



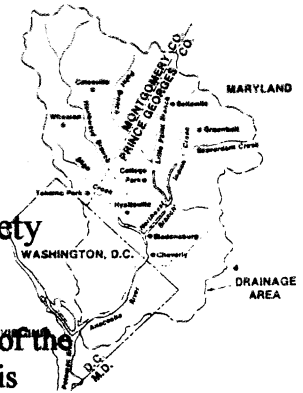
Anacostia Watershed Society

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Statement of Robert E. Boone, President, Anacostia Watershed Society



Good morning. My name is Robert Boone, and I am the president and founder of the Anacostia Watershed Society. AWS is a local environmental organization that is working to restore the Anacostia River to a swimmable and fishable condition. We engage thousands of volunteers each year to take part in this restoration through volunteer projects such as river cleanups and tree plantings. These volunteers invest their time and energy in these tasks because they share the common belief that our rivers are worth fighting for and protecting, and their commitment codifies this fact.

AWS also engages thousands of children each year in environmental education programs designed to teach them about the Anacostia River, and the relationship our land based activities have on its health. These kids participate in classroom education modules, and then have the opportunity to tour the Anacostia by canoe. These trips are always well received, and serve to strengthen the connection that the students have with their local environment. In addition to our educational canoe tours, AWS also organizes an annual paddlesport regatta on the river, which draws hundreds of citizens to the river for an afternoon of competitive and fun canoe, kayak and rowing shell races. Generations of children have grown up fearing the Anacostia due to its polluted condition. This is not right. Our regatta serves as a way to reintroduce the river to Washington. We believe that usage of the river builds stewardship, and we work hard to bring as many people to its waters as possible.

For the past two years, Anacostia Watershed Society has been conducting a water quality monitoring program on the tidal Anacostia River, testing for the presence of fecal coliform bacteria. The data collected show that, consistently, in both a wet year and a dry year, the fecal coliform bacteria levels were higher in the Bladensburg, Maryland stretches of the Anacostia, than in the District of Columbia. This is more astonishing when one learns that the samples in the District were taken directly in front of a combined sewer overflow pipe, which is designed to release a mixture of raw sewage and stormwater directly into the river. DNA tracking tests that we conducted on water samples from the Bladensburg Waterfront Park show that the fecal coliform is of 14% human origin. This is way too high. It should be zero percent. One can only conclude that WSSC's crumbling infrastructure is the culprit.

The disarray in the governance of WSSC has health as well as economic fall-outs. Addressing the question of sewer overflows and pipeline maintenance requires an organization wide effort, with clear directions from the board, effective management by senior staff, and careful and diligent work by teams in the field. This is not happening and is not likely to happen under the current board. We have been disappointed in the failure of the county executives to take control of this deteriorating governance situation by appointing a new board. While we have some hope that the legislature may intervene, we believe that a possible court involvement is some insurance that WSSC will be



induced to get its house in order. We are not eager for a law suit. Though we have had many conversations with WSSC staff and board, there seems to be no one with the capacity to act authoritatively on this vital health issue. We understand that EPA and the state of Maryland are contemplating enforcement action. We are deeply concerned, however, that their efforts will be inadequate.

Today's letter at heart is a challenge to the counties, the state and the feds to straighten out the mess at WSSC in the next 60 days. Eliminating raw sewage overflows in a system as large and complicated as WSSC's requires outstanding management and clear executive direction. Neither of which seems to be present at this time. The public health dimension to this crisis in management is so severe that we feel compelled to act with dispatch.

Just this year alone, a conservative estimate of over 75,000 gallons of raw sewage has been illegally discharged into the Anacostia by WSSC. This is a serious public health hazard, and a tremendously negative blow to the quality of life for everyone in the Anacostia basin. It is outrageous that in the 21st century, raw sewage is being dumped into our river. This is wrong, and needs to be stopped. We want our river back!