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A Small Price to Pay For a Healthier Anacostia River

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By DOTTIE YUNGER AND JIM
CONNOLLY
Washington
Sunday, April 5, 2009



Trash piles up in February on the Anacostia River, one of the region's most polluted waterways. (By Jacquelyn Martin - Associated Press)

As stewards of the Anacostia River, we can tell you that there is nothing to "debate" ["Bill to Charge Consumers for Bags Prompts Debate," [Metro](#), April 2] about the Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Act of 2009. The Anacostia River has been burdened with trash for far too long, and this legislation represents a great step toward cleaning it up.

Under this legislation, shoppers in the District could either bring in their own carryout bag or pay a fee of five cents per disposable plastic or paper bag. Fees would go to the Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Fund and to provide free reusable bags to seniors and low-income residents.



Similar legislation has been introduced in the Maryland General Assembly by Del. Alfred C. Carr Jr. (D-Montgomery). If passed, Marylanders would also have the choice of whether to bring their own bags shopping, forgo the use of a bag altogether when one is not needed, or purchase one for five cents from the retailer. Proceeds from this program would go to the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays 2010 Trust Fund.

Every year, 20,000 tons of trash enter the Anacostia River, leaving a dirty and neglected river running through our neighborhoods. According to a recent study by the D.C. Department of the Environment, bags make up nearly 50 percent of the trash in the river's tributaries and 21 percent of the trash in the main river.

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To date, Anacostia Watershed Society volunteers have removed more than 842 tons of debris from the watershed; the D.C. Water and Sewer Authority removes 477 tons of trash from the Anacostia River each year. Cleanups are important efforts, but they target only existing trash. The District has made strides in its recycling program, accepting many types of plastics, but recycling alone hasn't kept the trash and litter out of the river. We need to target the source.

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The bags that we get for free at stores are not really free. These bags already cost D.C. residents millions of tax dollars each year in trash cleanup and recycling costs, and residents pay for this through their monthly water bills.

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It has been far too long since people in the District could fully enjoy the Anacostia River. Restoring the river would return to the residents a public asset that they could use and enjoy. A healthy river would allow for all types of recreation that have long been denied to neighboring residents. And a

reclaimed river would support additional economic development that brings jobs and opportunities to the people of Washington. In light of these benefits, we think that five cents is a small price to pay.

The writers are, respectively, Anacostia Riverkeeper and president of the Anacostia Watershed Society. The Riverkeeper position is funded by the Earth Conservation Corps and the Anacostia Watershed Society.

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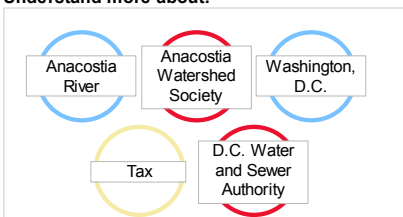
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