

## Building Support for Restoring the Anacostia River



## INSIGHTS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

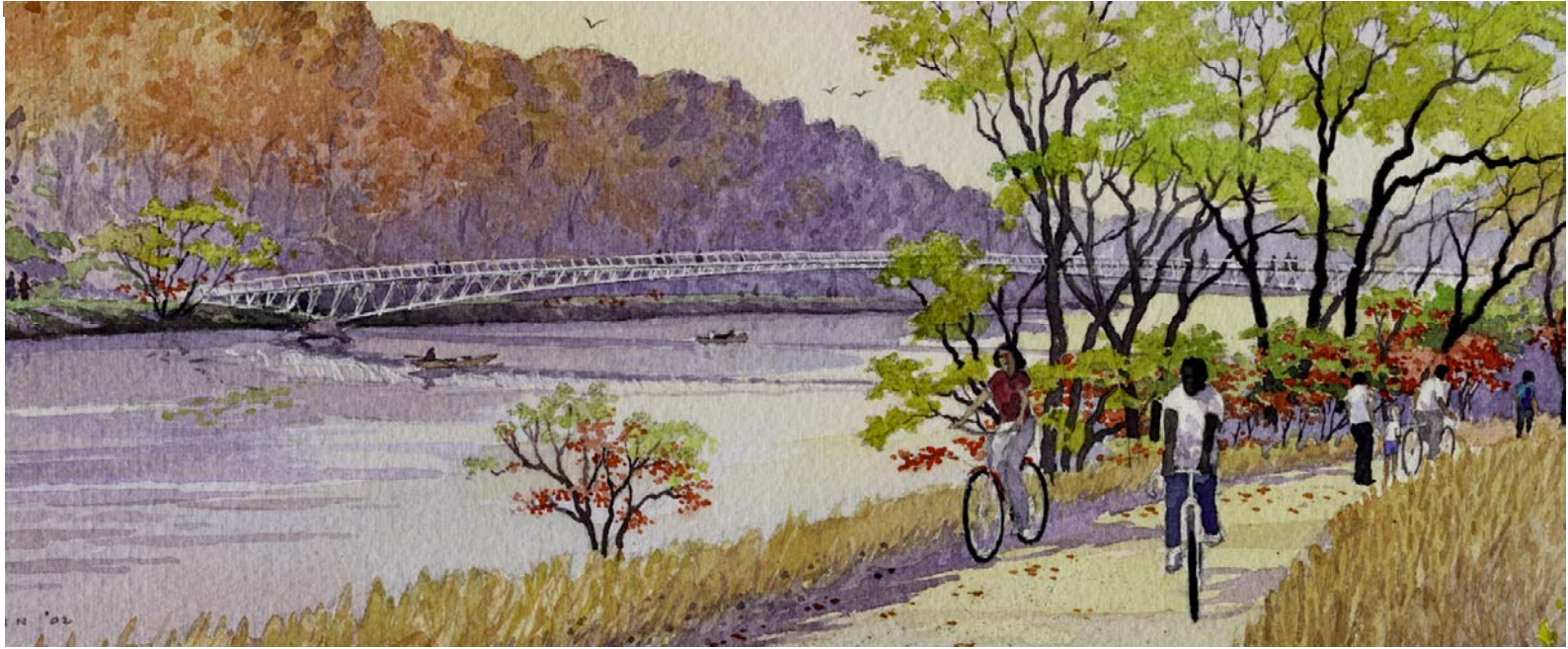
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The Summit Fund of Washington

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## Introduction

This report sheds light into the attitudes of Washington, DC and Maryland residents – as well as other important “stakeholders” – toward the Anacostia River and watershed. As one of the most polluted rivers in the country, the Anacostia is in dire need of restoration. This study looks at ways to build support for cleaning and restoring the river.

The report is based on a series of focus groups and interviews conducted by Lake Snell Perry & Associates (LSPA), a national research firm, during the summer of 2004. This project was sponsored by The Summit Fund of Washington, The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and The Prince Charitable Trusts, all of which are Washington, DC based foundations working on environmental and community development issues. In addition to these foundations, the research was guided by an advisory panel of leading environmental, governmental, and community agencies working to restore the Anacostia. Table 1 identifies the panel members.

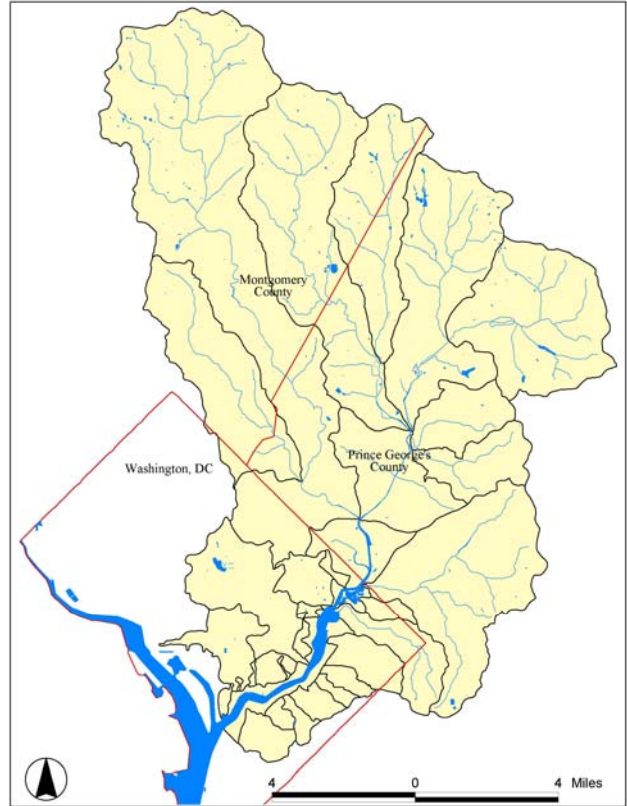
**TABLE 1. PANEL MEMBERS**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Advisory Panel Member</b>
Anacostia Watershed Society	Mr. Jim Connolly
Anacostia Watershed Citizens Advisory Committee	Mr. Tom Arrasmith
Chesapeake Bay Foundation	Mr. Doug Siglin
Clean Water Fund	Mr. Andy Fellows
DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice	Ms. Mary Jane Goodrick
	Mr. Walter Smith
DC Office of Planning	Mr. Uwe Brandes
	Mr. David Howard
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments	Mr. Ted Graham
Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation	Ms.Carolynn Mambu
Natural Resources Defense Council	Ms. Diana Dascalu
	Ms. Nancy Stoner
Prince Charitable Trusts	Ms. Kristin Pauly
Summit Fund of Washington	Ms. Linda Howard
	Ms. Vicki Sant
US Army Corps of Engineers	Ms. Carol Anderson-Austra
Washington East Foundation	Mr. Eugene Kinlow
Washington Gas	Ms. Mary Jean Brady

## Background on the Anacostia River

The main stem of the Anacostia River is only 8 miles long, flowing from Bladensburg, Maryland into the Potomac River at the southeast tip of the District of Columbia. The Anacostia's watershed (the network of streams that lead to the river) covers 176 square miles, about 5/6<sup>th</sup> of which lies in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland. (Figure 1)

Despite flowing through the heart of Washington, DC – and passing close by the Capitol Dome – the Anacostia River has suffered decades of neglect, disinvestment and chronic pollution. It has been officially designated one of the Priority Urban Watersheds flowing into the Chesapeake Bay and has been called one of the most endangered rivers in America. Today, the Anacostia remains beset by a host of major and interrelated conditions:



### LOCAL CREEKS THAT FEED THE ANACOSTIA RIVER

*Beaverdam Creek*  
*Hickey Run*  
*Indian Creek*  
*Little Paint Branch*  
*Lower Beaverdam Creek*  
*Northeast Branch*  
*Northwest Branch*  
*Paint Branch*  
*Sligo Creek*  
*Watts Branch*

- Polluted rainwater runoff and trash in much of the watershed;
- Years of neglect and environmentally destructive flood-prevention projects;
- A widespread lack of public connection to – and appreciation for – this important natural resource; and
- An antiquated combined sewer system in the District of Columbia that discharges millions of tons of raw sewage when it rains.

However, the current state of the river is far from hopeless. Technology exists to restore the river along with models to follow from jurisdictions that have successfully revitalized their waterways. Substantial and coordinated efforts from leading community and environmental organizations and policymakers are resulting in a renewed focus on the restoration of the river. Best of all, area residents agree the Anacostia River is one of the region's valued waterways and all want

to see the river restored to its full potential, making it a community resource everyone can enjoy.

The timing could not be better for this issue. Starting with the March 2000 announcement of the *Anacostia Waterfront Initiative*, a partnership of the District of Columbia and federal agencies committed to restoring the Anacostia River and creating a world-class waterfront, was created. As a result, over \$1 billion dollars of public and private investments along the river have been made with more planned developments in the pipeline. And in September 2004, plans to bring baseball back to Washington, DC and build a new stadium along the banks of the Anacostia River has brought even more attention to the river and the neighborhoods alongside it.

Not all of this attention is positive, and there are serious concerns about how the communities will be impacted by new development. However, citizens, businesses, and organizations never before interested in the Anacostia are now paying attention. This interest creates an opportunity to inform and engage new audiences in a conversation about restoring the Anacostia River. This report gives insight into the most effective ways reach those audiences.

## Study Methodology

LSPA conducted a total eight focus groups and four in-depth interviews with stakeholders from the Anacostia Watershed. These included sections of Washington, DC and Prince George’s and Montgomery Counties in Maryland. Table 2 describes the dates, participants, and research methods used to conduct the study.

**TABLE 2. FOCUS GROUPS & INTERVIEWS**

Date	Research Methodology	Participants
Aug. 16, 2004	Focus Group	Low and moderate income DC residents in Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8
	Focus Group	Higher income DC residents in the Capitol Hill area
Aug. 17, 2004	Focus Group	Montgomery County residents in the Anacostia Watershed
Aug. 18, 2004	Focus Group	Prince George’s County residents in the Anacostia Watershed
Aug. 23, 2004	Focus Group and Interview	Senior Montgomery and Prince George’s County Council staff (e.g., key personnel, Chiefs of Staff)
Aug. 24, 2004	Focus Group	Senior staff of US Congressional committees and members
Aug. 25, 2004	Focus Group	Local foundations with community and environmental focus
Aug. 26, 2004	Focus Group	Developers, land owners and community development organizations
Sept. 9, 2004	Interview	Senior staff of DC Council

All participants in the citizen focus groups were recruited at random and then screened to ensure a mix of racial and ethnic background as well as income level. The goal was to recruit a mix of citizens that reflect the diversity of their communities. The remaining focus groups consisted primarily of senior staff members of various organizations and agencies that have some authority over the river. The one exception is the focus group with developers, landowners, and community development organizations. For that group, individuals were recruited from organizations that border the Anacostia River or who own or are developing land nearby. Each focus group lasted between 90-120 minutes and had an average of eight participants. One-on-one interviews were conducted via telephone and lasted an average of 30 minutes. Telephone interviews were used for reaching public officials who were unable to attend the focus groups. All participants were promised anonymity to ensure candid responses.

### **Study Note**

The study is based on qualitative research, which means that these findings are not statistically representative of the various research audiences included in the study.

Quantitative research such as a telephone survey is necessary in order to have findings that can be projected to the larger population. The value of focus groups and interviews is that they allow researchers to probe more deeply to understand the underlying feelings and beliefs behind the opinions. But focus groups and interviews have substantial limitations and cannot show how widely these attitudes are actually held.

Following are detailed insights from the research.

## A. Overview of Findings

While each stakeholder group in this study is distinct in many ways (see following section for analysis) important themes emerged in just about every focus group. These general insights are helpful to consider when reaching out to a broad audience about restoring the Anacostia River. These general themes follow:

### Local Parks and Waterways Are Important to Area Residents

Most participants in this study say they value their neighborhood parks and waterways. They say that having access to natural resources is an important part of living in the Washington, DC metropolitan region. They say that they use their local parks, streams, creeks, and rivers for recreational activities on a regular basis. Most say they care about keeping these local resources clean so that everyone can enjoy them. Some say they have participated in community clean-ups and feel this is an important activity.

### Most Are Unfamiliar with the Anacostia River

Except for those who live in neighborhoods that border the Anacostia, most citizens in this study know very little about the river. This is even true for Capitol Hill residents, many of whom live within two miles of the Anacostia. Citizens in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties know the least about the river. The other groups in this study are more familiar with the Anacostia. This includes County Council staff, the DC Council staff member, foundations, developers, landowners, and community development organizations.

For most, their main interaction with the Anacostia River is driving over it. Few have ever seen the river up close or used it for recreational purposes. The exception to this is residents who live in neighborhoods that border the river. A number of these individuals say they frequently go to Anacostia Park for recreational activities or to meet friends. A few take walks along the river, and one or two have been boating on the river recently. In addition, some of the County Council staff and the foundation personnel have been boating on the Anacostia, mainly on trips sponsored by environmental organizations to raise awareness about the river.



**"To be honest, I am not knowledgeable at all...I don't know anything about the River."**

*- Resident living in Prince George's County Maryland*

### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

In the focus groups, individuals who have more contact with the Anacostia River tend to feel much more *positively* toward it. They are more likely to see its potential and to talk about its beauty and the role it plays in the community as a meeting place and a source of recreational activity. This suggests that more direct exposure to the river through boat trips or other activities could lead to more positive feelings about it.



**“[M]y first association is all negative: pollution, industrial sites, bad access, bad neighborhoods [and] swampy.”**

*- Resident living in Capitol Hill*

### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

Even though many say their impressions of the river are formed by the media, few actually pay attention to news about the Anacostia. In the weeks leading up to the focus groups, there was a week-long series of articles in *The Washington Post* about the Anacostia and virtually no one in this study had seen it. In fact, few could recall any recent news stories about the Anacostia on TV or in the print media. Also, many of the citizens have not heard of the *Anacostia Waterfront Initiative* and did not know that there were plans to develop the lands along the river.

## The One Fact that Everyone Knows is that the Anacostia River is Polluted

All participants in this study seem to know the Anacostia River is polluted and no one is surprised to hear the water is neither swimmable nor fishable. Few, however, knew how bad the pollution is, or that the Anacostia ranks among the most polluted rivers in the country. Most find this information alarming.

Most can locate the Anacostia River on a map (mainly because they drive over it), but some participants confuse it later in the discussion with the Potomac River. Few participants have ever heard of the Anacostia Watershed and virtually no one knew they lived within the watershed. Once explained, the concept of a watershed focused attention on the role participants play in the health of the river and is a key component to becoming engaged on this issue. Because they have so little contact with the river, most say their impressions are formed through media stories, which tend to be negative. They cite the crime along the river and the poverty of the neighborhoods that border it. Some say the river smells bad. Others say there is no easy access to the river. Most perceive the areas along the Anacostia to be neglected, dirty, and unsafe.

The one significant departure from these negative impressions is the primarily positive images held by residents who live in communities adjacent to the river. These people tend to take a nostalgic view and tell about fishing and swimming or simply sitting in chairs looking at the river. Even with the pollution and crime – which they acknowledge – they still think of it as “their neighborhood river” and value it. Maryland residents also have positive feelings about their own local creeks (e.g., Sligo and Paint Branch) similar to those of DC residents who live near the Anacostia.

## Few Know Who Is Responsible for the Pollution or for Cleaning Up the River

A sticking point for many citizens is their lack of knowledge about the causes of the pollution in the Anacostia. Since they do not know the major contributors to the river’s pollution, they do not know who is at fault. Some citizens wrongly assume that much of the pollution comes from large industries along the river, but

cannot name any of these industries or know where they are located. None of the citizens knew about the combined sewer system in Washington, DC and how, during heavy rainstorms, it discharges raw sewage into the Anacostia. Likewise, none think about the agricultural run-off from farms in the watershed and how it makes its way into the river. However, many believe that people in and around Washington, DC throw trash into the river, and that is part of the reason the river is so dirty.

Another issue for many participants is a lack of clarity regarding who *owns* the river. Some believe cleaning up the Anacostia is the responsibility of the DC government since they must own the river. A few mention the National Park Service as possible owners and so believe they should take charge of the clean up.

An important insight from the focus groups is that citizens see that the job of restoring the Anacostia as much bigger than they are. Many initially do not see a role in this task – they assume that a large government agency must handle it because there is nothing individual citizens can do. However, when they learn that they live in the Anacostia Watershed – and that what they do in their own homes and neighborhoods can affect the river – some are willing to see a role for themselves. Some are also willing to take responsibility for restoring the river. Yet they are not willing to act alone – many citizens in this study first want to know there are others acting to restore the river before they are willing to participate.

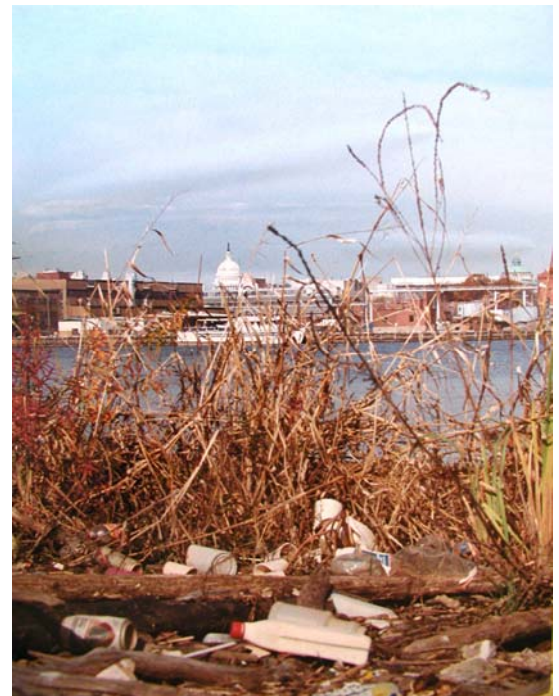
### **Restoring the Anacostia River and Developing the Communities along the River Are Linked Topics**

Study participants link cleaning the Anacostia River with developing the land that borders the river. These topics are connected, and it seems impossible to discuss one without the other. This is true of citizens, County Council staff, the DC Council staff member, staff of Congressional Members, foundations, developers, land owners, and community development organizations.

Most see this as a positive connection – the overwhelming majority believe the river needs to be restored (particularly after they learn how polluted it is) and that the neighboring

### **STRATEGIC INSIGHT**

Despite negative associations with the Anacostia River, most study participants can quickly see the potential of a *restored* Anacostia. Many can imagine fishing, boating, hiking and picnicking. Those who have never had contact with the river can see bringing their families there for recreational purposes. Many see immediately that a clean river could also mean revitalized neighborhoods with shopping and new housing. Somehow thinking about its potential makes a number of participants in this study begin to believe it is possible to restore the Anacostia.



**“I think once you clean up the Anacostia... people [will ask] if they want to sell their house and stuff. They are trying to push [us] out, then the wealthy will come in.”**

*- DC resident living in wards 5, 6, 7, or 8*

### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

Based on the focus groups, it seems difficult to discuss a restored Anacostia River without also talking about the effects of development on the surrounding neighborhoods. Most participants want to have some assurance that people will not be priced out of their communities and that development will include affordable housing options. Without addressing this concern many may feel uncomfortable with the restoration efforts even though they support the primary goal of a clean Anacostia River.

### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

Some citizens may perceive there is enough momentum building for the restoration of the Anacostia River that they do not need to act themselves. Indeed, citizens in the focus groups initially find the problem of cleaning the river to be overwhelming and feel there is nothing they can do as individuals to help. Yet the focus groups also suggest that citizens want to be involved in an effort that is already moving forward – and that has some powerful actors already involved like government and business. They fear acting alone and being ineffectual. Thus, their perception of building momentum for restoring the Anacostia River could actually work to engage more citizens than would otherwise be the case.

communities need to be revitalized. However, many participants become concerned about how the restoration of the Anacostia will change the neighborhoods surrounding it. They worry about gentrification and driving out long-term area residents. Foundations, policymakers and DC residents who live near the Anacostia are the most concerned about this unintended, but likely consequence of a restored Anacostia River. The big worry for local residents is being priced out of their neighborhoods. They have already seen a big jump in housing prices and most say they can no longer afford to buy their current home.

An important exception to this broad concern about gentrification is the developers in this study. While there were only two developers in the focus groups, their perspective may be shared by others. Specifically, they asserted that the Anacostia River does not need to be cleaned in order for them to successfully develop the land that borders it. Having a “water view” is enough to sell luxury apartments regardless of the actual state of the river. From this point of view, the development of the land will not necessarily spur the restoration of the river (which is the assumption that many others in this study make).

### Many Believe the Anacostia Will be Restored Soon

An interesting finding from this research is the shared perception among the diverse research audiences that the Anacostia River will likely be restored in the next 5 to 10 years. This perception does not seem based on factual knowledge or awareness of restoration efforts, but rather from a vague sense that momentum is building to restore the river. For example, some believe that developers and landowners along the river will need to clean the river in order to sell luxury apartments. As a number of citizens said, “Who would want to live next to a smelly river?”

A few have heard something about the District’s *Anacostia Waterfront Initiative* and believe that restoring the river is a part of this initiative. For those living in neighborhoods along the river, they are already seeing new investment and construction in their community and believe this will spur the river clean-up. Finally, once they learn how polluted the river is, some participants believe the river has reached such a critical point that policymakers, government agencies, and environmentalists will insist that it be restored.

## Many are Willing to Take Specific Kinds of Actions

Once many learn they are in the Anacostia Watershed, they begin to make new connections to the river. Many participants in this research say they would support and become involved in efforts (both through direct action and by supporting policies) that would help restore the river. These action steps vary by audience and by their perceived connection to the river. The most likely actions they identify are signing a petition; attending events in their neighborhood or along the river to learn more; visiting a website about restoring the Anacostia; joining an e-mail action list of activists; and participating in a community clean-up day along the river or their local tributary.

As previously mentioned, citizens prefer to work on this issue in conjunction with others. Many feel this should be an issue that involves DC and county governments, private businesses (e.g., Safeway and Giant) and joint efforts from leading environmental and community organizations (e.g., Anacostia Watershed Society, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, etc). The people that citizens say they trust the most and prefer to work with over all others are the environmental and community organizations already working in this issue.

Finally, citizens see a role for schools and children in raising awareness about this issue. They feel it is appropriate for their local schools to study the river and watershed to inform their children about pollution and the challenges facing the Anacostia. Likewise, many say they would like to receive information from the school (through their children) about what they can do to help restoration efforts.



### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

An insight from the focus groups is that environmental and community organizations have the most credibility, particularly with citizens, on this issue. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation is among those most frequently mentioned as credible. County Council staff also mention the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and the Anacostia Watershed Society as good sources of information. Comments suggest also that citizen-based groups, such as the Anacostia Watershed Citizens Advisory Committee, would have credibility on this topic.

## B. Specific Insights into Audiences

Following are specific insights about the diverse stakeholders involved in this study. The stakeholders:

- Low and moderate income DC residents who live along the river in Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8;
- Higher income DC residents in the Capitol Hill area;
- Montgomery County residents in the Anacostia Watershed;
- Prince George’s County residents in the Anacostia Watershed;
- Senior Montgomery and Prince George’s County Council Staff (e.g., key personnel, Chiefs of Staff);
- Senior Staff of US Congressional Committees and Members;
- Local foundations with a community and environmental focus;
- Developers, Land Owners and Community Development Organizations;
- Senior Staff of DC Council.

This section highlights where and how each of these groups is distinct from each other. It does not, however, repeat the more general opinions addressed in the previous section.

### Low and Moderate Income DC Residents Who Live Near the River (Wards 5, 6, 7 and 8)

#### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

Low and moderate income residents of Wards 5, 6, 7 and 8 may have the potential to become the most active supporters of restoration efforts. They feel a strong attachment to the Anacostia River that all the other focus group participants lack. Once they overcome their initial feelings and see that there are actions they can take, they are ready to act.

These research participants arguably have the most at stake in restoring the Anacostia River because they live along its borders, and this is reflected in their comments in the focus groups. Most consider the Anacostia to be their “home river” (the only group in the research to feel this way). Many say it holds a nostalgic place in their hearts, and they remember fishing and swimming in the river. They are the most likely to visit the river today and many say they use Anacostia Park for recreational activities and for socializing.

These residents depart from all other research participants in their strongly positive images of the Anacostia River. While they acknowledge the pollution in the water and the crime along its borders, they still consider the river to be beautiful and an important part of their community. For these reasons, they require the least amount of convincing to get involved in restoration efforts. This is their river and their community and they have a stake in it.

Nevertheless, based on their comments, they seem less politically active than other groups in this study. Few seem to be involved in civic groups

or with other neighborhood activities. Many in the focus groups do not know what they individually can do to help restore the river. Yet when specific actions are mentioned – such as signing a petition, contacting a member of Congress, attending a festival along the River, going to a website, and attending a neighborhood meeting to learn more – they show interest in getting involved.

Another major concern for this group is gentrification. They worry that a restored river will bring in new neighborhood development that will drive them out. They are among the most concerned about housing prices, and many say they could not afford to buy their current house today. They spend much of the discussion talking about new development along the waterfront and want to make sure that it will include affordable housing and will retain a neighborhood feeling.

### Higher Income DC Residents Living on Capitol Hill

While most live within two miles of the Anacostia River, these residents do not feel attached to it. In this regard they are distinct from their lower-income neighbors in Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8. They know little about the Anacostia River, and most have never had any direct contact with it. They tend to use the Potomac River for recreational activities instead. These residents focus on the crime along the Anacostia and say they do not feel safe in those areas. They say the water looks dirty. Many say they have no idea how to access the river.

An important characteristic of these Capitol Hill residents is that they appear to be very involved in their community. Many participate in civic organizations and neighborhood groups. Many have taken some kind of political action previously for a cause. Most are well-informed and say they keep abreast of news in their neighborhood. However, it is noteworthy that none could recall any recent stories about the Anacostia River or the week-long series in *The Washington Post*. They acknowledge that they do not pay attention to news about the river because they do not feel connected to it.

Like their neighbors along the river, their main concern is development. They are apprehensive that restoring the Anacostia River will lead to a surge of new development that will encroach upon their neighborhoods. An even bigger worry is that the Anacostia waterfront will become a tourist attraction like Baltimore's Harbor Place with T-shirt shops on every corner, loud music and traffic at all hours of the night. They also express concern about housing prices and are fearful that new development could increase their already overpriced houses, making it hard for even these middle-income residents to remain in their Capitol Hill neighborhood.

#### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

Because they are already active on other issues, these Capitol Hill residents could potentially become active supporters of restoring the Anacostia. They know how to bring about change on an issue and are the group most likely to feel that individual efforts can make a difference. They respond favorably to a wide range of action steps discussed in the focus groups (everything from writing a letter to Congress to petition signing to a neighborhood clean-up). Although they believe the Anacostia River needs to be restored, it is their concern about development that will most likely motivate them to become involved.

### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

Montgomery County residents in this study seem much more willing to become involved in restoration efforts once they learn they live in the Anacostia Watershed. This is critical information to share with them. However, it is probably not enough to engage them in larger, regional kinds of efforts. Study participants indicate they are most likely to take personal, individual kinds of actions such as going to a website to learn more about the issue. They also are interested in action steps they can take in their own homes – stopping leaking faucets, for example – or neighborhood clean-ups as opposed to larger, political kinds of actions like writing a letter to Congress.

### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

Prince George's County residents seem very focused on local issues that affect their community. The problem is that they do not see the Anacostia River as part of their community and this is the challenge to overcome. The key is to connect local streams and waterways – which they care about – to the Anacostia. Also, showing how they live in the watershed can help make this linkage between local concerns and restoring the Anacostia.

## Montgomery County Residents

These citizens know little about the Anacostia River and hold negative associations with it. They focus on the crime, the pollution, and the poverty of the surrounding areas. They only know where the river is because they drive over it and describe it as dirty-looking. They feel much more connected to the Potomac River, the Chesapeake Bay, and to their local streams and creeks.

However, once they learn that their local streams and creeks feed into the Anacostia River, they begin to make connections. Indeed, their “breakthrough” moment is learning that they live in the Anacostia Watershed. Although most had never heard this term before, it was news to them that their local waterways feed into the Anacostia. Many immediately see that the actions they take in their own homes and neighborhoods can affect the Anacostia River.

Of all the groups in this study, these citizens seem most motivated by a moral imperative to protect the region's natural resources. They also are the ones most likely to empathize with DC residents and consider it their “neighborly duty” to help out. And once they understand they live in the Anacostia Watershed, they see a personal responsibility to get involved.

## Prince George's County Residents

These citizens are much like Montgomery County residents in their lack of knowledge about – and negative impressions of – the Anacostia River. Most have had no direct contact with the river, and none feel connected to it. However, unlike the Montgomery County residents, the discussion about the Anacostia Watershed did not lead to a breakthrough. Rather, most find the concept of a watershed to be confusing and many resist the notion that their own actions and those of their neighbors can affect the Anacostia. In fact, the residents in this focus group were the most interested in learning the causes of the pollution to the Anacostia and were more likely to believe that there were some big polluters along the river who needed to take responsibility for cleaning it up.

Many of these citizens are also the most likely to see restoring the Anacostia as DC's problem. They struggle to find reasons why they should care about the river or become involved in these efforts.

They admit that they are more focused on their local neighborhoods and communities, and do not feel a strong connection to the river. Accordingly, this focus group is the least likely to consider taking action steps to help restore the Anacostia.

## Prince George's and Montgomery County Council Senior Staff Members

Prince George's and Montgomery Council staff members in this study are very knowledgeable about the Anacostia River and believe in efforts to restore it. They know about the sources of pollution to the river and watershed and about the District's *Anacostia Waterfront Initiative*. Some have actually been on the river as part of an awareness-raising event. Many see it as an important local resource that should be protected. While not a top issue for their Council Member, they say that he/she is willing to become more involved.

However, these staff members say that currently their Council Member is not involved in any ongoing discussions about restoring the Anacostia or in any joint efforts with DC government. They do not feel that there has been any significant outreach from DC government or relevant agencies to their offices. There is some disagreement among these staff members about who should take the lead in the restoration efforts – some prefer DC government while others want to see a regional solution working through Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. However, all believe that regional cooperation is needed in order for restoration efforts to be successful.

### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

Insights from staff of Prince George's and Montgomery County Councils as well as from a staff member from the DC Council suggest regional cooperation is key to restoration efforts. All say their Council Members are ready to become more involved – they recognize the problem and support restoring the Anacostia. Likewise, they all feel that restoration efforts could be enhanced and could gain more momentum if the DC Council worked more closely with the two County Councils.

## DC Council Senior Staff Member

This senior staff member describes his Council Member as very involved in restoration efforts and says it is a top agenda item. The reason his Council Member believes in restoring the river is to help build a stronger community, to improve the quality of life for all residents in the area, and to make possible a restored waterfront. The staff member is therefore very knowledgeable about the river, the causes of pollution, the *Anacostia Waterfront Initiative*, and about the state of current restoration efforts. He believes that Prince George's and Montgomery County Councils should be playing a larger role in restoration efforts. Like his peers in the Counties, he feels restoring the Anacostia will require a regional effort and cannot be addressed by the District alone.

## Congressional Staff Members

Congressional staff members in the focus group are fairly knowledgeable about efforts to restore the Anacostia even though this is not their Member's District or the primary focus of their Committees. Many seem to know about the sources of pollution – although some do not – and most are familiar with the District's *Anacostia Waterfront Initiative*. Most live on Capitol Hill and are somewhat concerned about the river as DC residents. Many say that their Members have similar connections. Most say they would be comfortable discussing this topic with their Member. Many even say their members would support the restoration efforts but

### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

There is a surprising willingness expressed by Congressional staffers for their Members to become more involved in restoring the Anacostia. Even though their Members are not from the DC area, their role as “stewards of DC” and federal policymakers could be evoked to get them more involved. In particular, learning that the river is in violation of federal standards that they helped establish could trigger their interest.

support varies depending on their issue areas.

The challenge with engaging Members and their staffs who represent districts outside of the Washington, DC area is that their local concerns – even their local rivers – take priority. Staff members explain that it can be hard for their Member to be a supporter of restoring the Anacostia when their own waterways also need restoring. However, as long as they are not asked to take the lead on this topic, most feel that their Members would be supportive. Part of this support comes from the unique responsibility their Members feel towards Washington, DC. Also, staff members are surprised to hear that the Anacostia River is in violation of federally established clean water standards and feel this is a compelling reason for their Members to get involved.

### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

Local foundations in this study say they are already very engaged in this issue. They understand the challenges and seem willing to stay engaged for a long time. Their focus, however, goes beyond the river to include the effects on the surrounding communities. They worry about gentrification and will likely become increasingly involved in discussions on this challenge.

### Local Foundations

Most of the foundations in this focus group are already funding projects related to restoring the Anacostia. They are well-informed about this topic and feel that restoring the river is essential to improving the quality of life for DC residents – which is their main goal. This group sees the potential of a revitalized river and needs no convincing on this issue. They are actively engaged already and seem willing to continue supporting projects to restore the Anacostia.

The biggest concern for these foundations is gentrification and development. They see that a restored river will affect the communities that border it, and they want to ensure that development occurs carefully. For example, many hope that there will be set-asides for affordable housing and green spaces for the community to enjoy.

They dislike comparisons to the Baltimore Harbor and feel something on a smaller scale is better suited to the community. They want a balanced, mixed-use approach to development that will retain the integrity of the community.

### Developers, Land Owners and Community Development Organizations

This diverse group of participants is knowledgeable about the Anacostia, the sources of pollution, and the challenges of restoration. Their focus is squarely on the land bordering the river. All feel it is very valuable property. While the community development organizations express concern about gentrification and driving out long-time residents of the area, developers say that this is inevitable. Indeed, one developer suggests that this is not necessarily a negative outcome in

terms of restoring the Anacostia. His perspective was that higher income citizens who move into the newly developed properties along the river will eventually be the force that pushes for the restoration of the river. Simply put, they will not want to live next to a polluted river and will have the resources and incentive to push for change.

As mentioned, this same developer does not believe that a clean Anacostia is a pre-requisite for developing the land that borders it. There is a market for waterfront properties regardless of the polluted state of the river. This insight suggests that developers who own property along the river may not be compelled to push for clean-up efforts because they may not perceive it as necessary for their financial interests.

A final insight is that developers may only be compelled to consider low impact development if regulated to do so. This perspective came from a developer who said that his peers are likely to ignore concerns about the environmental impact on the river unless building regulations require them to do so.

#### STRATEGIC INSIGHT

Developers are not likely to be allies in restoration efforts because they lack a compelling reason to get involved. Landowners may be more willing to participate because they want to be seen as good neighbors and are quick to defend their effects on the river already. Community development organizations seem the most concerned about the effects of new development on the community. This suggests they may be easier to engage than developers or land owners.

### C. Communicating about the Anacostia River and Watershed

An important purpose of this study was to find ways to talk about restoring the Anacostia that would interest and involve a variety of stakeholders. The challenge is that audiences in this study seem to respond to different themes. This means that broad communications may not fully engage all the diverse audiences one may want to reach. Following are insights from those themes:

**Two basic facts grab the attention of the majority of audiences in this study: 1) the Anacostia River is among the most polluted in the country; and 2) the river is in violation of Federal laws.**

Most participants in this study – including staff members of politicians – were surprised to learn just how polluted the Anacostia is and that it is in violation of federal laws for pollution standards. Most participants find this unacceptable and quickly want to know what is being done to remedy the situation. However, it is not clear that simply hearing these facts is enough to spur someone to get involved. Indeed, some may find this information overwhelming. It seems essential to couple these kinds of facts with concrete actions steps (from very simple and easy tasks to more difficult, long-term actions) individuals or groups can take.

### **All audiences seem inspired by the river’s potential.**

Information showing the potential of a restored Anacostia River – with water that is swimmable and fishable – interests all audiences in this study. Many participants consider the river to be a neglected and underutilized resource and quickly see the benefits of restoring it. Even participants who are disconnected from the river say they would be likely to spend some recreational time along the river once it is restored. Most need to know (or be reminded of) the benefits of a restored river for themselves and others in their community.

### **Explain or show through images the Anacostia Watershed for Maryland residents.**

Explain the concept of a watershed or show through maps and pictures where Maryland residents fit into the watershed. This information is essential for Maryland residents who live far from the river. They feel disconnected currently and wonder why they should care. Importantly, also talk about how their local creek and stream feeds into the Anacostia River and eventually into the Chesapeake Bay.

Watershed information may need to be supplemented by an explanation of the general scope of the problem: who is responsible (in a shared context); what steps are being taken; what steps they can take to help; and how their efforts fit into the overall restoration planning. Without some explanation of the problem and the solution, many citizens are less likely to become involved placing the onus of responsibility on others they view as larger violators (e.g., big industry, Maryland residents upstream, DC residents downstream, etc).

### **Focus on economic opportunity, balanced development, and affordable housing issues for DC residents, local foundations, and community development organizations.**

Most DC residents, foundations, and community development organizations in this study find information about new economic investments and development in their communities of great interest. This is where most of their concerns lay with restoring the Anacostia. Without addressing their concerns, the perceived loss of affordable housing and the increased threat of gentrification become serious barriers to involvement in this effort. Most want to see these concerns addressed upfront as restoration efforts continue and not to be left solely as an afterthought.

### **Stress the need for jurisdictional responsibility and regional cooperation among DC, Prince George’s, and Montgomery County Councils.**

Most senior staff of Council Members in this study feel that restoring the Anacostia will require a regional solution. Most are aware of the complexities of the problems facing the river and none feel they can be solved in isolation. As a re-

sult, they are interested in learning how other jurisdictions have tackled their polluted waterways and about new technology that can help restore the Anacostia. They are very solution-oriented and want information about how local and regional agencies and departments can work together toward this common goal.

## **D. Strategic Recommendations**

Finally, a number of steps need to occur as a prerequisite for many of the audiences in this study to become *active* supporters of restoring the Anacostia River and Watershed. These include:

### **Fill Information Gaps**

Spread information, key facts, tips and ways to get involved in the clean-up efforts throughout the watershed (e.g., post maps of watershed, print facts on the backs of grocery receipts and bills, send information through the schools and use traditional advertisements). Information alone does not necessarily lead to action, but it is critical to making a connection to this issue. The most useful tools in raising awareness are the facts about the river itself, e.g., it is among the most polluted rivers in the country. These facts and the concept of a watershed are the single most powerful tools in addressing the largest barriers to action: a lack of awareness and a disconnect from this issue.

### **Foster Connections**

This study identifies some missed opportunities to reach out to key audiences, which is especially true for County Council Members. Since there seems to be an overall lack of ownership of the river, fostering these connections is very important. Continue to use environmental organizations as the messengers on this issue as they are the most trusted source of information.

### **Fine Tune the Vision of a Restored Anacostia**

Build on and develop a shared vision of a clean Anacostia. Many participants in this study are made hopeful by the possibilities.

### **Educate about Terminology**

The concept of a watershed is very powerful in creating an instant connection to the river, but is a difficult concept for many to understand. The actual terms themselves tend to be confusing without a moderate level of explanation. Either more education is needed around this terminology, or simpler language needs to be used to explain the concept of a watershed.

## Must Address Development, Too

It is very difficult to separate the restoration of the Anacostia from the influx of additional development and the threat of gentrification. This is a critical linkage many participants make and are concerned about. Without some discussion around limiting these consequences, many residents are hesitant to become involved in the restoration efforts, especially those living in the District. Discussions outlining some provisions to minimize the effects of gentrification (e.g., more affordable housing, mixed-use development, etc.) are needed.

## Appendix: Participant Profiles

**TABLE 3. PARTICIPANT PROFILES**

#	Group	Distinguishing Characteristics
1	Low and Moderate income DC residents in Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8	Majority with household incomes under \$50,000 *
2	Higher Income DC residents in the Capitol Hill Area	Majority with household incomes over \$50,000*
3	Montgomery County residents in the Anacostia Watershed	Mix of income and geographic diversity within county*
4	Prince George's County residents in the Anacostia Watershed	Mix of income and geographic diversity within county*
5	Senior Montgomery and Prince George's County Council Staff	Representing communities in the Anacostia Watershed
6	Senior Staff of US Congressional Committees and Members	Representing communities outside the DC Area**
7	Local Foundations with community and environmental focus	Leading foundations active in community development
8	Developers, Land Owners and Community Development Organizations	Currently or interested in developing land along the river
9	Senior Staff of DC Council	Representing DC residents

All groups were mixed gender and included a diversity of race and ethnicity where applicable.

\* Included a mix of ages, lengths of residency, park usage, and parents and non-parents.

\*\* Member and/or Committee covers: public works, water and natural resources, economic development, government affairs and appropriations.



**For more information, please contact:**

Linda Howard, Executive Director  
The Summit Fund of Washington  
2100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 525  
Washington, DC 20037  
202.912.2900 (t)  
202.912.2901 (f)  
[info@summitfund.org](mailto:info@summitfund.org)  
[www.summitfund.org](http://www.summitfund.org)