of forty feet, was a highway of commerce. Oceangoing vessels transported hogsheads of tobacco directly from Bladensburg on the Anacostia to London on the Thames. In the 19th century the growth and development of the Washington Navy Yard as a shipbuilding and national defense center was largely the result of the yard's favorable location on the Anacostia at a time when the river was deep enough to handle warship construction. Historically, private industry and military installations along the Anacostia River have been good employers in the District for many years.

The river remains an important military transport corridor. The former Bolling Air Force Base and the US Naval Support Facility (now together as Joint Base Anacostia) lie along the river near the Congress Heights neighborhood and St. Elizabeths Hospital.

Until the 1920s the upper Anacostia was a region of water meadows, small spas, and hunting and fishing paradises for local sportsmen. Closer into the city areas like Kingman Lake and Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens provided beauty and serenity for city dwellers.

Tashlich ceremony on Anacostia, September 29, 2011
Hill Havurah, Capitol Hill's independent community-led Jewish synagogue/congregation, observes the Tashlich ("casting off") ceremony on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Members toss pieces of bread into flowing waters to symbolize the casting off of last year's sins.

Photograph by Susana A. Raab, Anacostia Community Museum

SECTION 3 Anacostia River Basin Timeline

The Anacostia River from the colonial period to the present has been a manipulated environment; one altered, transformed, and planned by native populations, settlers, agricultural and corporate elites, politicians, and real estate developers. A timeline of historical circumstances, cultural traditions, and environmental events that occurred along the Anacostia River

gives us insight into the changes that have taken place in the river itself. The timeline also shows the ways in which human interaction with nature has had an impact—positive and negative—on the development of the nation’s capital and the region.

- 8000 BCE** First human habitation along the Anacostia River
- 900–1600** Native Americans live in great numbers in settlements along the Anacostia River and maintain a lithic (stone) tool manufacturing area at the present-day Anacostia Metro site on Howard Road SE.
- 1608** Captain John Smith charts the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay. On his first voyage up the Potomac, he sails into the Eastern Branch (Anacostia River) and deals with the Nacotchtank and other Algonquian Indians.
- 1623** Captain Henry Fleet lives and trades with the Anacostia Indians (the Nacotchtank). Beaver and fish become important regional staples.
- 1690** Tobacco becomes an important agricultural product. Tobacco farmers no longer use indentured servants but rely on enslaved Africans as the labor force in the mid-Atlantic region from Maryland to Virginia.
- 1742** Bladensburg, Maryland, is established as a Maryland regional commercial center. In 1747 it becomes a designated tobacco inspection and grading port. The silting of the Anacostia River forces Bladensburg to close as a port for seagoing vessels by 1853.
- 1776** American Revolution begins
- 1791** President George Washington, with input from Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, chooses a site on the Anacostia River as the location for the Nation’s Capital.



Tobacco workers with hogshead
Robert McNeill
Rolling a Hogshead of Tobacco
Richmond, Virginia, 1938
From the project *The Negro in Virginia*
©1938 Robert McNeill
Smithsonian American Art Museum

SECTION 3 Anacostia River Basin Timeline

- 1799** The Washington Navy Yard is established as a shipbuilding facility for the United States Navy. It later becomes an ordnance plant.
- 1800** Population of the District of Columbia is 8,144 (2,472 residents are African American, enslaved and free).
- 1810** First sewer system in Washington is constructed to convey wastes to nearest stream.
- 1850** Potomac River is identified as the District's principal water supply in a congressionally funded study. Water reaches the District via the Washington Aqueduct on January 3, 1859. District population is now 51,687.
- 1861–1865** U. S. Civil War. District population in 1860 is 75,080. Slaves in the District of Columbia are emancipated on April 16, 1862; more than 40,000 enslaved persons from other areas flock to the freedom of the nation's capital by 1863. Epidemics of smallpox, typhoid, and malaria take thousands of lives in the city. Federal government investigates the problems of sanitary sewage as the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers are increasingly used as open sewers.
- 1870** Population of the District is 131,700.
- 1871–1873** Anacostia River is viewed by the District government as a sewage conduit. By 1873 underground city sewers empty raw sewage into Rock Creek and the Anacostia River.
- 1930s** Land use in the Anacostia Watershed moves from agricultural uses to establishment of urban communities.
- 1930** Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC, organized in Maryland) connects its sewers to the District's.



Washington Navy Yard, 1862
Lithograph published by E. Sachse & Company,
Baltimore, Maryland
*Original courtesy of Mrs. Worth Sprunt, 1974;
Naval History and Heritage Command*

SECTION 3 Anacostia River Basin Timeline

- 1932** Thousands of World War I veterans join the Bonus March on Washington and camp on the Anacostia Flats. Veterans demand early payment of their bonus for service in the war, as the Great Depression has left many veterans unemployed and homeless. First major public scare arises from untreated sewage in the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers; bacterial contamination closes the Anacostia River from Three Sisters Islands to Fort Washington.
- 1936** Thick ice, snowmelt, and rainfall runoff contribute to a major flood of the Anacostia River. Other U.S. cities in the East and Midwest also suffer flood damage in 1936 and 1937.
- 1938** In 1938 the District builds wastewater treatment plant at Blue Plains, which treats sewage from both the District and Maryland suburbs.
- 1941–1945** World War II. City experiences record demographic growth; population in 1940 is 663,091 and 802,178 by 1950.
- 1945–1970** Redevelopment Land Agency forces thousands of black families out of Southwest DC into substandard housing in Anacostia. This is part of the District’s urban renewal program, which the NAACP denounces as “Negro Removal.” In the landmark decision in *Berman v. Parker* (1954), the U. S. Supreme Court rules that Congress and the District government can seize unblighted private property to serve the public purpose of redeveloping a blighted area (i.e., a slum). The *Washington Star* in 1963 calls urban renewal in Washington “A Frankenstein Project that infringes on property rights and transfers slums from one area of the District to another.” Whole neighborhoods in Southwest DC are demolished and later replaced by federal office buildings and small-scale middle class housing.
- 1949** Barred by segregated practices from using the all-white Anacostia pool on the Anacostia Flats, black youth often swam in the increasingly polluted Anacostia River. In June nearly 50 black children attempt to enter the Anacostia pool. Closed temporarily, the pool reopens to all swimmers in 1950.
- 1964** First section of I-295 (including DC-295 and known along its length as the Anacostia Freeway) opens. I-295 intersects with the 11th Street Bridge, which connects the Navy Yard to Anacostia. The I-295 highway cuts access to the river and hides views of the river for east-of-the-river residents.

SECTION 3 Anacostia River Basin Timeline

HOW NEGROES BECOME DISPLACED PERSONS



1 Washington's overcrowded slum areas occupied by Negroes—



2 Are opened to white development. The wreckers arrive and—



3 New housing for whites is erected. The displaced colored people are re-located within shrinking area.



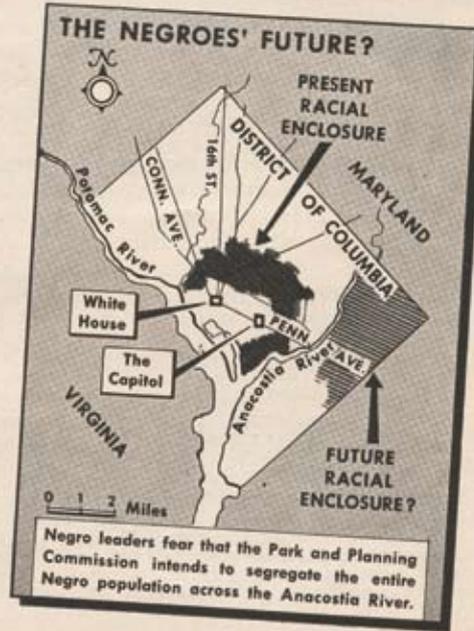
NO PLACE TO GO



The courts no longer enforce restrictive covenants but a silent conspiracy does.



Pressure groups force housing and planning boards to tighten segregation.



Segregation in Washington: A Report of the National Committee on Segregation in the Nation's Capital, November 1948
Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution

SECTION 3 Anacostia River Basin Timeline

- 1968** Concerns about Kenilworth Dump, set along the Anacostia River to take advantage of easy access to water and drainage, foster public outrage at the February death of Kelvin Tyrone Mock, a seven-year-old boy caught in rapidly spreading flames from dump incinerators.
- 1972** Federal Government passes the Clean Water Act (officially the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments), establishing a national goal of “swimmable-fishable” waters.
- 1980** Fifty (50) percent of the Anacostia watershed is urbanized. Washington, D.C., population reaches 569,000.
- 1993** Anacostia River is designated by American Rivers as the fourth most endangered river in North America. Ninety-eight (98) percent of the tidal wetlands and seventy-five (75) percent of Anacostia’s freshwater wetlands are lost or destroyed by this date.
- 1995/1996** Greenpeace demonstrates against PCB contamination from the Washington Navy Yard and issues a report, “Dishonorable Discharge: The Navy’s PCB Poisoning of the Anacostia River.”
- 2008** Nationals Park, home of the Washington Nationals major league baseball team, opens near the Navy Yard along the Anacostia River. Development of the baseball stadium stirs great controversy. Still, the ballpark is the first LEED-certified green major professional sports stadium in the United States. Development around the park is part of the Anacostia Waterfront Corporation development plan.
- 2010** The Anacostia River Clean Up and Protection Act of 2009 (known as the DC Bag Tax law) takes effect. The law requires grocery stores and other retail establishments to charge a 5-cent fee for plastic carryout bags. In one year, the bag tax generates nearly \$2 million for Anacostia River cleanup, and consumers rapidly make the choice to use reusable bags instead of plastic ones that often wind up in the river and in the craws of aquatic birds.
- 2012** The Urban Waterways Federal Partnership of 10 federal agencies begins. The partnership reconnects urban communities with their waterways to promote economic, social, and environmental benefits.



*Courtesy of District of Columbia
Department of the Environment*

SECTION 4 Imagining Anacostia

Imagining a future beautiful Anacostia River begins with a recognition of the river's current problems, including urban and stormwater runoff; combined sewer overflows; and legacy toxics from historic sources like public utilities and the Washington Navy Yard.

To achieve a cleaner and more useful river we have to expect that District and Maryland governments will enact new laws to address stormwater pollution from private properties currently under real estate development.

Restoration efforts on the Anacostia River have been piecemeal so far without a coordinating authority with resources and legal strength to prioritize actions across political boundaries. Many of the river's toxics (chemicals, poisons, and other pollutants) are "fixed" in the streambed of the Anacostia River; they are part of the river soil and cannot be easily removed from the river and its waters. The Environmental Protection Agency alone cannot compel cities and companies to clean up "legacy toxics." Successful cleanup of legacy toxics will require broad-based community efforts and continuing scientific research.

Money is a central ingredient in moving from vision to reality in creating a clean Anacostia River. Local resources are insufficient to cover the cost of complete cleanup. The bill to clean up the Anacostia over a 15-year period has been estimated at about \$115 million annually. Using the US Navy's estimates, cleaning up the Anacostia River by 2027 will amount to a little more than \$1 billion, the cost to build one mid-size guided missile cruiser for the Defense Department.

Many actions are taking place on the river right now to make us anticipate a brighter future for the Anacostia. Currently "A New Day for the Anacostia," a public action plan from DC Applesseed, calls upon the federal government to lead a partnership with the Anacostia watershed's local governments to reclaim one of the most environmentally wounded rivers in the nation. An age of coordination is at hand.



Ducks enjoy a small restored wetland area in Anacostia Park.
Photograph by Susana A. Raab, Anacostia Community Museum

SECTION 4 Imagining Anacostia

Next, the Anacostia is increasingly becoming a test laboratory for green science and green initiatives. Following an executive order by President Barack Obama, the EPA is promoting green infrastructure techniques such as rain gardens, green roofs, and vegetated swales. Permeable pavements and massive tree

plantings in the watershed absorb stormwater runoff. As the Anacostia River becomes cleaner, it will attract thousands of people to its new bike trail and to the various river trails that already exist in the watershed.



Third graders of Maury Elementary School in northeast Washington, DC, participate in the Rice Rangers program of the Anacostia Watershed Society to grow wetland plants from seed in the classroom and to plant the seedlings along the Anacostia River; May 1, 2012. The AWS program instructor (far right) holds a small wild rice shoot (*Zizania aquatica*) ready for planting.

Photograph by Susana A. Raab, Anacostia Community Museum

SECTION 5 You Have an Impact



Wade-in at Bladensburg Waterfront Park, to test the depth of clean water in the Anacostia River

Photograph by Lauren Gentile/The Hatcher Group

Cleaning up the Anacostia and other watersheds is central to transforming our hopes for urban rivers into reality. In addition to new and improved waterfronts, the process of cleaning up and recovering our urban rivers generally will provide economic and community benefits to neighborhoods and residents throughout the watersheds. The Anacostia River, like all of the major urban rivers in the United States, is a river of great promise.

How do we chart a course to a sustainable future along the

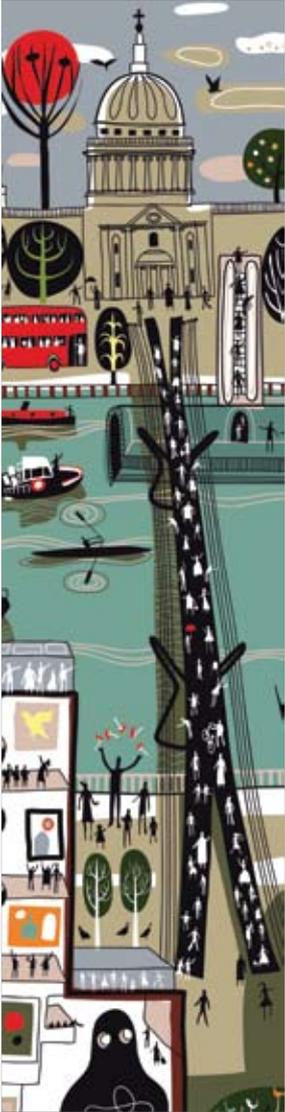
Anacostia and other urban waterways? We need coordinated efforts from local, state, and federal agencies to address large systems and infrastructure needed. But we also need to make good choices in our daily living and take responsibility for the wondrous resource that flows through our urban space.

Removing toxic substances from river water and riverbeds (“toxics remediation”) must continue at an accelerated level, especially at the “point of discharge” or the places where toxics enter the streams. Pollutants pose a threat to birds and fish that are an important part of the food chain. Successful remediation will come through coordinated and consistent efforts by federal agencies and local governments. Already we are seeing the benefits of government-driven river cleanups in Los Angeles and elsewhere.

And yet we may not see positive results from governmental actions for another decade. This is especially true for the issue of combined sewer overflows which, during heavy rain periods, contribute to high bacteria levels which prevent the river from being safe for swimming. It takes time to put new infrastructure and systems in place to handle such large problems.

In the meantime, we have a positive—and a negative—impact on the river every day. In small ways and big we can take care of our waterways and repair years of neglect to achieve the swimmable, fishable urban river we desire.

SECTION 6 Select Waterways



*Thames People and
Tides, 2011*
River Thames Poster
Courtesy of Melvyn Evans



The Waterfront Park Lawn
Courtesy of Waterfront
Development Corporation
(Louisville)



Art Peace Park Place; ca. 2007
Courtesy of Leo Limón



Drawing of Pointe Park,
Pittsburgh, PA
Courtesy of
Chan Krieger NBBJ



Graffiti art near
Moganshan 50, photograph by
Gilad Fili Feldman,
courtesy of Fili's World,
www.filation.com/blog/

Build a Sports Complex: *East London, England*

In the decades following World War II, the city of London largely left East London to struggle with rebuilding. The East London Docklands had been heavily destroyed by Nazi bombing during World War II; few efforts were made toward real cleanup of devastation; and the neighborhoods of East London. What little rebuilding was done returned the docks somewhat to their centuries-old purpose of handling most of the shipping and riverside industry of the capital of Great Britain.

Much like Washington, DC, east of the river, East London was dismissed as an area of poverty, crime, and deprivation. Until a few years ago, most of this region at the confluence of the River Lea with the Thames has been used for domestic and industrial landfill. Much like the Anacostia River, the Thames waterfront of East London was contaminated with oil products, tars, and heavy metals.



Docklands Light Railway crosses the River Lea in East London, site of the 2012 Olympics Park; 1992

With the prospect of the 2012 Olympic Games taking place in London came the opportune time to regenerate and revitalize East London. The prospect for new, affordable housing along desirable waterfronts; cleaner waterways; newly generated jobs; transportation and communication centers; and exciting recreational activities brought new energy and new hope, not only to East London, but to the whole of the city.



Julie Sumner (*right*), secretary of East London's Manor Gardening Society, and other association ploholders led a protest in 2007 against the removal of community gardens from the center of the London Olympics site. Including old East London families and a growing diverse citizenry, residents fought unsuccessfully to stay on the plots of land given to the community "in perpetuity" more than a century ago in 1900 by banker Arthur Villiers so that local people could raise their own healthy food. In relocating the plots, Olympics development agencies promised to restore the Manor Gardens to the original site after the end of the Olympics games. Residents eagerly await fulfillment of those promises for a "Green Olympics."

SECTION 6 Select Waterways

Promote Recreation and Access to the Water: *Louisville*

The Louisville, Kentucky, Waterfront Development Corporation has led one of the most successful waterfront development projects in the United States in connecting riverfront land with the downtown metropolis of a major city with a population in excess of 600,000. Essentially this project was a result of the coming together of various social, economic, and racial groups interested in “rescuing” the downtown waterfront of Louisville from what it had become—an area of abandoned rail yards, toxic spill sites, and vacant warehouses that cast an atmosphere of gloom over all of downtown Louisville.

David Karem, a member of the Kentucky State Senate, spearheaded the idea to clean up the waterfront and turn it into usable civic park space. Today Louisville’s waterfront park has expanded into 85 acres of diverse recreational space and concert facilities capable of hosting festival crowds of 350,000. City leaders welcome the walking paths, biking trails, playgrounds, and children’s activities along the river’s edge. For government leaders, developers, community activists, and private citizens, the waterfront park has become a major recreational asset not only for the people of Louisville, but also for citizens across the river in Indiana.



Designated in 2006 by the Urban Land Institute as one of the Top Ten Urban Parks in the Nation, Louisville’s Waterfront Park offers walking trails, picnic spaces, and concert venues on an 85-acre parkland along the city’s waterfront with the Ohio River.

Photograph courtesy of Waterfront Development Corporation (Louisville)

SECTION 6 Select Waterways

Preserve History, Restore Nature, and Achieve Environmental Equity: *Los Angeles*

For most of its fifty-two miles, the Los Angeles River flows unseen through the city and county of Los Angeles and surrounding territory because it was piped in concrete by the US Army Corps of Engineers in the 1930s to control flooding. On the banks of the river's east side reside some of the most urban and underserved communities. With less park acreage per capita than any other city in the United States, the county of Los Angeles has developed a series of long-range plans to improve aesthetics, protect wildlife, promote the health of the river, and leverage economic development.

Local visionaries have seen the river's hidden beauty and potential for restoration. As Los Angeles Councilman Ed

Reyes puts it, "Six decades after the Los Angeles River was first canalized, the city of Los Angeles faces an unprecedented opportunity to reverse the past and re-envision the river as the soul of the city." Poets, artists, community activists, youth workers, soccer enthusiasts, and Latina women, among others, call for "daylighting" the river (removing it from concrete ditches and restoring its natural course) and for making parks and recreational developments a matter of environmental equity (providing neighborhood resources in a fair manner to all populations). Robert Garcia, founding director and counsel of The City Project, suggests an overall goal, not only focused on water and green space, but also dedicated to transforming communities through jobs, housing, health, and culture.



Los Angeles River
*Courtesy of Tom LaBonge, Councilmember,
4th District, Los Angeles City Council*

In Los Angeles a coalition of Latino community organizations, including Anahuak Youth Sports Association, The City Project, and COFEM (Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas en Norteamérica), sponsored a youth soccer tournament at the El Rio de Los Angeles State Park at Taylor Yard in Elysian Valley, a celebrated Latino community. These groups champion "State Parks for All" and are cooperating on a plan to transform the entire Taylor Yard, a former railroad area, along 2 miles of the Los Angeles River near downtown.

Courtesy of Anahuak Youth Soccer Association



SECTION 6 Select Waterways

The Greening of an Industrial Waterfront: Pittsburgh

Until recently Pittsburgh was a city characterized by three rivers—the Allegheny, the Monongahela, and the Ohio—with little or no public access to its waterfronts. Steel mills, warehouses, fabrication plants, and railroads channelized its landscape. Automobile parkways sliced through what was left of public land. All that remained was disused shoreline and flood walls.

As Pittsburgh mayor, Tom Murphy, who is now a resident fellow at the Urban Land Institute, presided over much of the city's waterfront transformation. In extended interviews Murphy kept repeating one central fact that applies to the

Anacostia waterfront as well: the need for coalition building and community support. Also, the local business community has to be able to see that active flourishing waterfront parks and trails enhance the aesthetic of a city and encourage tourism, economic development and demographic growth.

Currently Pittsburgh has been rated by the Urban Land Institute as having one of the top ten waterfront parks in the nation. Further it is now connected to waterfront bike trails that make it possible to bicycle from the center of Pittsburgh to the heart of Washington, DC, without encountering a single automobile!



The Golden Triangle
Pointe State Park at the tip of Pittsburgh's Golden Triangle; current view. The park commemorates Pittsburgh's historic role in the French and Indian War (1754–1763). The 150-foot fountain at the tip of the park draws water from a deep well and not from the three rivers.
Photograph courtesy of Riverlife

SECTION 6 Select Waterways

Clean Up a Polluted River: *Shanghai*

Since Shanghai became an international trade port after the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 opened China to the rest of the world, Suzhou Creek has played a major role in the city's industrial development and political organization. With all the industry along Suzhou Creek, including factories for steel, textiles and silk, and furniture, the river became increasingly polluted. Businesses, boats, and homes along the river discharged waste products directly into the water. Garbage and waste floated along and choked the river. Garbage scows handled the city's refuse. In time, Suzhou Creek gained a reputation as "the smelly river," the most polluted Shanghai waterway since the 1920s.

On permanent exhibit at the Mengqing ("Green Dreams") Garden and Museum on the Suzhou Creek in Shanghai is this historical image of trash and garbage that used to clog the river. Mixed in with industrial waste are Styrofoam containers and common throwaway debris. *Courtesy of Mengqing Museum (Shanghai)-Suzhou Creek Exhibition Center*



In the past 20 years, the Shanghai local and provincial governments, the national Chinese authorities, scientists, and environmental advocates have worked to clean up Suzhou Creek. Redevelopment plans have included water management controls, restoration of the waterways, and development of adjacent land for residential, financial and light industry, and recreational uses. Formerly abandoned warehouses and factory buildings have been transformed into arts and culture spaces. While nearly 8,000 residents have been relocated from the water's edge, more than 4,000 new jobs have been created.



As cleanup plans for the Suzhou Creek have shown some success, recreational and cultural uses of the river have picked up. Shanghai now hosts well-attended dragon boat races and paddling clubs. *Photograph of 2012 dragon boat race courtesy of Shanglong Dragonboat Club*

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HOURS
Open daily 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM
Closed December 25

ADMISSION FREE

TOURS
For group tours, call 202.633.4870

PARKING
Museum parking lot and
on-street parking

Accessible to people with
physical disabilities



www.anacostia.si.edu

The mission of the Anacostia Community Museum is to challenge perceptions, broaden perspectives, generate new knowledge, and deepen understanding about the ever-changing concepts and realities of “community.”

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