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Federal help to clean up the Patapsco accepted

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Baltimore's Patapsco River gets Federal assistance

By [Anna Renault](#), Baltimore Environmental News Examiner

Baltimore has an active environmental community dedicated to helping improve the thousands of miles of shoreline throughout the State's massive watershed. Yesterday, with a new partnership of federal agencies and local communities, the watershed got a major boost in its current restoration projects.

Administrative officials from the Federal government converged on Baltimore to announce a new initiative to clean up and redevelop blighted urban watersheds throughout the country. Only seven waterways were chosen nationwide to test this new partnership between the federal, state and local agencies working with local communities. Baltimore's Patapsco River was one of the seven chosen!

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) along with the departments of the Interior, Agriculture and Housing & Urban Development has agreed to work with other federal agencies and local governments. The government counterparts will work with nonprofit groups to reduce pollution and enhance urban neighborhoods. Projects will include shore clean-up and planting trees while providing jobs in the urban area parks.

"Urban waters across our nation are brimming with potential," EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson said at a news conference in Middle Branch Park, as fishing boats were observed in the water behind her. "We can revitalize these areas," she added, saying the initiative sought to return the waterways to the community attractions they once were.

Unfortunately, the Patapsco watershed typifies the problems of so many urban waterways according to officials attending the press conference. It is among the least healthy tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay. The river is strewn with trash and debris making it unfit to swim in. Fishermen are warned against eating certain fish because of the river's contamination with toxic wastes.

Waterfront businesses and community groups have pledged to make the river swimmable and fishable by the end of the decade.

"You've picked the right place here in the Patapsco," Maryland Senator Benjamin L. Cardin told the visiting federal officials. "It's a vulnerable watershed, but the commitment is here to make a difference."

No new funding is attached to the effort, but officials say they intend to make better use of existing money by getting agencies to work together, making better use of the dollars available. Michael Rains of the U.S. Forest Service said his agency — which has had a field station in Baltimore for nearly 20 years — figures it might be able to come up with \$500,000 to spend on projects in the Patapsco watershed, such as planting trees and restoring eroded stream banks.

Jackson said the EPA will look for ways to help Baltimore save money by adjusting federal regulations to encourage less costly ways of reducing storm-water pollution from city streets and parking lots.

The federal agencies aim to work with the city to develop a plan for connecting and improving natural areas such as forests and streams with parks, trails, community gardens and urban farms. They also intend to help plant trees and restore schoolyards, as well as offer environmental education and career training for youths.

Local environmental activists welcomed the pledge of federal help. But they also expressed a major concern:

"Let's not make this a bureaucratic, paper-chasing thing," said Halle Van der Gaag, deputy director of Blue Water Baltimore, the harbor watershed watchdog group. "Let's focus on implementation and getting something done."

Across the country other urban waterways were chosen to help this pilot project. They are the Anacostia River in Washington and its Maryland suburbs, the Bronx and Harlem rivers in New York, Lake Pontchartrain area in New Orleans, the Los Angeles River in California, the South Platte River in Denver, and an area of northwest Indiana bordering Lake Michigan.

Baltimore's environmental groups were eager to accept the assistance offered by this new Urban Waterway Partnership Project.

NOTE:

The information in this article was gleaned from several sources including:

Tim Wheller, Reporter, *The Baltimore Sun*, 501 S. Calvert St., PO BOX 1377, MD 21278-0001.
tim.wheeler@baltsun.com; two emails from reporters at WJZ TV and WBAL TV NEWS; and information provided to me by Senator Ben Cardin's office and the Environmental Protection Agency website. Several sources provided the same information.

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