



ANACOSTIA WATERSHED SOCIETY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Clean Water Act Permit a Step Toward Clean Rivers in DC

Washington, DC, October 5, 2011... The District of Columbia will be a national leader for strong stormwater pollution standards based on a new permit issued today by the Environmental Protection Agency, according to the Anacostia Watershed Society, Audubon Naturalist Society, Clean Water Action, DC Environmental Network, and Natural Resources Defense Council.

Every time it rains, dirt, oil, toxic chemicals, heavy metals, bacteria, and trash wash into the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, local streams and other bodies of water through the city's separate sewer system.

Under the permit issued today, newly developed and redeveloped properties will have to retain 1.2 inches of rainfall on-site through the use of green infrastructure controls like green roofs, rain gardens, and trees planted along streets. This means that no pollution will run off into the District's waterways from new or redeveloped buildings or parking lots during 90 percent of rainstorms, according to EPA modeling.

This level is an improvement over permits issued for other cities, which in some cases do not specify an amount of rainfall to be retained and in others do not set a level that provides enough protection.

"The permit's requirements will help revitalize urban areas in our nation's capital," said Brent Bolin, director of advocacy for the Anacostia Watershed Society. "The green infrastructure practices now required are effective, affordable pollution controls that will create local jobs, building projects and improve the quality of life of District residents."

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Unlike pipes and underground tanks normally used to control stormwater pollution, studies show that green infrastructure can increase property values and attract economic development in addition to improving water quality.

“Just over an inch of rainfall may not seem like a lot of water, but this is actually one of the strongest requirements in the country,” said Rebecca Hammer, a water attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council. “This standard sets a new benchmark for stormwater permits regionally and nationwide.”

The permit also requires a portion of existing buildings and paved areas to be retrofitted to this new standard, but it falls short of the restoration that is necessary to address these areas’ contribution to the pollution problems that plague District water bodies and the Chesapeake Bay.

At the same time, the permit misses an important opportunity by leaving out meaningful requirements for the District to meet its own water quality standards for a host of pollutants. This leaves the city unaccountable to residents for contributing to conditions that impair waterways for fishing and swimming.

“Ultimately, the permit’s success or failure in cleaning up our waterways will depend on how the District implements it,” Bolin said. “The local environmental community will be keeping close tabs on that process.”

About the Anacostia Watershed Society

The Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS) is dedicated to cleaning the water, recovering the shoreline, and honoring the heritage of the Anacostia River and its watershed communities in Washington, DC and Maryland. Since 1989, AWS has worked to conserve and protect the land and water of the Anacostia River and its watershed communities through educational programs, stewardship efforts, and advocacy projects. AWS works to make the Anacostia River and its tributaries swimmable and fishable as required by the Clean Water Act. For more information about AWS, visit www.anacostiaws.org.