

# Anacostia Watershed Restoration Partnership Communication and Outreach Plan 2022



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# Introduction

## History

### 2018

The partners of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Partnership (AWRP), which include representation from local, state, and federal governments, and utilities, institutions, organizations and citizens. Montgomery County, Maryland; Prince George's County, Maryland; The District of Columbia; The State of Maryland; DC Water; and the National Park Service, developed a social media campaign in 2018 to influence consumer behaviors within the watershed in order to protect and invest in the Anacostia for the long term. The specific, protective behaviors they were seeking included activities that help reduce nutrient loading, reduce sediment and reduce litter. A campaign in October of 2018 was called "Year of the Anacostia," and employed a mix of earned and social media strategies for achieving higher awareness. Social media engagement about the Year of the Anacostia (YOTA) among environmental groups and others already plugged into the watershed was quite positive and robust, and attendance at a series of events celebrating the YOTA were well attended.

Despite these achievements, it was not clear whether the campaign reached beyond audiences who already care. For event goers not plugged in to the watershed, it was unclear whether they came away from their experience with a renewed or new sense of awareness about their role in the watershed because it was not measured. Nevertheless, the effort was considered a success.

### 2019

In 2019, the members of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Partnership (AWRP) initiated a process to create a Strategic Communications Plan (Plan) to drive progress toward the group's outreach goals – which is primarily to raise awareness of the role the Anacostia plays in the lives and health of the residents of the watershed and, in turn, their role in its health.

A work session was conducted in September 2019 with COG staff to (1) understand the workgroup members' needs and stake in the program; (2) review and assess all the pre-2019 efforts and assets developed to support them; (3) Agree on a generalized strategy for developing a 2020 Plan. Next, a visioning and strategy session with the Anacostia Messaging Workgroup was held in October 2019 to (1) articulate and identify the group's near-term priorities and purpose; (2) to identify goals and outcomes of a 2020 campaign, (3) to agree on priority audiences and targeted campaign strategies. A meeting with COG staff was held in November 2019 to review a draft plan and obtain their input. In January 2020, a final plan was presented to the Workgroup for execution in 2020. The Plan acknowledged the following challenges:

## **Challenge 1: Differing priorities, differing needs**

Sometimes, when members of separate jurisdictions come together, despite seeking shared solutions to common problems (such as pollution in the Anacostia), they come to the table with differing priorities and needs. This issue is evident here as well, with members of Ward 7 and Ward 8 directly impacted by the Anacostia's health, for example, while residents of Montgomery County are not impacted themselves, but their own behaviors can impact the health of the River.

**Solution:** Because of these types of issues, it will be important for group members to be mindful of the differences and be willing to compromise on their shared solution for communication and outreach.

## **Challenge 2: Diverse demographics across the watershed**

The Anacostia River's Watershed comprises a substantial portion of the region and impacts the residents of Maryland and the District. There is tremendous diversity within each jurisdiction – it's one of the greatest treasures of living in this area. This diversity makes it challenging, though, to create an outreach plan and messaging that fits all partner goals and priorities.

**Solution:** The Plan may have some distinct audiences, each with separate objectives and messaging.

## **Challenge 3: Limited ability/resources to devote to campaign effort**

As is the case with many of COG working groups, members are pressed for time and budget. They may only be able to meet face to face to discuss the plan on a bimonthly or quarterly basis and will have limitations to what they can spend on efforts.

**Solution:** The Plan should include and plug into existing strategies that build on the current momentum created by partners and affiliated groups. In addition, it should identify some cost-effective ways to expand reach and impact, focusing very keenly only in areas and on audiences that have the potential to make a noticeable difference.

## **Challenge 4: Prevailing Perception that Anacostia health is not recovering nor is it relevant to the watershed's residents**

Research conducted in the last five years showed that residents of the area were unaware of the Anacostia's recovery, unaware of its relevance and benefit to them personally, and that they did not express an interest about it.

**Solution:** Messaging should address these issues straight on.

## 2020

The Plan created for 2020 was largely not followed by the workgroup members. Instead, it was agreed that the most useful way to support the members would be to create and share with them a monthly social media content calendar to give them daily content they could all use, to keep a low drumbeat of messaging going while quantitative and/or qualitative research to develop baseline understanding of awareness and attitudes about the Anacostia was being planned. The social media calendar focused in four main areas of messaging which were: the value of the Anacostia to the region, keeping it clean, enjoy it (through recreation), and take note of its revitalization. Though the pandemic impacted the type of messaging the workgroup sent out through social media, each partner continued to use the joint social media calendars through the spring, summer and fall of 2020.

In the Fall of 2020, the Partnership agreed it was time to obtain some quantitative baseline understanding of awareness, behaviors and attitudes about the Anacostia. A survey was conducted though it seemed to reach (judging by the results) only those that were already very well educated about their watershed and aware of their impacts as individuals.

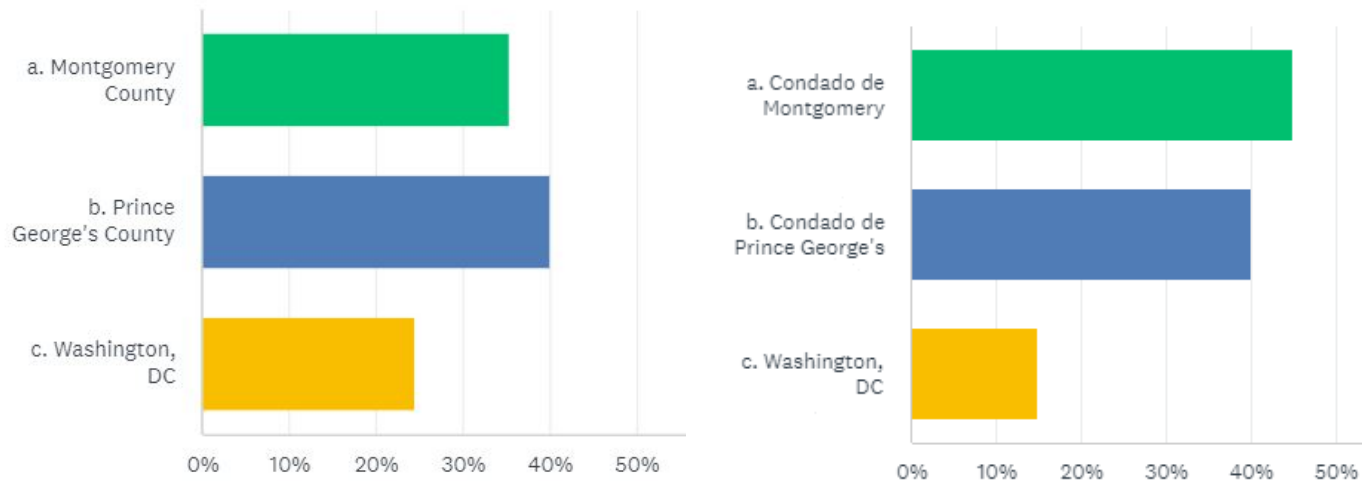
## 2021

In 2021, a revised plan was created that included some key, focused efforts by each partner within their jurisdiction, though these tactics were not pursued. Social media continued to play a central and primary role in the Partnership's outreach. In addition to each Partner using their own platforms to share common messages from the Partnership social media calendar, COG used its accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, *EnjoyTheAnacostia*. In addition, the COG staff created a new, more consumer-friendly website to anchor the program, and toward the end of the year, three short videos were created to be used with social media. The survey was conducted once again, and as anticipated, reset a few of the baseline numbers, with its much larger sample size (from 516 to 1672).

Some of the survey results of interest showed lower understanding of the benefits of picking up their pet's waste, particularly among survey takers who identified as Asian/Pacific Islanders. Reaching out to this group with this message was therefore incorporated into the 2022 plan. In addition, very few respondents who identified as African American and Black believe that applying fertilizer had a negative impact on the health of the Anacostia so that has also been identified as an outreach opportunity. Last, the largest group of respondents who 'never' visit the Anacostia were 41-50 years old, so reaching this sub-audience with this message was also added to the approach.

# Research Results (2021)

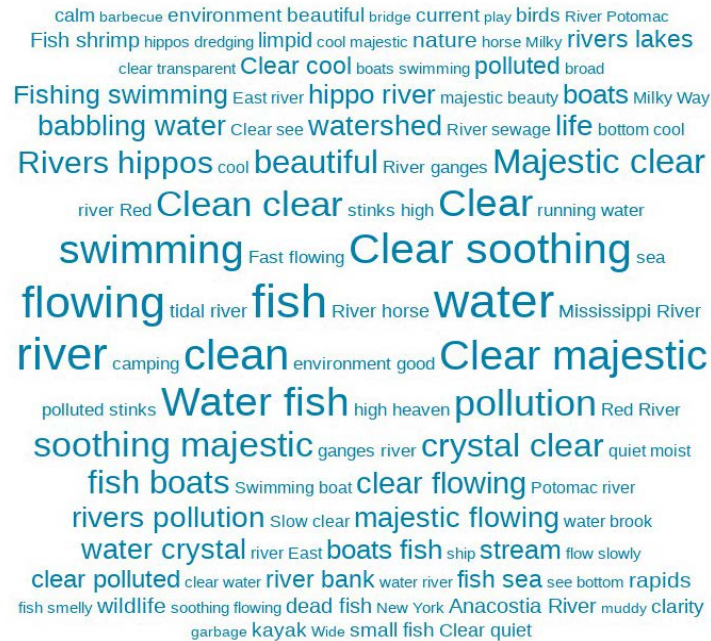
## Who Took the Survey



The survey was open for four weeks, between September 27 and October 22, 2021. More than triple the number of people took the survey in 2021 (1672) as compared to 2020 (516). Respondents' locations broke down similarly to those of the previous year, nearly evenly split between Montgomery County, Prince George's County and the District of Columbia. More than half (54%) reported less than \$75,000 in household income (25% in 2020). One-quarter (25%) reported between \$75,000 and \$100,000. There was a dramatic drop in the number of respondents who reported an income of more than \$100,000 (16% down from 62% in 2020) and 5% reported having more than \$200,000 (16% in 2020). In terms of age, 7% of respondents were over 50 years old, down from 49% in 2020), 72% were 31-50 (up from 43% in 2020), and 21% were 18 to 30 (up from 7% in 2020).

## Knowledge of the Watershed in General

Eighty-five percent claimed to know what is meant by the term “watershed” (same as in 2020), however only 72% believe they live in the Anacostia watershed (11% were unsure). What’s more perplexing was that only 29% claimed to know which watershed they live in (down from 70% in 2020), so it will be important to repeat this message in 2022. There was a slight uptick (80% vs 75% in 2000) of those who claimed to know where the Anacostia River, and the streams that flow into it, are located. The word cloud describes which watershed people said they live in.



## Beliefs about the Anacostia River Health

About one-fifth of those surveyed said when they think of the Anacostia, they think it’s polluted, but less polluted than 5 or 10 years ago. This is down from one half believing this in 2020. More respondents said when they think of the Anacostia, they think it provides habitat for fish and wildlife, and opportunities for recreation than in 2020 (43% up from 30%). Just 4% said when they think of the Anacostia they think of polluted water, which was down from 12% in 2020, suggesting far fewer people think of the Anacostia as polluted. The word cloud shows the top three words respondents think of when they think of “river.” Though the number dropped significantly, still more than half (54%) of respondents report being aware their government was making investments of time and resources to improve the Anacostia and they support it (down from 87% in 2020). Fewer people (7%) report not being aware this work was happening but are supportive of it (down from 9% in 2020).

## Knowledge About Individual Impacts to Anacostia Health

More than half (53%) believe that fertilizing their lawn with chemical fertilizers and pesticides (55%) can have a negative impact to the Anacostia’s health. Both of these are down from 2020 when the percentage was in the 90s. Nearly 60% were aware that

changing oil in the driveway and letting some flow into storm drains would have a negative impact to the Anacostia's health. Only 38% made the connection that having mostly hard surfaces on their property can negatively impact the Anacostia (down from 88% in 2020) while 44% believe having soft surfaces positively impacts the Anacostia (down from 70% in 2020). About half think that having soft surfaces either doesn't impact the Anacostia's health at all or has a negative impact. Nearly 47% believe picking up pet waste has a positive impact on the Anacostia's health (down from 82% in 2020) and 47% believe picking up pet waste either has no impact, or a negative impact to the Anacostia's health (up from 25% in 2020).

### **Recreating Behaviors**

Just 22% of those surveyed report recreating on or near the Anacostia at least weekly and identical to 2020, 39% report recreating on or near the Anacostia a few times per month or year. Just 26% report recreating on or near the Anacostia only a few times in the last 5-10 years. Lots of opportunity to message about the recreating prospects around the Anacostia.

### **Valuing the Anacostia**

When it comes to valuing the Anacostia, 35% say they care that it is healthy, enjoy recreating on or near it, and actively get involved to make sure it thrives. A few less (30%) say they value the Anacostia, care that it is healthy, enjoy recreating on or near it, **but don't** actively get involved to make sure it thrives. And another 30% say they value the Anacostia, care that it is healthy, **but don't** enjoy recreating on or near it, **and don't** actively get involved to make sure it thrives.

Some of the main takeaways from the survey are as follows:

- Knowledge of watershed as a term, and awareness of the location of the Anacostia **River** is high. However, with 71% of respondents unsure or unaware of which watershed they live in, there is a need to communicate the correlation of their home habits to the Anacostia.
- With only half of respondents taking note that the Anacostia is improving, the messaging should focus on this point.
- There are opportunities to improve understanding of the relationship between hard and soft surfaces and Anacostia health (meaning the concept of runoff); the impacts of fertilizers and pesticides, and the positive impacts that picking up pet waste has on the watershed's health.
- There is opportunity to grow the number of people who are both enjoying the Anacostia and actively doing things to help make it thrive.

These results validate the necessary focus on four message areas, which began in 2020: Keep it Clean, The River is Improving, The River has Value, and Enjoy the River.



# Plan Goals

- Increase awareness of the four platform messages:
  - The value the Anacostia River offers
  - The importance of keeping it clean, and how
  - Opportunities to enjoy the Anacostia River
  - The continued work being done to revitalize the River
- Maintain clear and consistent messaging to area residents, EnjoyTheAnacostia.org visitors, and partner social media accounts.
- Provide information and resources for stakeholders to connect with and access the river, as well as to incite positive behaviors that benefit the Anacostia

# Key Audiences

The following groups were identified as key audiences to focus on in 2022.

- Area residents
- Followers of the Anacostia and Partner social media accounts
- Area youth, including high school graduates and early college students (18-22)
- Fishing Community
- Spanish Speakers

# Message Platform

## The Anacostia Has Value

### **The Anacostia connects us all.**

- The Anacostia has the potential to bring its local communities together.
- Preserving, protecting, and restoring the river isn't just a nice thing, it actually improves our quality of life.
- The Anacostia River plays a central role in what makes the Metro DC area a great place to live, work, and play.

### **The Anacostia River is essential to our community.**

- A clean Anacostia supports wildlife, preserves habitat, provides recreation opportunities, and powers the local economy.
- The River has the power to improve our health and well-being.
- Our residents deserve to live in healthy environments free from pollution and waste.

## Residents Have A Lot of Influence Over the River's Health

### **We're all responsible for the safety and health of our water and natural areas.**

- What we do on our properties can impact the River, even if we live far from it.
- What we put on our lawns (pet waste, motor oil, and fertilizer) eventually finds its way to the Anacostia River, so pick up pet waste, carefully collect used oil, and make sure to follow manufacturer's instructions to apply no more fertilizer than your lawn needs.
- We're all responsible for the natural beauty of the River. So, each time when you are out, look for trash, pick it up, and properly dispose of it.

## The Anacostia is Improving

### **Billions of dollars invested in infrastructure to keep sewage out of the river.**

- DC's 5-cent plastic bag fee and bans on foam containers and straws keep trash out of the River.
- Nine trash traps have been installed that keep litter out of the River and ongoing public cleanups will be scheduled soon.
- 133 tons of trash were removed in 2019 with a goal of 251 tons in 2020. There has been an 81% reduction in combined sewer overflows in the Anacostia since 2019 with a goal of 98% by 2020.

- We have reduced 3,616 tons of sediment in the river in 2019.
- 59,253 pounds of nutrients from fertilizer were removed from river (Nitrogen and Phosphorous).
- The percentage of sites that were considered poor for fish dropped from 30% to just 12%, providing a home to 77 species of fish.
- 32 miles of stream restoration work has been completed as of 2019, improving flood management and erosion control.

Come to the River and Enjoy The Anacostia

**There are dozens of ways to enjoy the Anacostia, to improve your physical and mental well-being**

- There are more than a dozen ways to experience the Anacostia's beauty on land or on the water. Check them out at [www.enjoytheanacostia.org](http://www.enjoytheanacostia.org).

# Strategies and Tactics

*Increase awareness of the value and benefit the Anacostia River, its recovery, how to keep it clean and how to enjoy it.*

**Use social media to reach general public, youth 18-22, and Spanish speakers with concise wording and visual content.**

- On a monthly basis, create and share with partners, a monthly social media calendar that provides posts and imagery for each day, under the four message pillars. Include local events as well as opportunities to get involved.
- Develop and distribute to partners, social media content (one for each of the four main messages in the message platform) in applicable sizes (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) (in English and Spanish) that is written specifically for the 18-22 audience. Include call to action to visit website.
- Consider bringing on board a college intern to spend the summer visiting and playing around the Anacostia and have her/him host a Tik Tok account to share the adventure and encourage others to do so (minimum wage).
- Translate content calendar into Spanish for Spanish speakers.
- Host a social media giveaway (ex: Soil Test Kits or lawn stakes demonstrating a Fertilizer-Free Lawn).
- Generate a QR code that sends viewers to the website and research possible locations to place.

*Expand the Partnership's ability to reach and impact more stakeholders.*

**Continue to support all the partners and affiliated NGOs in the region with information about the Anacostia and promote efforts to revitalize it (as well as other aspects of the message platform.)**

- Reach out to organizations in the Spanish, Asian, African-American communities, as well as environmental and recreation groups in the region, who can share content on social media or be a place to distribute the AWS river trail guide and the new Anacostia brochure under development this year.
- Donate free resources or sponsor a giveaway for DOEE free fishing clinic, Anacostia RiverKeeper's Friday Night Fishing event in June 2022 or the Facebook group DC Tidal Basin, Hains Point and Potomac Fishing Reports events.
- Support Prince George's County 'Scoop That Poop' program by providing complimentary pet waste bags and bandanas with the Q/R code printed on them for pop-up events and marketing efforts.

*Provide opportunities for stakeholders to connect with and access the river, as well as to incite positive behaviors that benefit the Anacostia.*

**Distribute the PG Parks “Trail Map”, AWS’ “Anacostia River Trails” and Visit the Anacostia brochures widely through digital and print channels.**

- Develop a Spanish version of the brochure for Spanish Speakers.
- Compile list of locations (community/rec centers, senior centers, libraries, government offices, etc.) in predominantly Spanish Speaking communities that are not close to river and stream valley access to display brochures, and make sure they have plenty to give away. Check in quarterly and replenish as needed.

**Maintain a master list of activities and events in the watershed at [EnjoytheAnacostia.org](http://EnjoytheAnacostia.org) and promote them using social media.**

- Review the current list bimonthly to keep it updated and post to website.
- Promote the activities for each month in the social media content calendar.
- Attend community events in the watershed with branded giveaways (such as refillable water bottle) to spread awareness of the Anacostia and to build a network of Anacostia ambassadors (people to talk about and promote and share their positive experience and knowledge about the Anacostia).

# Strategies By Audience

STAKEHOLDER	CHANNEL(S)/TACTICS	FREQUENCY
<b>Government Agencies/Leaders</b>	Email update from Partner Rep	Monthly
<b>Area Residents</b>	<p>Social media from Partners</p> <p>QR codes on stickers on trailheads, doggy trash bins, anywhere near Anacostia activities.</p> <p>Promote events on/near the Anacostia</p>	Weekly (or more) Posts to Social Media
<b>Area Youth (18-22)</b>	Social media from Partners – Consider Tik Tok intern	Weekly (or more)
<b>Partners</b>	Meet monthly to share successes and help support efforts; Provide monthly SM calendars.	Monthly
<b>Fishing Community</b>	<p>Research potential new groups in the fishing community who can become informal partners who can share content on social media or be a place to distribute the AWS river trail guide.</p> <p>Donate branded freebies (logo-ed/website) or sponsor a giveaway for DOEE free fishing clinic, Anacostia RiverKeeper’s Friday Night Fishing event in June 2022 or the Facebook group DC Tidal Basin, Hains Point and Potomac Fishing Reports events.</p>	Monthly
<b>Spanish Speakers</b>	<p>Make Social Media Posts in English and Spanish</p> <p>Create a Spanish brochure</p> <p>Identify one or two Spanish NGOs in the area to share content with.</p>	<p>Weekly (or more) Posts to Social Media</p> <p>Monthly efforts with orgs.</p>

# Evaluation

## Outreach Effort Outputs

- ✓ Are posts being made weekly?
- ✓ Is the content calendar being used to ensure each of the four main messages are conveyed regularly?
- ✓ Are there resources available to have posts be available in English and Spanish?
- ✓ Are we spending time engaging followers, answering questions, sharing others' news, and commenting?
- ✓ Are we boosting key posts in occasions, to get content in front of new audiences?
- ✓ Are we reviewing social media, media stories and other channels in our work to identify and reach out to new possible partners or influencers who can help raise awareness?
- ✓ Are we reaching out to partners and organizations with a similar mission?
- ✓ Are we inquiring about their upcoming events and efforts to improve the Anacostia and how we can contribute?
- ✓ Are we designating time to place stickers on trailheads, trash bins and dog waste stations?



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## Outreach Effort Outcomes

Survey	2020 Results	2021 Target	2021 Results	2022 Target
Know what is meant by the term watershed	84%	89%	84%	89%
Know which watershed they live in	70%	75%	29%	34%
Know where the Anacostia River, and the streams that flow into it, are located	75%	80%	80%	85%
When they think of the Anacostia, they think it's polluted, but less so than 5 or 10 years ago.	50%	55%	19%	24%
When they think of the Anacostia, they think polluted water.	12%	7%	4%	1%
Are aware their government is making investments to improve the Anacostia and they support it.	87%	92%	54%	59%
Believe that having mostly hard surfaces on their property can negatively impact the Anacostia.	88%	92%	38%	43%
Believe having soft surfaces positively impacts the Anacostia.	70%	75%	44%	49%
Think having soft surfaces doesn't impact the River's health or doesn't have a negative impact.	30%	25%	51%	46%
Believe picking up pet waste has a positive impact on the Anacostia's health.	82%	87%	47%	52%
Believe picking up pet waste either has no impact, or a negative impact to the River's health.	15%	10%	47%	42%
Say they recreate on or near the Anacostia a few times per month or year.	39%	45%	39%	44%
Say they value the Anacostia, care that it is healthy, enjoy recreating on or near it, and actively get involved to make sure it thrives.	56%	60%	35%	40%

- ✓ Have we seen a difference in social media engagement, viewership and following?
- ✓ How have we raised awareness by leveraging our new partners? Which ones?
- ✓ Has the website seen more traffic since the brochures were printed and stickers posted?



# Appendix

## **SAMPLE Monthly Partner Reporting Template**

Month: \_\_\_\_\_ Partner Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Social Media Tracking/Engagement Notes**

Best performing post: \_\_\_\_\_

New influencers (who): \_\_\_\_\_

Other notes: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Partners Met**

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Next Steps**

\_\_\_\_\_