



THE RIVER BENEATH THE RIVER

THE ANACOSTIA FLOWS INTO A BETTER FUTURE.

BY JENNIFER REUT

KRISTA SCHLYER



FOR A LONG TIME, the Anacostia River didn't even have a name. It was just the Eastern Branch, the other, less promising section of Washington, D.C.'s better known and more distinguished river, the Potomac. But it was always known as a fortunate course to the Nacotchtank, the Native Americans who used it as a trading post, and later to the European colonists who relied on the river's deep port at Bladensburg, Maryland, to carry tobacco, and to the generations of farmers, tradesmen, and laborers who never seemed to run out of fish, fowl, and game to hunt. For nearly nine miles, the Anacostia eased in and out with the tide, with no particular urgency, toward its confluence with the Potomac, tracing an unhurried flow through thousands of acres of tidal wetlands.

Of course, that was before the port and the shipping channels silted up in the 19th century from agricultural misuse; before the river was flushed with sewage, pesticides, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) that embedded in the sediment and eventually in the fish populations that fed local residents; before sections were channelized and controlled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; before it was the site of an open-fire landfill that killed a seven-year-old child, Kelvin Tyrone Mock, and regularly spewed toxic smoke into the city's predominantly African American neighborhoods; before more than 600 tons of trash found its way into the river each year. Before all that, the Anacostia was abundant.

And so it may be again, if in a more modest way. This year, 2018, is the Year of the Anacostia, a celebration of the past 15 years of effort dedicated

ABOVE
The Anacostia River once had an estimated 2,500 acres of wetlands. Restored and extant wetlands now cover some 180 acres, primarily in the upper reaches of the river.

KRISTA SCHLYER



an example of environmental failures writ large onto the city's poorest and most vulnerable. Spurred by the 1972 Clean Water Act, the city is now aiming for a fishable, swimmable river by 2032, though the Anacostia Watershed Society, a local advocacy organization, is targeting 2025. Pri-

vately, some environmental advocates tell me the river may be swimmable even sooner. The story of the Anacostia River (which finally acquired a name derived from indigenous nomenclature) could easily be written as a parable for all the woes we have visited on our urban waterways and on vulnerable communities trapped in

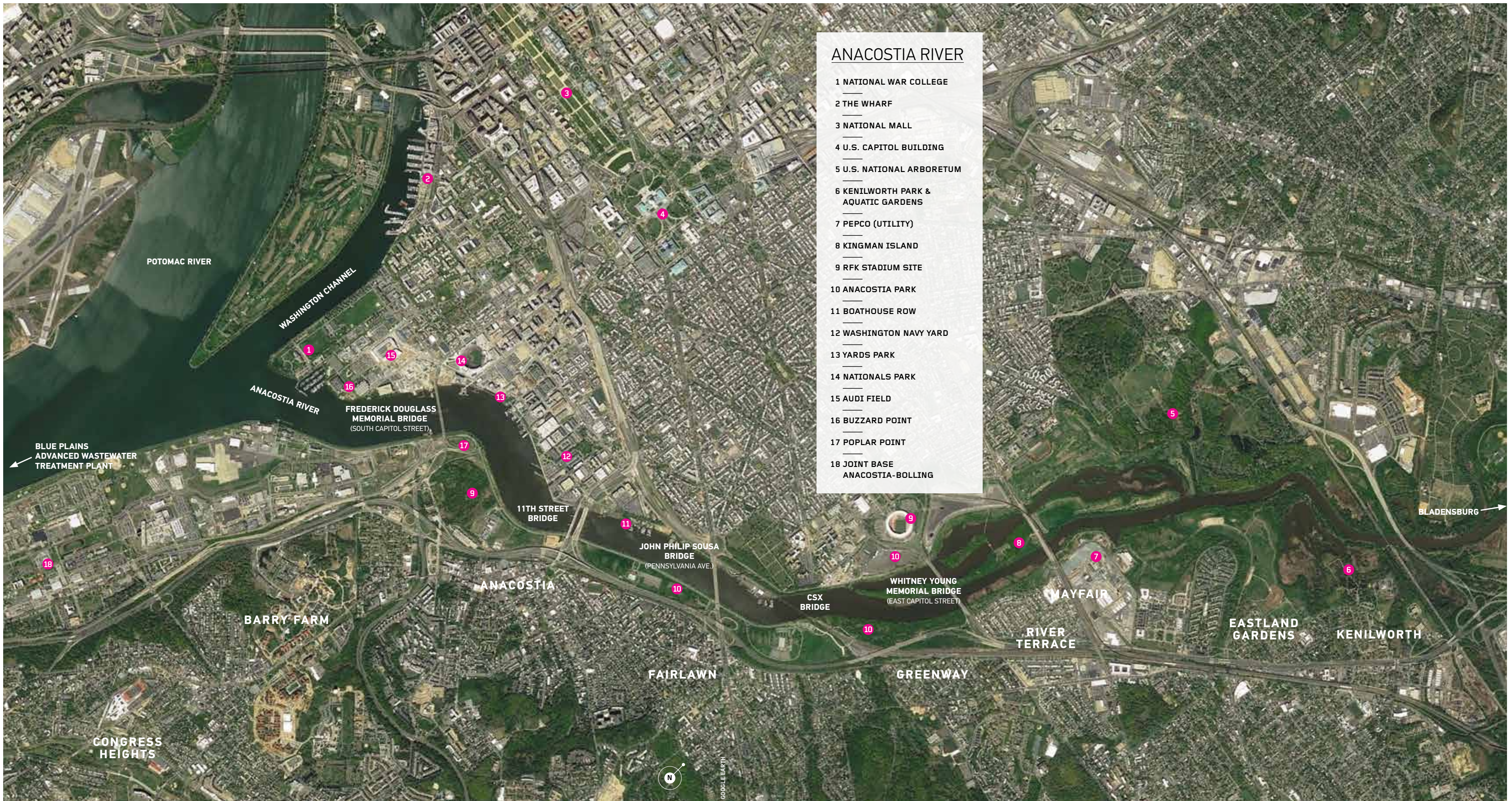
to transforming the river through economic, transportation, recreation, and environmental initiatives spearheaded by the District of Columbia, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and dozens of nonprofit citizen organizations. Fifteen years ago, when the city of Washington, D.C., released the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative Framework Plan, the river was a national embarrassment—



TOP
A muskrat's habitat on the Anacostia River includes plastic bottles, now the most common form of trash in the river.

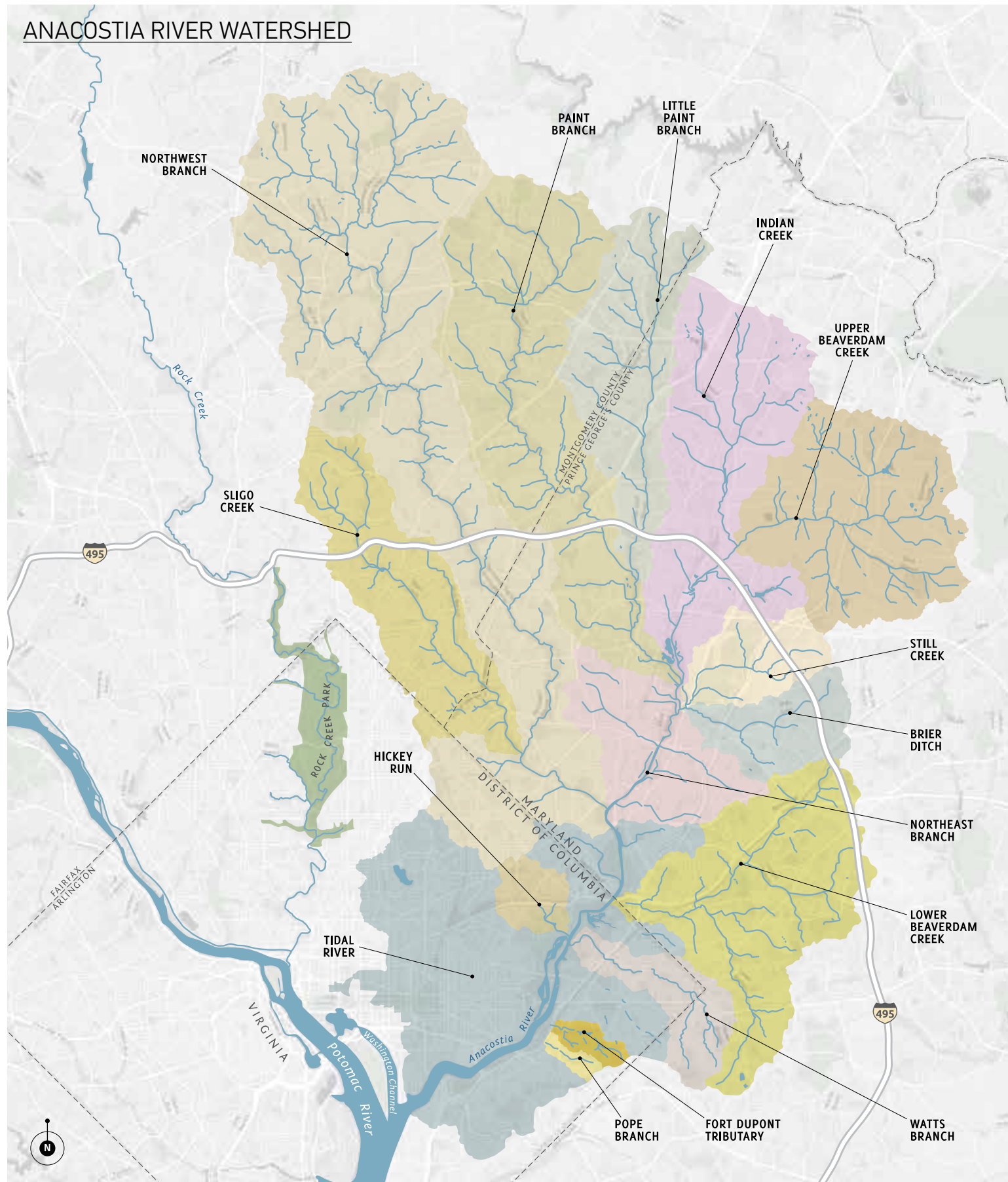
LEFT
The tidal flow of the river is slow, stranding trash and other pollutants on its banks.

KRISTA SCHLYER



- ### ANACOSTIA RIVER
- 1 NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE
 - 2 THE WHARF
 - 3 NATIONAL MALL
 - 4 U.S. CAPITOL BUILDING
 - 5 U.S. NATIONAL ARBORETUM
 - 6 KENILWORTH PARK & AQUATIC GARDENS
 - 7 PEPCO (UTILITY)
 - 8 KINGMAN ISLAND
 - 9 RFK STADIUM SITE
 - 10 ANACOSTIA PARK
 - 11 BOATHOUSE ROW
 - 12 WASHINGTON NAVY YARD
 - 13 YARDS PARK
 - 14 NATIONALS PARK
 - 15 AUDI FIELD
 - 16 BUZZARD POINT
 - 17 POPLAR POINT
 - 18 JOINT BASE ANACOSTIA-BOLLING

ANACOSTIA RIVER WATERSHED



ABOVE
One of the river's many tributary creeks and streams.

↳ the worst environmental calamities. Now poised on the edge of a hard-won environmental recovery, the river might become yet another case study in urban waterfront renewal and exploding economic development, followed by gentrification and displacement and a sense of regret, if not action, over lost opportunities and a lost sense of place.

That the Anacostia flows through the east side of the nation's capital, cutting off the city's poorest people and isolating their neighborhoods from its more prosperous mainland, as it were, further tempts observers to draw pointed parallels between the river's story and the country's inability to confront the interdependencies of race and environmental and economic justice. The east-side neighborhoods are predominantly female and African American. They experience the city's highest prevalence of asthma, cancer, and infant mortality, to name just a few of the significant health indicators that disproportionately affect residents. There is a chronic lack of services and economic investment.

Those stories are all true, but the parallels can be heavy handed. They keep you from seeing the river as a unique human ecology. The river deserves a better story. The Anacostia deserves complexity.

Krista Schlyer is a conservation photographer and writer who lives near the river's upper reaches in Maryland and has spent several years observing and photographing the Anacostia. Her book, *River of Redemption: Almanac of Life on the Anacostia* (Texas A&M University Press, 2018), documents the recovery of the river habitat, but also the persistence of pollution and continued environmental crises. It's the coexistence of these two qualities that makes the Anacostia unexpectedly compelling.

The recovery of the river ecosystem is most visible in the rebounding and persistence of wildlife, particularly in the stretch of the river around Kingman and Heritage Islands and the National Arboretum. For D.C. residents familiar with a different, more contaminated version of the river, the

DOLLY HOLMES

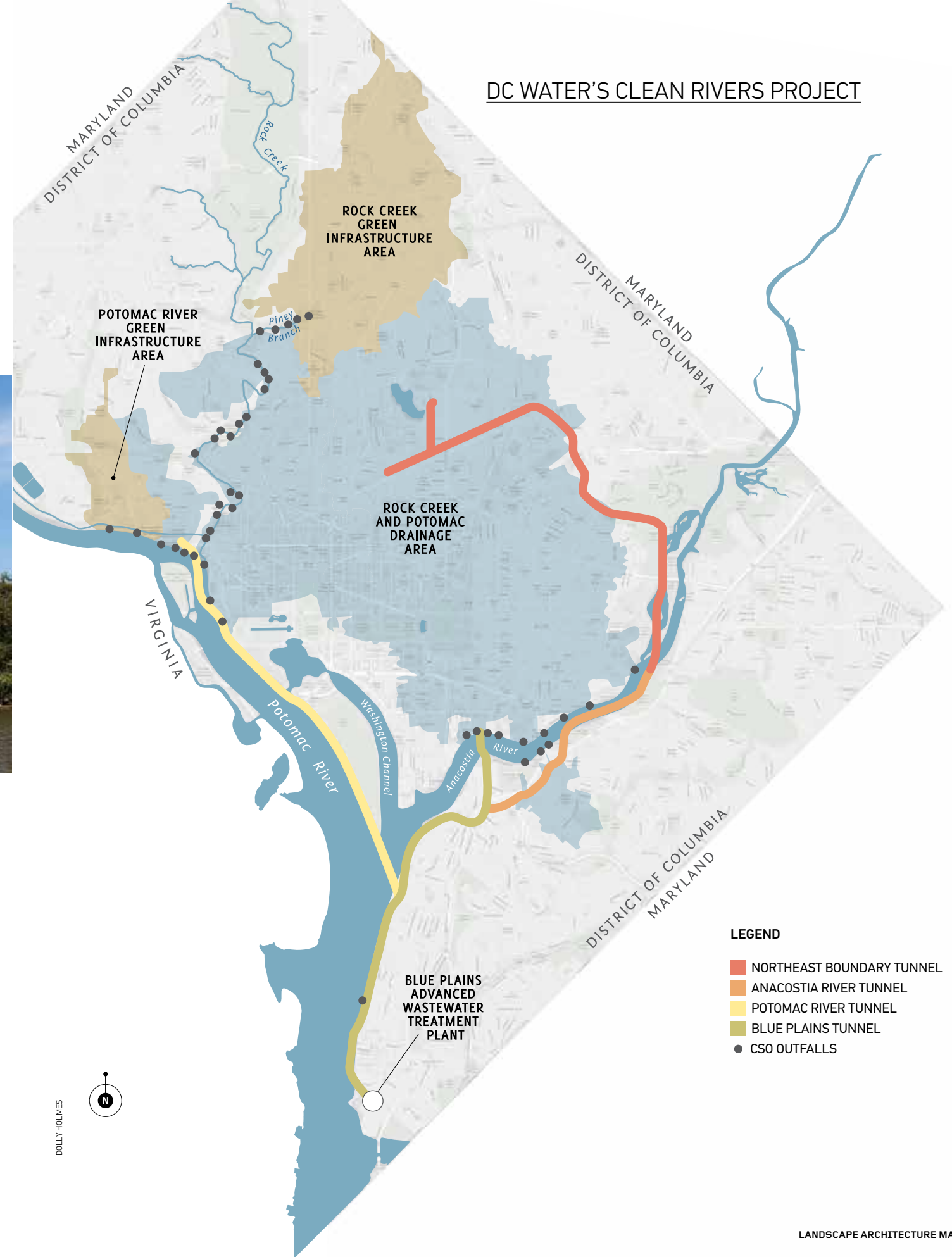
SAHAR COSTON-HARDY, AFFILIATE AS/IA

DC WATER'S CLEAN RIVERS PROJECT



LEFT
Outfalls along both banks of the river are marked by stonework, part of an early 20th century seawall built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to manage flood risk. The seawall is no longer maintained, and the corps is a partner in restoring the river wetlands.

BELOW
A new overflow structure near Kingman and Heritage Islands that controls tunnel overflow will replace the older outfall structures that disgorged stormwater into the river. The tunnel construction can be seen in the background.



- LEGEND**
- NORTHEAST BOUNDARY TUNNEL
 - ANACOSTIA RIVER TUNNEL
 - POTOMAC RIVER TUNNEL
 - BLUE PLAINS TUNNEL
 - CSO OUTFALLS

natural world Schlyer captures is nothing less than astonishing. A recent BioBlitz logged more than 550 species in the Anacostia watershed. Paddlers upriver may encounter bald eagles, osprey, cormorants, and beaver among the plastic bottles and occasional shopping carts. Schlyer says the reduction of trash has been the most visible change. “It’s still there. It’s still a huge problem. But it’s noticeably different from 2010 when I really started doing this. That’s a big thing, because it changes the way that people feel when they spend time on the river,” she says. “Of course, there are problems that are much deeper and more complex than trash.”

In 2005, the D.C. government, the U.S. Department of Justice, the EPA, and the city’s water authority entered into a consent decree intended to bring the city into compliance with the

1972 Clean Water Act, which requires cities to control point source pollutants that discharge into their waterways. One-third of Washington, D.C.’s land—primarily its historic core and older neighborhoods—flushes sinks, tubs, and toilets into a combined sewer system that carries both sanitary and storm flows, rather than into a more modern separate storm sewer system. When those combined sewers are overwhelmed, which happens about 75 times a year on average, the combined sewer overflow (or CSO) drains directly into the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, as well as Rock Creek, a waterway within a national park that flows through the city’s central spine, at 47 outfalls in the District. According to the city’s water authority, the CSOs dump nearly 2,142 million gallons into the Anacostia River and 1,063 million gallons into the Potomac annually. ↘

SAHAR COSTON-HARDY, AFFILIATE ASLA

DOLLY HOLMES

UPSTREAM D.C.



GRAY INFRASTRUCTURE HAS GIVEN WAY TO GREEN TO PREVENT SEWER OVERFLOWS INTO WASHINGTON, D.C.'S WATERS.

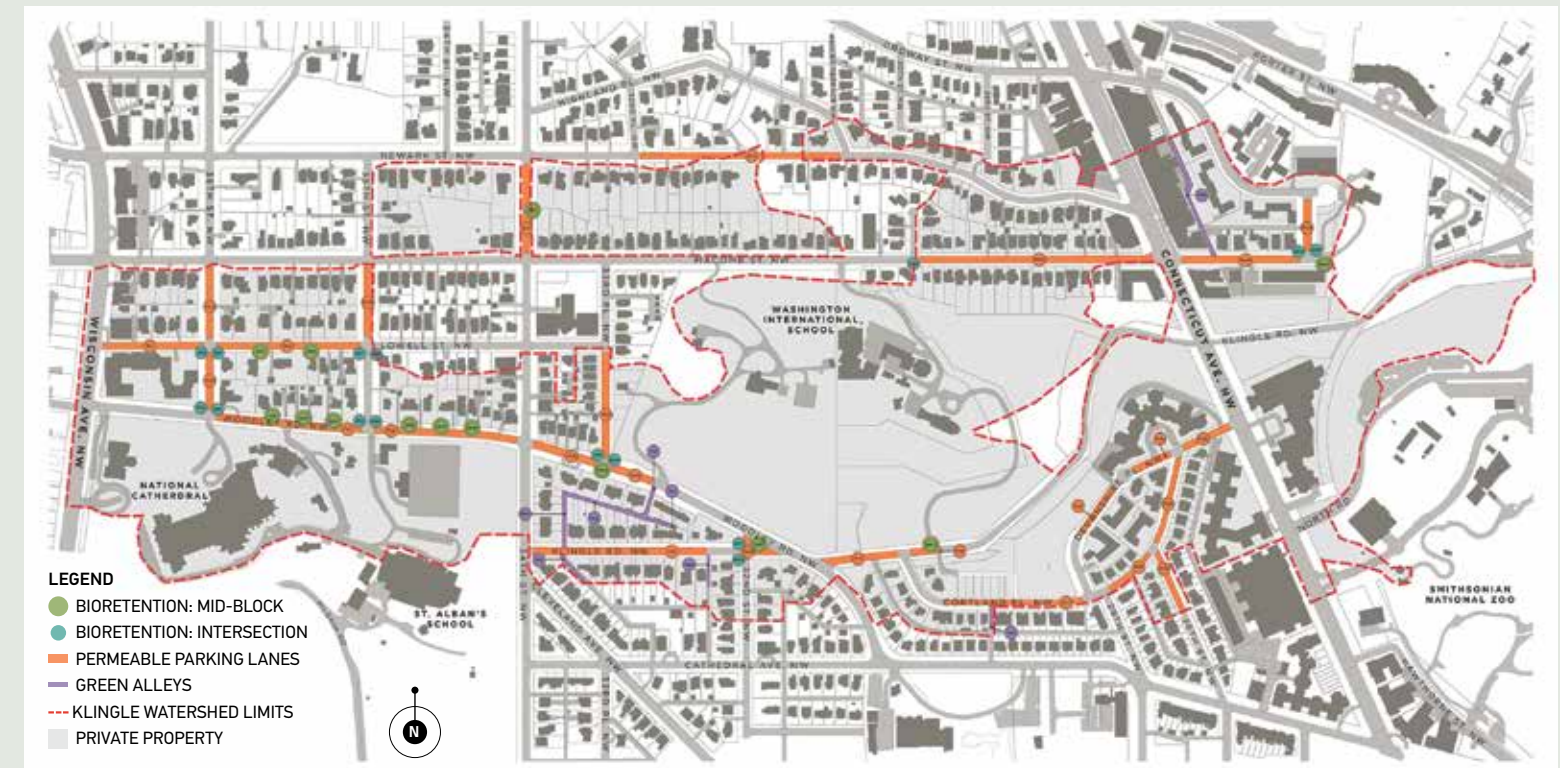
BY BRADFORD MCKEE

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE is now an important part of the Clean Rivers Project (described on page 94). The colossal Anacostia River tunnel remains a fixture in the effort on the east side of the city to hold and carry stormwater to DC Water's Blue Plains Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant. But to the west, the introduction of green infrastructure is allowing the elimination of one smaller tunnel for a combined sewer network above Rock Creek, which drains into the Potomac River, and the scaling back of another large tunnel along the Potomac itself.

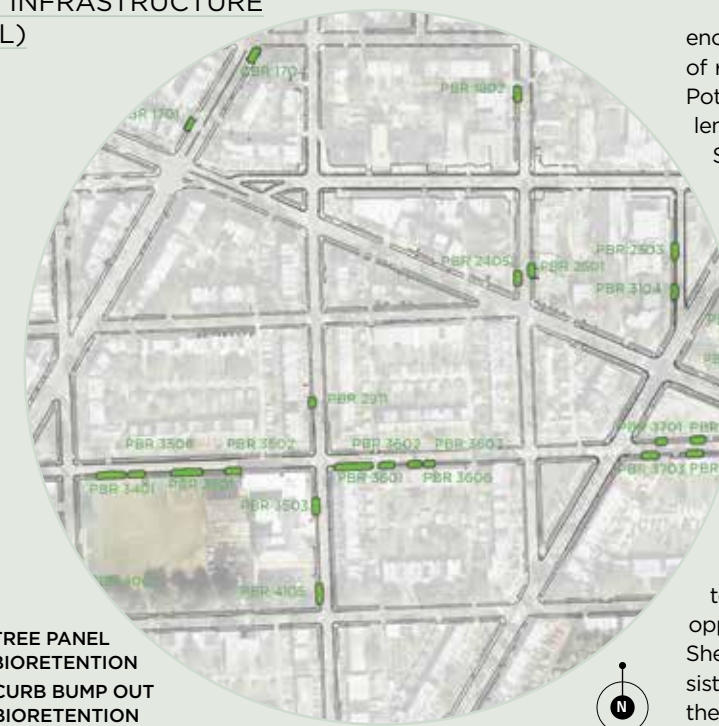
The notion of complementing gray infrastructure with green was a priority of George Hawkins when he became general manager of DC Water in 2009. It was not an easy sell. Clean-water advocates were skeptical of green infrastructure's performance capability and also feared delays in achieving the goals of the Clean Rivers Project—to end 96 percent of the District of Columbia's combined sewer overflows. Hawkins was able to make a case for the efficacy of green infrastructure and also to show that significant improvements to water quality would occur well before the tunnels' projected completion.

The Clean Rivers program is deploying a mix of bioretention, porous pavements, rain barrels, and downspout disconnection from combined sewers. In the Rock Creek sewershed,

KLINGLE WATERSHED OVERALL STORMWATER MANAGEMENT/GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE OPPORTUNITIES



ROCK CREEK PROJECT — GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE (DETAIL)



enough green infrastructure is planned to manage 1.2 inches of rainfall on the equivalent of 365 impervious acres; in the Potomac sewershed, it will manage 1.2 inches on the equivalent of 133 impervious acres. "We are volume-driven," says Seth Charde, a landscape architect who is DC Water's program manager for green infrastructure construction. "It's all about keeping water out of the combined sewer to prevent overflow."

Above Rock Creek, the landscape architecture office of Rhodeside & Harwell, based in Alexandria, Virginia, is designing 40 bioretention facilities in residential areas for DC Water as a consultant to Nitsch Engineering and AKRF Inc., the prime contractors. The plan will place regional plants in tree panels and curb bump outs. The firm is taking a similar approach in the watershed of Klingle Creek, a tributary of Rock Creek, for the District of Columbia's Department of Transportation. "It's one of the first projects of its scale in being systematic in this approach to identifying green infrastructure opportunities in the watershed," says Faye Harwell, FASLA. She noted a *New York Times* article about neighborhood resistance in New York City to new bioretention installations. In the District, she says, "We haven't seen anything in protest."

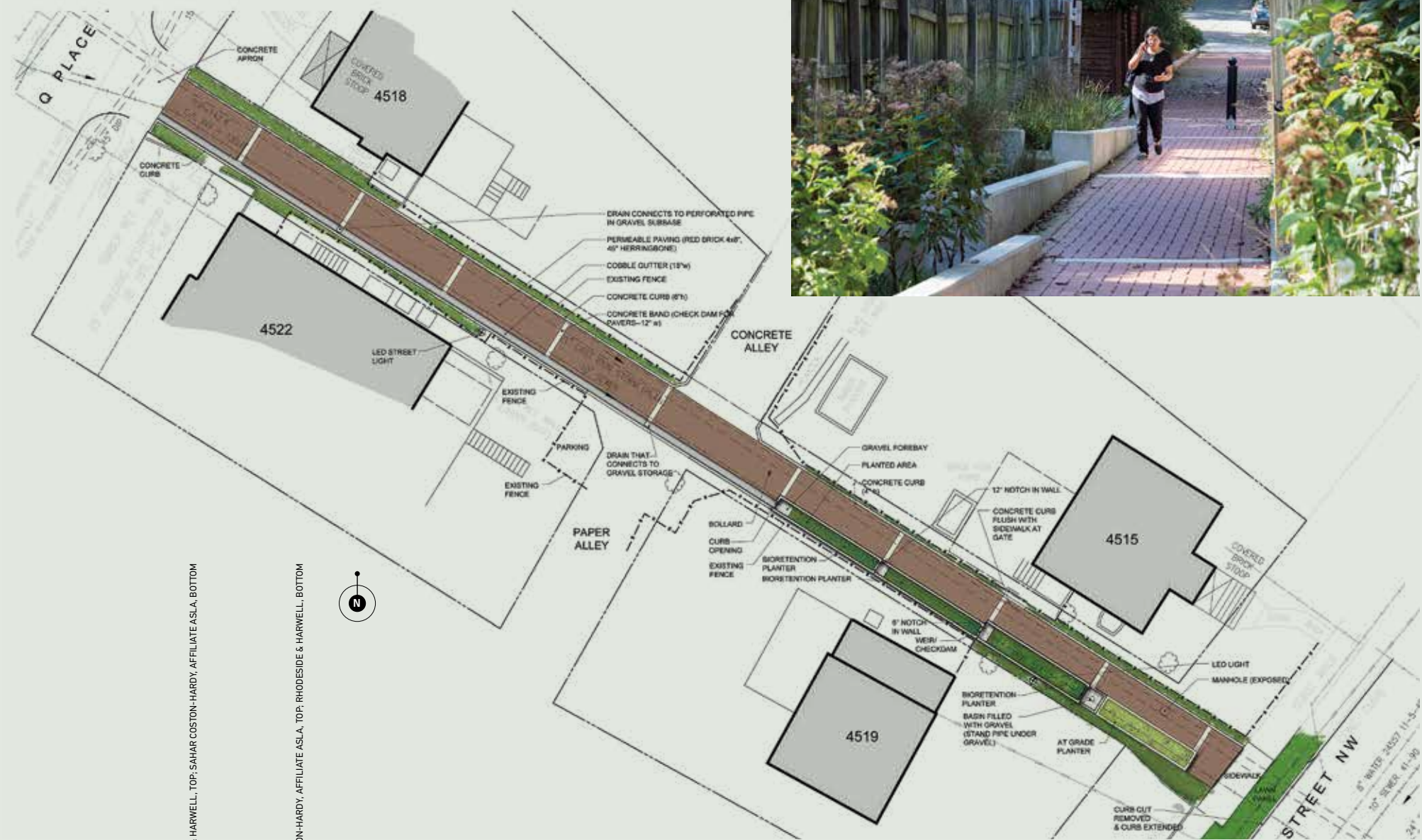


BEFORE



AFTER

Q STREET GREEN ALLEY



NE STAPLE OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE in the Clean Rivers Project for Washington, D.C., is porous pavements in upland portions of the city. Much of the absorption required to meet clean-water goals will need to occur in public rights-of-way. Along with tree-panel and curbside bioretention and sponge parks, there will be new porous surfacing in parking strips and in a new system of green alleys. “That’s really the bread and butter of the program” to spare waterways the overflows of sewage, says Seth Charde of DC Water. “It’s where we’re going to get the bulk of our volume.” (In addition to these measures, the RiverSmart programs administered by the District’s Department of Energy and Environment subsidizes green infrastructure on non-city-owned lots.)

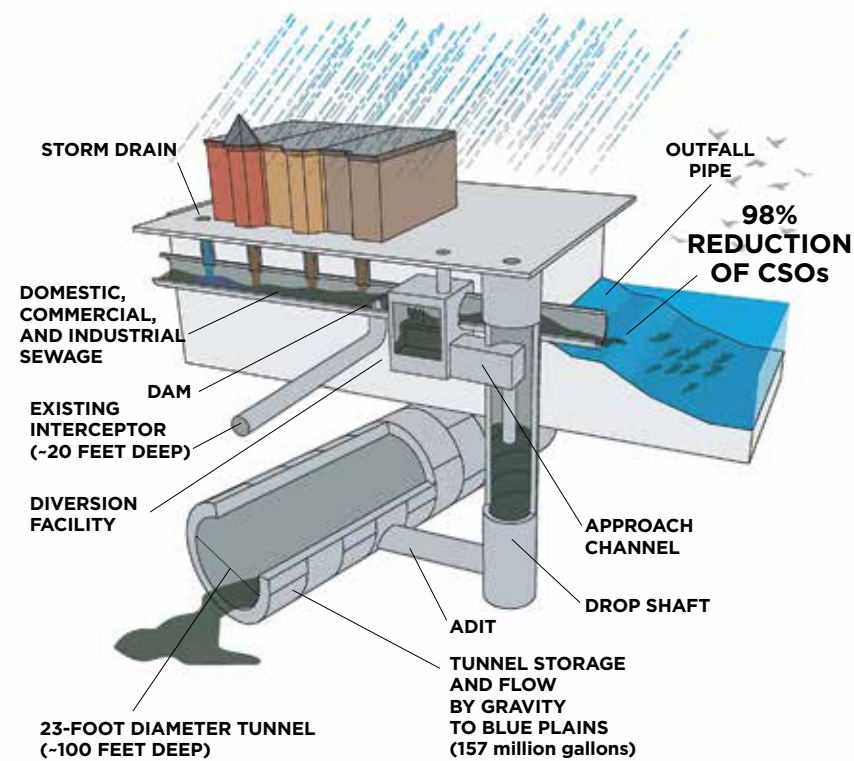
In a location above the Potomac combined outflows, Rhodeside & Harwell, as a prime contractor to the District of Columbia Department of Transportation (the District is a party along with DC Water to the Clean Rivers Project), has developed a prototype for a green alley behind Q Street NW in the Foxhall Village neighborhood. It had been a typical asphalt alley, prone to flooding in low points. The prototype design, directed by Elliot Rhodeside, FASLA, brought in pervious pavers, porous concrete, and bioretention plantings with check dams. “It’s basically a rill system,” says Faye Harwell.

DC Water is committed to maintaining all new green infrastructure projects, Charde says, “for the duration of their lifetime.” ●

RHODESIDE & HARWELL, TOP; SAHAR COSTON-HARDY, AFFILIATE ASLA, BOTTOM

SAHAR COSTON-HARDY, AFFILIATE ASLA, TOP; RHODESIDE & HARWELL, BOTTOM

CSO DIVERSION DIAGRAM



→ Rock Creek has about half that many annual overflow events resulting in 49 million gallons. Stormwater runoff includes street trash and automobile pollution such as metals and oils, as well as fecal bacteria from dogs and other animals, and it joins the sewage overflow in the combined sewers on their voyage into the Anacostia River. Advocates say the fecal bacteria dumped into the water from storm events is by far the Anacostia's largest source of bacterial pollution.

In 2000, the Anacostia Watershed Society, along with several local organizations, filed a civil complaint against the city's water utility, DC Water (then the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority) to force it to address the CSO pollution in the river. Those advocacy groups were later joined by the EPA and the Justice Department. The result, a consent decree by a federal judge, required the city and the water authority to spell out how they were going to address the thousands of gallons of sewage and stormwater that were pouring into the river. That plan, now called the Clean Rivers Project, will reportedly cost \$2.7 billion.

Jim Foster is the president of the Anacostia Watershed Society, one of the original parties in the consent decree. He says the agreement was particularly challenging because DC Water was required to reduce CSOs by a whopping 98 percent, but that just performing the preventive maintenance required by the consent decree actually reduced the sewage flows by half. Complicating the cleanup, however, was the unique governance relationship between the city and the federal government, which owns much of the land in and around the river. Washington, D.C., did not achieve what is called Home Rule authority—the ability to nominally govern itself—until 1973, and the federal government owns 29 percent of the District's land, much of it through the National Park Service, for which it pays no real estate taxes. Foster says this scenario has been catastrophic for the river. "The federal government designed and built the system, and then they just handed it over to the District. Didn't give them any money, any check, or anything," Foster says. "So the District was basically handed this hot mess." The financial relationship with the federal government isn't the only impact on the



ABOVE
DC Water's stable of charismatic boring machines now numbers four.

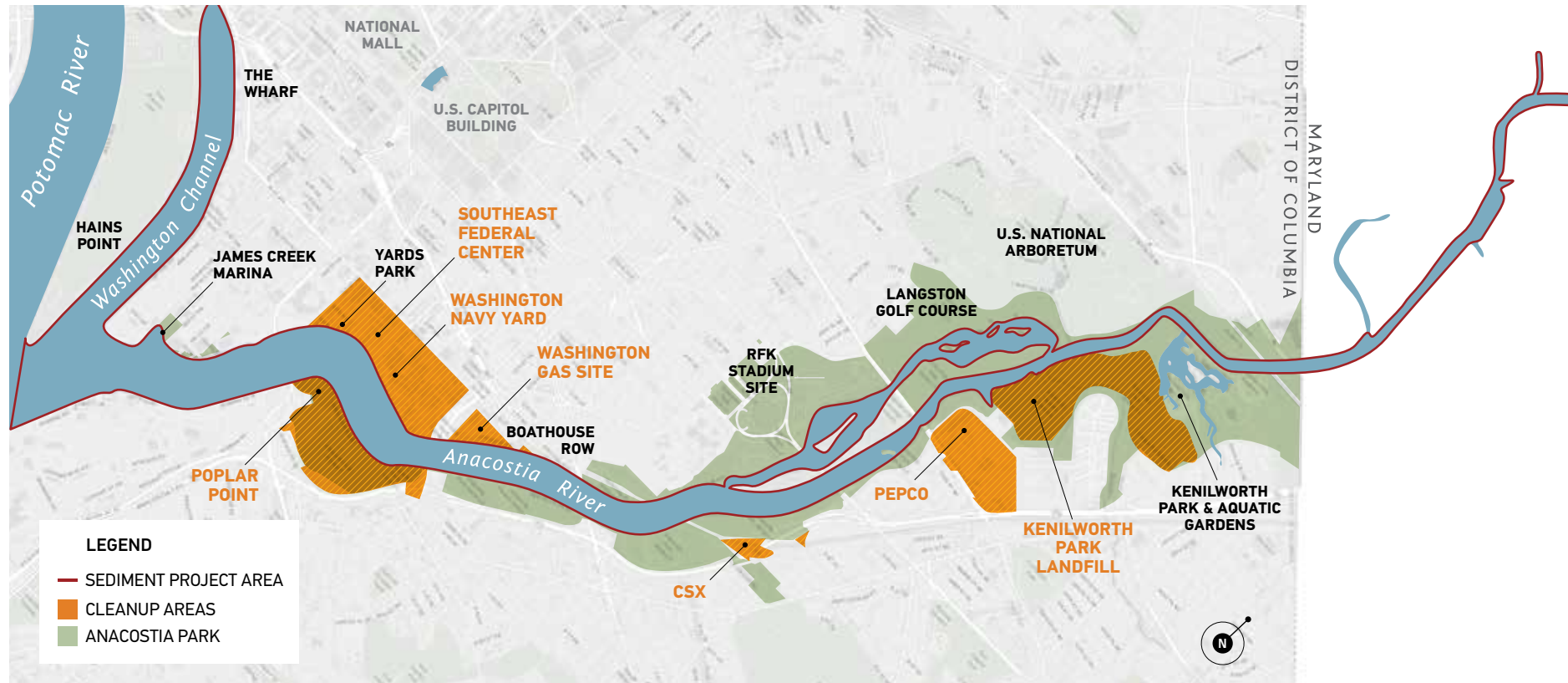
OPPOSITE
A diagram from DC Water explains how the new tunnels will capture stormwater that once poured into the city's rivers.

river. "The 176 square miles of watershed—the federal government owns 10 percent of it. They alone, just through their land use practices, impact our water quality completely," Foster says.

Into this breach blossomed dozens of grassroots organizations that work on issues around the river—environmental, certainly, but also education, job creation, resilience, youth development, and recreation, just to name a few. Erin Garnaas-Holmes is a project director for the Anacostia Waterfront Trust, a coordinating organization cofounded by former Mayor Anthony Williams, who is widely credited with developing the vision to clean up and revitalize the river during his tenure in the early 2000s. Garnaas-Holmes estimates

that there are currently somewhere between 65 and 75 nonprofit and government agencies working on river issues in some capacity, to say nothing of the working groups, partnerships, coordinating committees, and other coalitions that have formed around common goals. Garnaas-Holmes has a background in urban planning and landscape architecture that serves him well as someone who must coordinate among many disparate groups, but it has also enabled him to see how issues like housing and water quality might need to be connected in the Anacostia River. "How do you combine environmental restoration with a conversation about neighborhood security and affordable housing and gentrification at large, and how do you create a process that incorporates those two

ANACOSTIA RIVER CLEANUP SITES



things at once?” he asks. Making those connections now and finding a way to have everyone pull in the same direction are critical to reaping the investment for the people, not just the river.

The original plan to enforce controls on combined sewer discharge, set in 2005, was primarily to construct tunnels to hold stormwater and catch up on maintenance. But in 2009, George Hawkins came on board as the new general manager of DC Water. Hawkins had ideas other than for tunnels. He advocated for implementing bioretention and other infiltration measures—green infrastructure—in some of the areas that ultimately drain to the river. Seth Charde is a landscape architect and the program manager for green infrastructure construction at DC Water. “Around 2011, we started looking at green infrastructure as a solution for managing volume and preventing combined sewer overflows,” he says. Green infrastructure could work in concert with tunnels for the Potomac and Rock Creek water-

sheds, but it was thought to be insufficient for the Anacostia, where the volume of stormwater was too great and the tidal river was too sluggish to discharge bacteria and reflow oxygenated water. Plus, the appetite for derailing the massive tunnel project was not great.

The consent decree was modified in 2016 to deploy detention and infiltration strategies where they seemed to make sense, but not along the critically polluted Anacostia sewershed, which is partly why there is now a combination of tunnels, detention, and green infrastructure strategies used to manage the city’s stormwater along its different waterways (see “Upstream D.C.,” page 90). The main tunnels planned as part of the Clean Rivers Project are the Potomac, Anacostia, and Northeast Boundary tunnels. They bracket the city’s combined sewer network on the outside as separate systems. When they are complete, DC Water expects to reduce stormwater volume in the rivers by 96 percent.



Earlier this year, the Anacostia River Tunnel came online, the first of the three planned tunnels, which will all be completely built and functioning by 2023. The idea of the tunnels is fairly straightforward. The tunnels will capture stormwater and transport it beneath the river to the Blue Plains Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant on the east side of the Potomac, where it will be processed and released back into the river as cleaner water that flows to the Chesapeake Bay. The system is gravity fed through a series of diverters that move the water from the sewers.

Sewers and sewerage might be the urban necessity least likely to acquire the patina of cool that ornaments more glamorous infrastructure such as bridges and electrical substations, but DC Water has been imaginative in its outreach to win over the public. Each of the massive tunnel boring machines (TBMs) used for excavating the tunnels was named, blessed (along with the workers), and given Twitter handles in a festive public media event. Like hot rods, watercraft, and hurricanes before 1979, tradition has dictated that TBMs must be named after women. The TBMs for the Clean Rivers Project include Lady Bird (for Claudia “Lady Bird” Alta Taylor Johnson, an environmentalist and a former First Lady of the United States), Nannie (for Nannie Helen Burroughs, an educator), Lucy (for Lucy Diggs Slowe, the first female dean of Howard University), and the newest TBM, the Northeast Boundary Tunnel’s Chris, which broke with tradition to honor Christopher Allen, the Clean Rivers assistant director who died before the project’s completion. The TBMs are extensively documented on DC Water’s YouTube channel.

After the Anacostia tunnel opened this March, a very wet year in D.C. allowed the tunnel’s efficacy to be tested quickly (in 2018, the city had reached

ABOVE Bald eagles were reintroduced to the river in the 1990s by the Earth Conservation Corps. There are now nesting pairs in the National Arboretum, as well as several active osprey nests.

LEFT Masaya Maeda, a water quality specialist for the Anacostia Watershed Society, uses a Secchi disc to measure turbidity.



DOLLY HOLMES

KRISTA SCHLYER, TOP; SAHAR OOSTON-HARDY, AFFILIATE ASLA, BOTTOM



SAHAR COSTON-HARDY, AFFILIATE ASLA

OPPOSITE
 Once a toxic landfill, Kenilworth Park is now managed by the National Park Service. Along with the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, the site includes 700 acres of wide open fields and vistas.

the typical annual rainfall of 40 inches by late August). A few weeks after opening, the storm dumped around two inches of rain on the region, and DC Water proclaimed that the tunnel prevented 170 million gallons of stormwater and sewage from flowing into the Anacostia. As of this writing, DC Water estimates that the tunnel has prevented 2.4 billion gallons of combined sewage and 146 tons of trash from entering the Anacostia River.

Water quality in the Anacostia, including measurements of dissolved oxygen, pH, chlorophyll, depth, and turbidity, is monitored by the city's Department of Energy & Environment (DOEE), but the department's data is supplemented considerably by local conservation organizations, including Anacostia Riverkeeper and the Anacostia Watershed Society. Both organizations do constant public outreach, hosting free weekly tours of the river, fishing nights, cleanups, and other activities meant to get people down to the river. They also keep the pressure on the city and federal government.

Anacostia Riverkeeper tests primarily for *E. coli*, fecal bacteria that are highest in the river after storms overwhelm the CSOs, and they report their findings to the DOEE as well as through the Swim Guide app and

other online channels. There are warning lights around for boaters, if you know where to look, but as the recreational attractions of the river increase, so does the likelihood that people might end up more wet than not. Technically, the river is classified not swimmable at any time, but people fish, dip their feet in, jump out of kayaks and off paddleboards, and generally find it difficult to keep their hands in the boat.

The city's bag tax has been good for the river. Money from the 2009 law, which required vendors to charge customers five cents for every plastic and paper bag used, funds a variety of efforts at the Anacostia, including education and stream restoration as well as the Anacostia Riverkeeper and Anacostia Watershed Society public tours, which are free and open to anyone from late spring to late fall. The fee has also probably decreased bag usage, greatly curtailing the number of plastic bags that make their way into the river waters. Trey Sherard, the riverkeeper at Anacostia Riverkeeper, says his group has seen a big reduction in the number of bags they pull out of trash traps since the tax was implemented. Now, if they could just ban plastic water bottles.

The bacteria from CSOs is the single biggest source of pollution in the river, but it is not the only one. The Anacostia's lazy tidal flow allows bacteria in the water, as well as chemical pollutants from industry and construction sites and plain old garbage, to stew, along with the previously existing toxic sediment that lines the river in some places. Addressing the polluted sediment has been a more complicated endeavor. Some of the sediment pollutants are from legacy industries or utilities that operated in the 19th century; others are from the federal government.



ABOVE
Akima Price, an environmental consultant, works on connecting stressed communities to the river in Anacostia Park.

OPPOSITE
Fishing is one of the most popular activities in all parts of the river. The city government stresses that catch from the river should not be eaten.

The DOEE has identified 14 potential cleanup sites along the river—places where chemicals have leached into and bonded with the river sediment, and where study and remediation will have to roll out slowly. PCBs, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, dioxins, pesticides such as Chlordane, and metals such as arsenic and mercury are among the chemicals found in these sites. Sherard says that DDT still shows up, running off the former agricultural land that is disturbed by all the new construction and embedding in the sediment. For people who are swimming or working in or near the water in those areas, or fishing, the level of chemical exposure is a concern.

The DOEE's Anacostia River Sediment Project focuses on a nine-mile tidal area of the Anacostia, but also the Washington Channel, a harbor zone that reaches the Jefferson Memorial, and a bit of the confluence where the river meets the Potomac. Areas of concern or "hot spots" include the Navy Yard and the Southeast Federal Center, and Poplar Point, the site of the old gasworks, each adjacent to planned or completed new developments that the city has been banking on to bring in revenue.

Gretchen Mikeska is the coordinator for the Anacostia River Sediment Project and a longtime boater on the Anacostia, and has been collecting

and reviewing data about how people use the river as part of DOEE's public outreach. She says the city is moving into the feasibility phase of the project now, and expects to present possible remedies and recommendations to the public sometime in the winter.

In 2000, then-Mayor Anthony Williams began to spell out the vision for the Anacostia Waterfront, an effort that brought together 19 city and federal entities that would eventually sign on to the "waterfront revitalization endeavor." In 2003, the city's office of planning, then staffed by Director Andrew Altman, with Toni L. Griffin as the deputy director for revitalization and neighborhood planning, developed the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative Framework Plan, a document that began to spell out a holistic vision for the waterfront—parks, ecological recovery, improved transportation options, strong neighborhoods, better connections, new development, and economic revitalization. The vision document seemed bold at the time—the river was foul and frightening, and its trash-strewn environs a mix of industrial wasteland and vacant lots—but it picked up some of its strategies from cities like Boston and Barcelona, which had successfully redeveloped their polluted waterfronts into public amenities.

It's happening fast now—at Buzzard Point, less than a mile upstream from the Anacostia's mouth, the new Audi Field, a \$400 million soccer stadium for D.C. United, went up in a scant 16 months and opened in July of this year. The 11th Street Bridge Park, budgeted to cost around \$50 million, is scheduled to break ground in 2019 and includes an innovative Equitable Development Plan that is being watched by many as a stop on resident displacement. Mayor Muriel Bowser



SAHAR COSTON-HARDY, AFFILIATE ASIA, THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE

recently tipped a shovel on the \$489 million development around the site of RFK Stadium directly east of the U.S. Capitol above the river. Yards Park, a beautifully designed small public park between DC Water's new sustainability showplace building and a mixed-use development of restaurants and boardwalks, opened in 2011, and quickly began attracting families from nearby Capitol Hill.

With the 2008 financial crisis still echoing in the city's development sector, there has been decidedly more public conversation about the vulnerability of the river's adjacent neighborhoods to gentrification, a problem that is surely a sign of success in other forms. The popularity of one riverside project that recently opened, the District Wharf, a \$2 billion mixed-use food and entertainment magnet next to the city's last remaining fresh seafood markets, has served to validate the concerns of some critical observers and brought more pressure on the city and developers to increase safeguards against displacement of existing businesses and residents.

All of these high-dollar marquee developments, with the exception of the 11th Street Bridge, fall on the west side of the river, the side that forms the edge of the now-prosperous federal city. Along the eastern bank is perhaps the river's greatest and least-known asset, the 1,200-acre Anacostia Park. The park extends the length of the river's eastern bank, and includes much of the northern reaches on the west side as well. In fact, the National Park Service runs and maintains the majority of the land that stretches down both sides of the river and its banks in the District. Among the park's assets are Kenilworth



Park & Aquatic Gardens, the only skating pavilion owned by the National Park Service, several picnic areas, a boat dock, and many unprogrammed fields of play. Threaded through the park's open meadows is the Anacostia River Trail, a multi-modal path that invites cyclists, scooters, and pedestrians.

Behind the park's open fields, and largely cut off from the river by a twist of highways, are some two dozen neighborhoods that make up the city east of the river. Largely African American and the victims of years of disinvestment and outright neglect, these are the neighborhoods with both the most to lose and the most to gain from the rebirth of the Anacostia River.

Garnaas-Holmes says that the existing resource of Anacostia Park can be a way to secure the community in place if changes are focused on the existing residents, including the elderly and families with young children, rather than on attracting newcomers. "If they're done in a way that's targeting audiences that live right next to it and have the most to gain from it, I think if that's really intentional, it'll also help to steer away from flipping a park for a theoretical audience that leads to the lack of a sense of ownership and then slowly changes who uses the park over time." For a place like Anacostia Park, that requires using existing resources in new ways.

Akiima Price is an environmental consultant whose work focuses on connecting urban communities of color with nature, particularly those experiencing stress or trauma. In Anacostia Park, she is working on programs to help the park service and its partners strengthen the park as a community resource, not just an amenity. She echoes the sentiments of Garnaas-Holmes and others working in the east river communities in emphasizing that there are ways the park and its river partners can better meet the needs of local residents, and she is both strategic and innovative in her approach to developing opportunities to connect people to the park and the river in a way that benefits both. That could just be tweaking what organizations are already doing, such as boat tours, to offer a place for other populations, such as those re-entering society after incarceration. "Maybe it's a father-son nature club, with the goal of the fathers and the sons healing their relationship—not so much seeing the eagle, though that will happen and be a part of what makes that so transformative." From there, says



THE WHARF
The mile-long section of the waterfront (with this pier design by Michael Vergason Landscape Architects) was among the most expensive projects in Washington, D.C.'s history.

OPPOSITE
A colorful bit of the Municipal Fish Market remains open on the Washington Channel next to the new Wharf development.

SAHAR COSTON-HARDY, AFFILIATE ASLA, THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE

Price, a connection to the Anacostia River as a stage for that transformation might yield a sense of stewardship down the road. And the river will always need people to rave about it.

The Year of the Anacostia has allowed the city to tout what's been accomplished since the Anacostia River framework plan was published in 2003, to bring new people to the water, and to reintroduce the uneasy longtime residents to the improving river. As the sediment removal project begins to move forward, there's a possibility that a yet-to-be-imagined version of the Anacostia River might burst forth from its toxic mudflats

in the near future. But there's a tension between the painstaking rehabilitation efforts, efforts that have increased biodiversity, restored wetlands, re-established habitat, curtailed the flow of millions of pounds of sewage, and improved water quality, and the voracious pace of construction nearby that threatens to undo the work that is just beginning to change the experience of the river. Jim Foster, not one to mince words, is sanguine about the pace of change. "This is a generational thing. We did this over 250 years. We're not gonna solve it over the next four years." ●

JENNIFER REUT IS THE SENIOR EDITOR AT THE MAGAZINE.

ANACOSTIA PARK

The 1,200-acre Anacostia Park has bike trails, boat docks, and a skating rink, but its most valuable amenity is the opportunity for Washingtonians to connect to the Anacostia River.



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