



WATER RESOURCES RESEARCH GRANT PROPOSAL

Title: Anacostia Urban River Issues Study

Focus Categories: WCL

Keywords: Environmental Equity, Environmental Reclamation

Duration: March 1, 2000 to February 28, 2001

FY2000 Federal Funds: \$16,863

FY2000 Non-Federal Funds: \$26,118

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Problems and Objectives

The Anacostia River watershed is located in Prince Georges Co. MD, Montgomery Co. MD., and Washington, DC. This study will dwell exclusively on the segment of the river within the borders of the District of Columbia. The Anacostia river is a tidal river and one of the tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay, which is a one of the largest estuaries in the world. In recent years there has been an ever increasing demand for urban river restoration projects. This demand has been sparked by the amount of pollution that these rivers have endured over the years. Environmental degradation and other adverse effects emanating from pollution have indeed paved the way for some segments of the population to call for and initiate meaningful policies designed to restore these dying urban rivers. There are many such efforts in the United States. Amongst them are projects such as the Bronx River restoration project in New York and the Charleston River project in South Carolina. On the other hand, heavily polluted river basins such as the Anacostia

River basin have not been accorded the attention they deserve. This reluctant attitude by policy makers has raised some very serious questions. There are those who question the efficacy of existing policies vis-a-vis river restoration projects, as well as those who claim that the failure to clear the river basin rests on an issue of environmental equity. Whatever the reasons for this sad state of the Anacostia River; the paramount issue that confronts us is how we can implement the restoration of this precious resource to a healthy state and sustain and monitor this restoration. Numerous conferences have been held, position papers have been written and proposed river rejuvenation projects have been circulated and as of this date it seems that little or nothing has occurred to bring the river into compliance with clean water parameters. River pollution is a by-product of pollution from industrial and agricultural sources, result of the effects of urbanization. These problems are not only creating environmental degradation but are constantly being cited as a cause of serious health problems afflicting the local population. In order to arrive at viable solutions designed to address these problems, it is imperative that a comprehensive approach to these problems will be applied. This approach would include the investigation and contribution of all stakeholders-the community, the private and the public sectors. It's against such a backdrop that this proposal is going to examine the socio/environmental rationale for the lack of a concerted approach to the Anacostia rejuvenation projects. The study will attempt to address the following problems:

- Whether conditions on and in the Anacostia River can be cited as issues of environmental equity.
- Industrial uses of the river and its banks; are they polluting and if so did the community have any say in siting these industries?
- How have industries and government responded to community complaints and concerns?
- Pollution due to: Industrial Use, Human Use, Toxic sediments from upstream agriculture.
- Fishing in the river as related to some cases of human infection and disease

Despite problems identified there hasn't been any meaningful or concerted action. As a result the question then arises, is it by design or omission that these problems have existed for an unreasonable length of time or is it that there isn't any active community involvement or community clout to restore this river to a healthy state? The issues raised provide a compelling justification for an intense examination of the non biological or societal factors which may be responsible for this catastrophe.

Statement of Results and Benefits

This study will identify some of the societal problems that are responsible for the environmental degradation of the Anacostia River. It will identify societal perceptions of the part industry and government play and have played in addressing this degradation. The society around the river will be used as a laboratory to help understand the problems that plague the river. This information will be very important in understanding the problems identified, as well as in designing, formulating, evaluating and implementing environmental policies that if implemented will assist in restoring the aquatic life and

general health of the river. Furthermore, the product of this study will add significantly to an understanding of some of the adverse medical health conditions afflicting the local population that have resulted from the consumption of contaminated fish harvested from this polluted river in particular and the Chesapeake Bay in general. Therefore, cleaning the Anacostia River, a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay will be beneficial to not only the local population; but it will be cost effective to all the regional governments that surround this river in the long run. It should be noted that this river doesn't serve only the southeastern area of Washington, DC.

This study will function as the preliminary identification of issues to be discussed in a proposed stakeholders' conference on the implementation of reclamation efforts in the Anacostia River basin.

Nature, scope and objectives of the study

The methods to be used in this study will include the utilization of primary data (samples survey) as well as the use of secondary data (literature from similar studies conducted on other urban restoration projects such as the Bronx river project in New York.) The use of sample survey as a technique of study in this project will not only assist in defining the problems that afflict this river, but will assist in distilling the essence of the study. The sample to be used in this study will include a cross-section of the riverside population (wards 5,6,7,and 8). The probing areas in the survey will include income, race, gender, habits, civic and community involvement, government action, knowledge of environmental issues, perceptions and attitudes about the river, use of the river. The data will then be analyzed and published.

Methods, procedures and facilities

The primary methods to be employed in this study will include:

A random sample telephone survey approach will be the primary method of data collection, with a backup of selected on-site household surveys.

Sample survey, and secondary sources such as-general publications, letters from officials, textbook literature and other original research will be used as a data bank. Relevant materials from these sources will be used to distill the essence of the study.

Facilities available to the research team include students at the University of the District of Columbia with telephone survey capabilities, and data analysis capabilities. There is also an office on campus with a computer, printer, and scanner which is capable of generating Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps related to the research as well as performing data analysis and maintenance. This off~ce and facilities are available to the research team for the duration of the project. The study will commence March 2000 and be completed by February 2001.

Review of Related Literature

In the May/June 1999 issue of Public Health Reports an article titled, "More research needed to ensure environmental justice, stated that a committee of the Institute for Medicine is calling for more research on direct links between health problems of poor communities and industrial pollution from industry sited in poorer communities. A literature search by that committee identified communities exposed to higher levels of pollutants "are not well equipped to deal with them because of limited involvement in the political process." Although the subject of environmental justice has been an important research topic since the early 1980s, there has been no research on this subject vis-a-vis the Anacostia River and its basin. The Federal government in the mid-1980s funded such research through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), however for the past two years and into the foreseeable future, the EPA has indicated that there will be few Federal funds allocated through the EPA for this type of research. In the Bronx River and Charleston River projects cited above, an environmental justice component was included within the overall research project. Additionally, a recent tactic of industry is to demonize environmental justice issues and programs by claiming that it puts a strain on state resources to implement equity programs by calling environmental racism a hoax and environmental justice programs a block to development, and by engaging in risk management research which purports to balance economic benefits with environmental threats.

Anonymous, 1999, "More research needed to ensure environmental justice," Hyattsville, Public Health Reports, 113(3): 208.

Social science research on issues related to the Anacostia River basin has been conspicuously lacking. However, some studies on the biological, chemical or environmental effects of pollution on the Anacostia itself or as a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay have been conducted. In these studies the community's role essentially has been limited to that of observers. This in itself is problematic because it not only ill-defines the scope of the problem but it marginalizes the gravity and nature of the problem.

Literature Cited

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Whitehead, 1999, New York, "Managing environmental justice risks," The CPA Journal, 69(8): 30-33.

Also see USGS project # (Harriette Phelps Sediment Project) for some biological studies on the Anacostia River cited.

Also see the 1997 EPA report # 903-R-97-027 entitled "An Environmental Characterization of the District of Columbia: A Scientific Foundation for Setting an Environmental Agenda" for many references to research on the Anacostia in the references section.