

Anacostia River Swimming: A Path Forward

Gretchen Mikeska, P.E., (gretchen.mikeska@dc.gov) (Department of Energy & Environment, Washington, DC)

Background/Objectives. Bathing, swimming or wading in the waters of the District of Columbia (i.e., Tidal Basin, C&O Canal, Rock Creek, Potomac River, Anacostia River, Washington Channel, or Georgetown Channel), except for the purpose of saving a drowning person, has been prohibited since 1971. The Anacostia River is now positioned to become a new site for urban river swimming due to successful execution of a number of projects and initiatives that will enable the Anacostia River to consistently meet water quality standards. These projects include DC Water's Clean River Project that will reduce combined sewer overflows by 98%. Cleanup of the river sediments is the focus of the Anacostia River Sediment Project (ARSP) that is being implemented by the Department of Energy & Environment for the District of Columbia (DOEE) in partnership with the National Park Service (NPS). This project is currently on track for a 2019 Record of Decision (ROD) that will identify the cleanup remedy for the river and outline the process for implementation.

Approach/Activities. DOEE's overall goal is for a fishable/ swimmable Anacostia River, as prescribed by the Clean Water Act (CWA). DOEE has a number of initiatives underway as the Anacostia River moves toward becoming a swimmable urban river.

Increased sampling to ensure water quality standards are achieved. Beginning in 2018, DOEE increased its water quality sampling for E. coli, pH, and turbidity from monthly sampling to daily sampling at six sites. DOEE will oversee a volunteer water quality monitoring project that will commence in the summer 2018. DOEE granted \$150,000 to NGOs to develop a 3-year program to recruit, coordinate and train volunteers; produce volunteer training materials, cover costs of monitoring supplies; analyze water samples collected by the volunteers; and generate publicly accessible on-line data.

Exemptions to the District Swim Ban. As early as 2019, DOEE may allow special swimming events in the Anacostia River as long as water quality standards are met at the time of the event. On April 6, 2018, DOEE published proposed rulemaking in the DC Register that amends the 1971 ban on swimming that restricts swimming in District waters. The overall goal is to lift the District Swim Ban as soon as standards for Class A beneficial use (bacterial, pH, turbidity) are consistently maintained.

Feasibility Study: Roadmap to Swimming in the Anacostia River. The Smithgroup JJR, as a donation to the Anacostia Waterfront Trust (AWT) and working with DOEE and NPS, will prepare a feasibility study that will assess urban swimming alternatives for the Anacostia River. The study will evaluate swim structures (e.g., swim platforms, beaches, and docks) in up to seven locations along the river, considering design, overall neighborhood access, equity, management, and costs for each alternative.

Results/Lessons Learned. To prepare for a swimmable Anacostia River, DOEE is following examples in both the United States and Europe. The Charles River is an excellent example of how a formerly industrial river can begin to prepare for urban river swimming. DOEE is also reviewing success stories from a number of European cities (e.g., Copenhagen, Gothenburg) that feature urban river swimming.