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Feds to announce new urban waters effort in Bmore



A batch of top Obama administration officials are coming to Baltimore Friday to announce a new "urban waters" initiative. Nice to see they're getting out of Washington and maybe recognizing that the Patapsco River, rated the sickest waterway in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, is every bit in need of help as the DC area's Anacostia River.

Middle Branch Park in South Baltimore is to be the setting for the late-morning announcement. **Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa P. Jackson** and **Interior Secretary Ken Salazar** are among the officials scheduled to be there, as are the White House's environmental and domestic policy advisers and high-level agriculture and housing officials.

The media advisory put out by EPA gives no details, other than to call it a "new initiative to restore and revitalize waterways in cities across the nation." EPA has been pushing something called the "**Urban Waters Movement**," aimed at helping communities - especially underserved ones - to improve and benefit from their waterways.

Under that program, EPA has offered "partnerships" with local governments and community groups, but it seems a little short on money to finance improvements or even the promise of greater regulatory attention to spur cleanup. At least there's no prominent mention on EPA's [website](#) of those two traditional federal tools for driving environmental restoration.

Though unsure whether this promises real or mostly symbolic support, local environmental and community activists say privately they're pleased to get top-level Obama administration officials here and to have Baltimore included in a nationwide effort that until now has showered most of its attention in this region on the Anacostia.

Not that DC's "other river" (besides the Potomac) doesn't need help, but EPA played an active role there that it has yet to demonstrate in the Baltimore harbor watershed, which some scientists have rated the most degraded spot overall in the entire Chesapeake watershed. The agency, for instance, was involved in the development of an ambitious restoration plan for the **Anacostia** and has pushed through a mandatory trash cleanup plan and tighter requirements on the District and its suburbs to reduce polluted runoff via storm water.

By comparison, it's been Baltimore's **Waterfront Partnership**, a coalition of business and civic groups, taking the lead in drafting a restoration plan for the harbor. And **local activists**, with some help and encouragement from city and state, provided the spark for getting pollution diets ordered for the harbor to reduce the trash and sewage fouling it.

President Obama directed his administration to take the lead in jump-starting the lagging Chesapeake Bay restoration effort, but that apparently hasn't extended to the tributaries of the bay - at least not yet. EPA has been more cheerleader than player or even coach in the fledgling harbor restoration effort.

It will be interesting to see if this announcement is the beginning of a new, more active role in reclaiming Baltimore's troubled waters. With housing and domestic policy officials due for the event here, perhaps the administration will somehow coordinate better its economic and community development programs to help green and revitalize urban and older suburban neighborhoods - which many local activists see as key to any effort to halt the torrent of trash and storm water pollution fouling our urban waters.

(Trash floats in the water off Middle Branch Park. 2010 Baltimore Sun photo by Kim Hairston)

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