

## CITYDESK

# Love You, Anacostia River, No Matter What

Posted by **Shani Hilton** on Sep. 30, 2011 at 4:17 pm

The *Post* magazine has a love letter to the Anacostia River this week, including pastoral pictures and a history of the river:

“The river was seen as a vein of Mother Earth; it was salty, like blood, and it tasted like blood,” says **Gabrielle Tayac**, a Piscataway Indian (the closest descendants the Nacotchtanks have left) and historian at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian. “It was part of the living system.”



In June 1608, **John Smith** sailed up the Chesapeake Bay to the Potomac and its eastern branch, what would become known as the Anacostia. Buffered by thick forests, the Anacostia was 40 feet deep as far north as what is now Bladensburg, and Smith marveled at its clarity.

Then the Europeans put a crushing end to this Edenic idyll. By the time of the Civil War, the Anacostia was nearly a dead thing. And then it got worse.

There's lots more, like the story of one the country's oldest black yacht clubs, and the young people who work to clean up the river. And it reminds me of the more pragmatic look **Alex Baca** took at the state of the river earlier this year:

Sure, it's common knowledge that the Anacostia is in bad shape. But the report—a joint effort between the Anacostia Watershed Society and the office of the Anacostia Riverkeeper that will be repeated

yearly from now on—makes it clear just how unhealthy the river actually is.

The report contains a Water Quality Report Card and a Political Report Card. The former rates dissolved oxygen, fecal bacteria, water clarity, and chlorophyll in three separate portions of the river (Maryland and upper and lower D.C.); the latter, whether or not jurisdictions surrounding the river are making good strides in environmental policy. (Though a political report card that included a section on fecal bacteria might not be a bad idea.)

Some highlights: Montgomery County has stormwater regulations and has clearly stated an improved Anacostia River is desirable, but Prince George's County and the state of Maryland do not have stable stormwater ordinances and have not expressed interest in cleaning up the river. D.C. has passed the bag tax, but has stalled on cleaning up known toxic sites like Poplar Point. It'll take 4,063 years for water clarity to improve in the upper D.C. portion of the Anacostia, and 55 for fecal bacteria to no longer be in issue in the Maryland portion.

## Comments

**andrew**

September 30th,  
2011  
5:11 pm

#1

I've got to object to the use of the photo accompanying this article.

I've been rowing on the Anacostia almost every day for the past year, and I've never seen remotely as much trash in the river as what's depicted in the photo.

Yes, trash does wash into the river after a big storm, but the quantities are not even remotely close to what's depicted. You're doing a disservice to the river, and to the people who have worked diligently to clean it up so that scenes like the one in the photo are now a thing of the past.

Preventing large pieces of trash from washing into the stream is actually a fairly simple problem, and one that we're on our way to solving in the very near future. On the other hand, chemical contaminants and agricultural runoff cannot be seen, and pose a much more serious threat to the river's health.

The Anacostia is a hidden treasure to the District, and we should be doing

everything in our power to restore it to a pristine condition.

**mykl**  
October 1st, 2011  
10:40 am

#2

I agree that this photo is a poor representation of what the river is like today. Maybe back in the early to mid-90s the surface of the river was this polluted, but times have changed.

I know that there has been a lot of effort to restore the river: to clean up the trash and improve water quality. What makes a difference, though, is getting people to discard their trash properly, not in the street and not in the river. If people took better pride in their community, the river wouldn't suffer as bad.

With regard to Andrew's comment that chemicals pose a serious threat to the health of the river, I agree. Toxins from the street, from appliances, and from autos are some of the main contributors of the river's poor health. It will take a huge effort to rectify this problem, but it's not impossible.

To help the river survive, please take the time to see it for yourself and then decide what you can do to make it better. Whether planting some flowers, picking up empty bottles or plastic bags, you can make a difference.

**blkwrestl**  
October 2nd, 2011  
7:14 pm

#3

grow up the picture represents what marland and virginia dore to dc

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