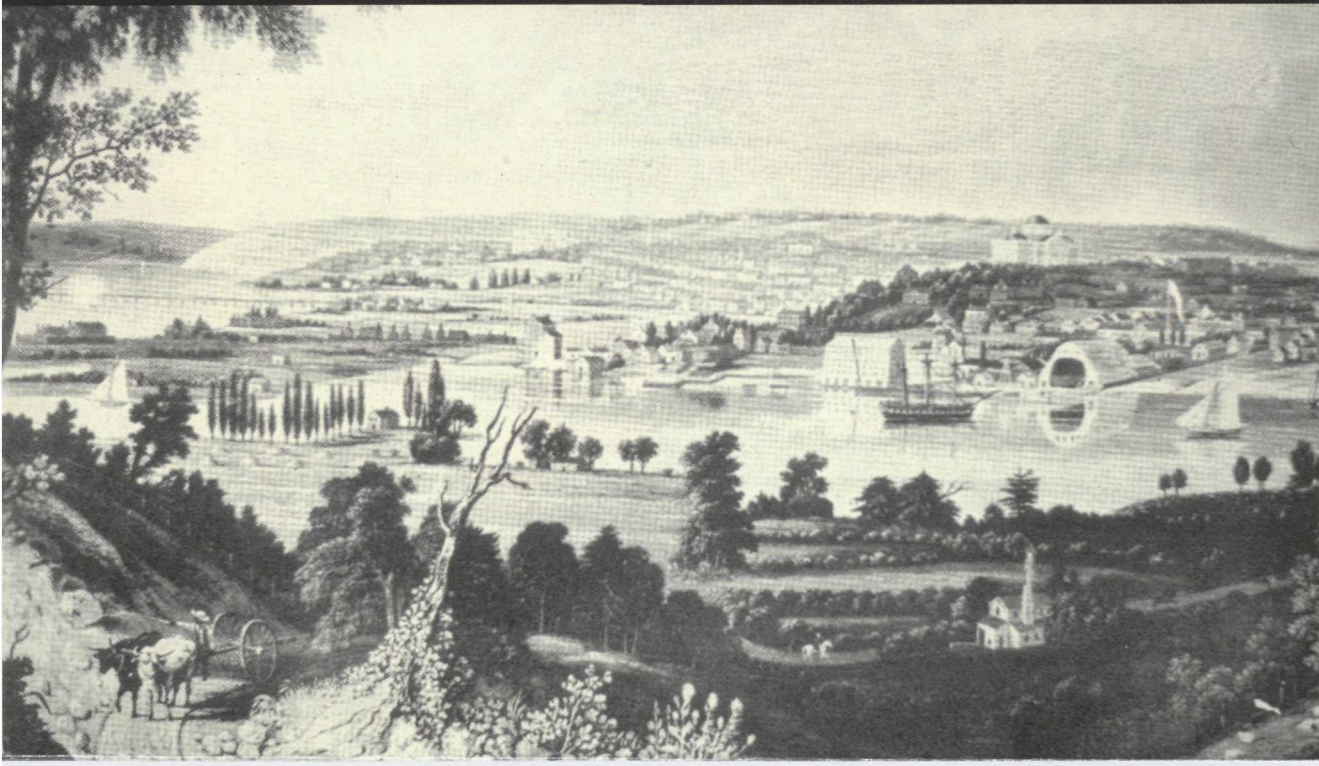


Anacostia Park

Anacostia Park
Washington, D.C.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



"The Eastern-Branch [Anacostia River] is one of the safest and most commodious harbors in America...and is abundantly capacious."
—Maryland newspaper on location of national capital city, 1791

When the national capital city was planned in the early 1790s, the land bordering the Anacostia River was envisioned as an ideal location for shipping, industry, and other commercial activities that would develop the economy of the new city. However, by the late 19th century, the Anacostia River had become silted up by runoff from agricultural activities farther upstream. In the early 20th century, reclamation of the Anacostia River "flats" transformed the swamp lands into the riverside parks—what we know today as Anacostia Park.

Anacostia River from the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge north approximately five miles to the District/Maryland line. The park includes Kenilworth Park and Aquatic Gardens, Langston Golf Course, and the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium.

The developed recreational facilities, the northern part of Anacostia Park near Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens provides one of the best places in the region in which to see wildlife.

Anacostia Park's playing fields offer opportunities for soccer and other recreational activities.

Present-day Anacostia Park spans over 1,200 acres stretching the length of the

A view of Washington, D.C., from the south bank of the Anacostia River, 1834

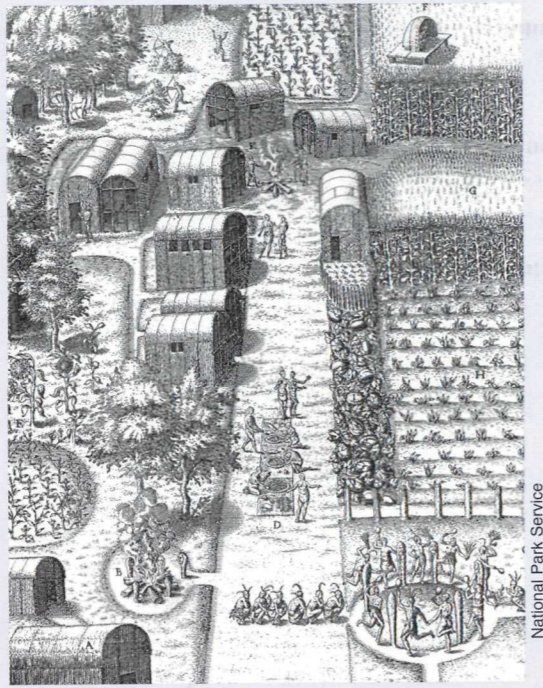
Anacostia Park is a multi-use recreational park, with shoreline access, a swimming pool, multi-use pavilion, ball fields, trails, and picnic areas that attract visitors from throughout the city and across the nation. The park also is home to the United States Park Police Training Center and helipad, as well as the Urban Tree House and the Aquatic Education Center. While the southern portion of the park (below the railroad bridge and boat ramp) contains most of



The Nacotchtanks

Long before the arrival of the first European explorers, a vibrant American Indian culture evolved around the abundance of fish, game, and other natural resources in the Anacostia River area for at least 10,000 years. In the 17th century, the Nacotchtank Indians were the primary residents along the eastern shore of the Anacostia. Prosperous farmers, gatherers, hunters, and traders, the Nacotchtanks lived in the vicinity of what is now Bolling Air Force Base. Jesuit priests later Latinized the Algonquian place name of Nacotchtank to Anacostia.

Englishman John Smith explored the Anacostia, or Eastern Branch of the Potomac, in 1608. Smith's arrival heralded both the rapid settlement of the land east of the Anacostia River by English landowners and the rapid decline of the Nacotchtanks. Ravaged by European diseases, the weakened band suffered from raids by competing Indians and attacks by English settlers. By the 1670s, the Nacotchtanks had been driven from the region.

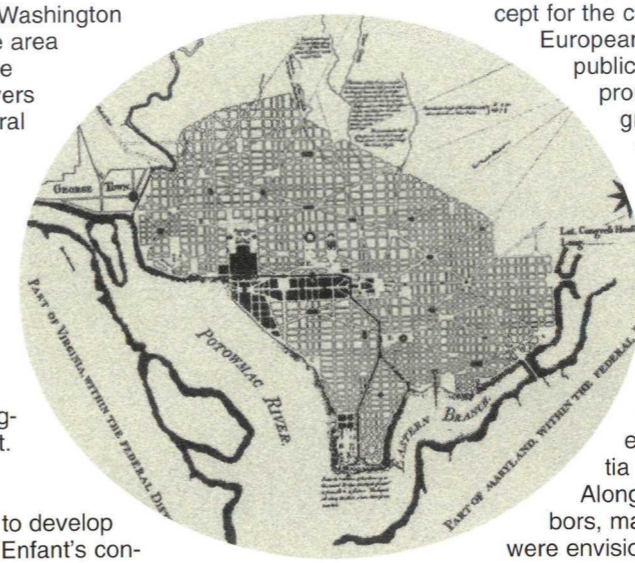


Historic print of the first Native American village in what is now Anacostia

Planning for the National Capital City

In 1790, President George Washington selected the 10-square-mile area around the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers as the seat of the new federal government. The site appealed to him because Georgetown in Maryland and Alexandria in Virginia, both established in the 1750s, already were thriving port cities along the Potomac River. The Anacostia River offered the potential of deep-water ports and was poised for significant harbor development.

Washington commissioned Frenchman Pierre L'Enfant to develop plans for the new capital. L'Enfant's concept for the city was based upon classic European plans, which provided for public buildings to be located on prominent geographic features, grand boulevards that radiated outward and connected public buildings and parks, and large public spaces that served as appropriate settings for the public building. This ambitious architectural and landscape design also included a detailed street plan that extended from the Potomac River to its Eastern Branch, as the Anacostia River then was called. Along the Eastern Branch, harbors, markets, and industrial sites were envisioned.

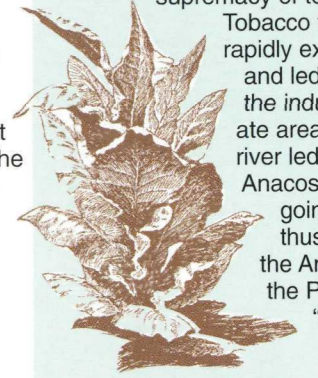


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Agriculture

Land grants to wealthy Englishmen placed much of the property in the Anacostia region in the hands of a few elite families. Tobacco was the primary cash crop. Fertile land, expanding European markets, the presence of the nearby deep-water port at Bladensburg, and the availability of large numbers of enslaved Africans facilitated the regional supremacy of tobacco production.

Tobacco farming, however, rapidly exhausted the soil and led to the demise of the industry in the immediate area. Siltation of the river led to the closing of the Anacostia River to ocean-going vessels by 1800, thus ending hopes that the Anacostia would rival the Potomac as a river of "grand commerce."



Tobacco, once the primary crop

Anacostia Communities

The end of tobacco production in the region hastened the breakup of the mammoth plantations. With the land available for development, residential communities slowly began to form in Anacostia. The opening of the Washington Navy Yard in 1799 spurred residential settlement in Anacostia as large numbers of workers made their homes directly across the river from where they worked.



Anacostia historic district, c. 1865

The Good Hope community emerged as a settlement around Jenkin's Tavern in the 1820s, when Good Hope Road was the major established link between Washington, D.C., and southern Maryland. The early residents of Good Hope and the other communities in Anacostia were primarily English, Irish, and German, along with a small number of free blacks. Most of these residents were blue-collar workers or farmers.

In 1854, John Van Hook and his real estate partners formed the Union Land Association. They named their housing development Uniontown and sought to cater to

white homeowners of means interested in owning property outside the original boundaries of the capital city. The company did not offer homes to African Americans. This first effort at marketing "suburban" housing never caught on and the company suffered from poor sales.

The creation of the Freedman's Bureau settlement at Barry Farms in 1867 further dissuaded most whites from buying property in the Anacostia area. It is a great irony that after Van Hook's business collapsed, the famed African American orator and abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, purchased Van Hook's home and office at Cedar Hill and established his residence there. (Today, the National Park Service administers the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site.)



Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

Civil War Fortifications

When fighting broke out between Union and Confederate forces in April 1861, the capital city was vulnerable to attack from pro-Southern sympathizers in Maryland and from other points. A ring of forts was developed around the capital city and included an extensive system of earthen forts that stretched into what is today the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland. The forts established to guard the eastern approaches to the city, Fort Greble (current day Anacostia), Fort Carroll, and Fort Mahan (located just north of Benning Road), were three of the larger rudimentary earthen outposts located east of the Anacostia River.

Anacostia in Modern Times

Ironically, Anacostia—known to contemporary residents as a predominantly black part of Washington, D.C.—was a majority white section of town until the late 1950s and early 1960s. Integration of the Anacostia public swimming pool in June 1949 sparked race riots in the park. The public schools were integrated following the 1954 Supreme Court decision that outlawed separate schools for black and white students. As the suburban areas developed and white families left the city, the influx of black residents reduced the white population of Anacostia from 82 percent in 1950 to 37 percent by 1967.

Anacostia storefront near the park entrance



Development of Anacostia Park

The appointment of the McMillan Commission by the U.S. Congress in 1901 set the stage for the development of Anacostia Park. Among its recommendations, the Commission urged that the Anacostia "flats" follow the model of the East and West Potomac Parks—that the swamps be "reclaimed" and the new lands used as gardens and recreation space for public use.

The reclamation of the silted Anacostia River and its transformation into a public park was an ambitious plan that would take several decades to complete. The Anacostia River and Flats Act of 1914 called for "continuing the reclamation and development of the Anacostia River" and tidal plains.

To accomplish this task, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed a seawall on the banks of the Anacostia, dredged the river bottom, and used the sediment to fill in the wetlands behind the wall. Park construction and landscaping projects continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s, surviving a series of cost overruns, work stoppages, and setbacks. This "reclamation" entailed the destruction of a vast natural wetland system. However, at the time the value of wetlands was not understood and they were generally thought of as "malarial swamps."

In 1933, management and oversight responsibilities for Anacostia Park were turned over to the National Park Service.

During the Great Depression, funding was provided to public works projects in Anacostia Park. Segregated golf courses, swimming



Langston Golf Course

pools, and playing fields were built as part of an attempt by Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to provide recreation facilities for both the white and black residents. Langston Golf Course opened in 1939 to provide a golf course for African American golfers. Established as a nine-hole course, the golf course was enlarged to 18 holes in 1955. Although other golf courses were desegregated in the 1950s, Langston Golf Course continues to serve as the home course for Washington's black golfing community.

In 1938, the National Park Service acquired Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, which were developed between 1882 and 1921 by Civil War veteran W. B. Shaw, who dammed his farmland to create a series of ponds and a private pleasure garden. Between 1921 and 1938, the gardens were operated as a commercial venture that was open to the public. Today, the garden features many varieties of water lilies. By the late 1930s, development of Anacostia Park was still underway and had extended the park to the District/Maryland line. The Robert F. Kennedy Stadium structure was built during the early 1960s and named in honor of Kennedy after his assassination in 1968.



The Bonus March

The most significant historical event that occurred in Anacostia Park was the location in the park of the "Bonus March" campsite. Reeling from the effects of the Great Depression, a large group of World War I veterans marched to Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1932 to demand the immediate payment of a wartime bonus. Once in the nation's capital city, many of the Bonus Marchers established a camp at Anacostia Flats, where they created shanties from cardboard boxes and scraps of wood. By June 1932, close to 11,000 people had gathered in the "fully integrated camp."



The Bonus Marchers' camp at Anacostia Flats, 1932

After Congress refused to meet the demands of the marchers, President Hoover ordered General Douglas MacArthur to remove them by force. Police and military personnel (including a tank unit led by Major Dwight D. Eisenhower) attacked the marchers on July 28, 1932, knocking down and setting fire to their shelters. Those not injured in the battle drifted back to their homes without the sought-after bonus.



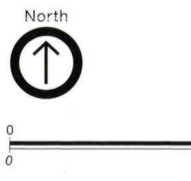
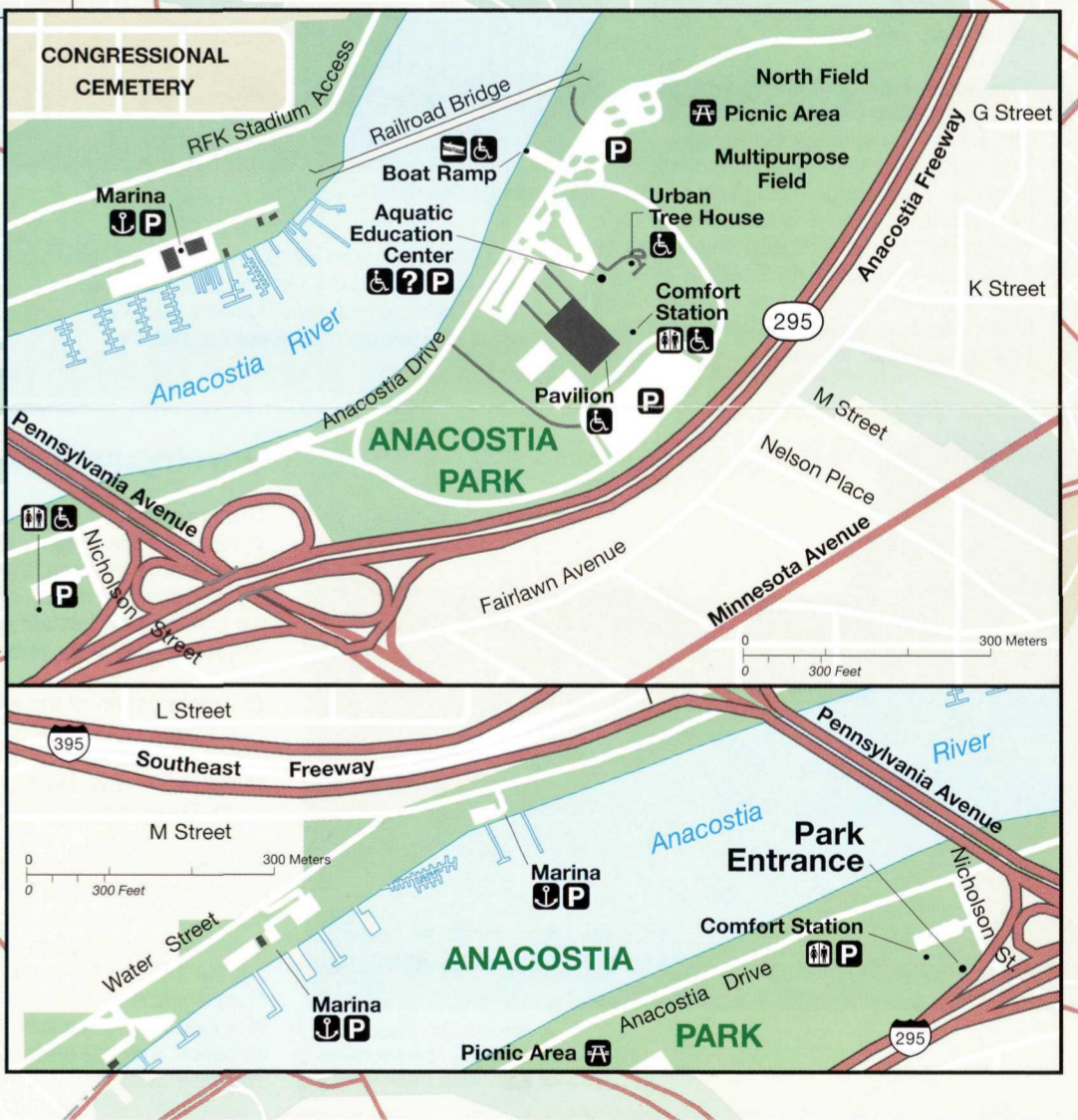
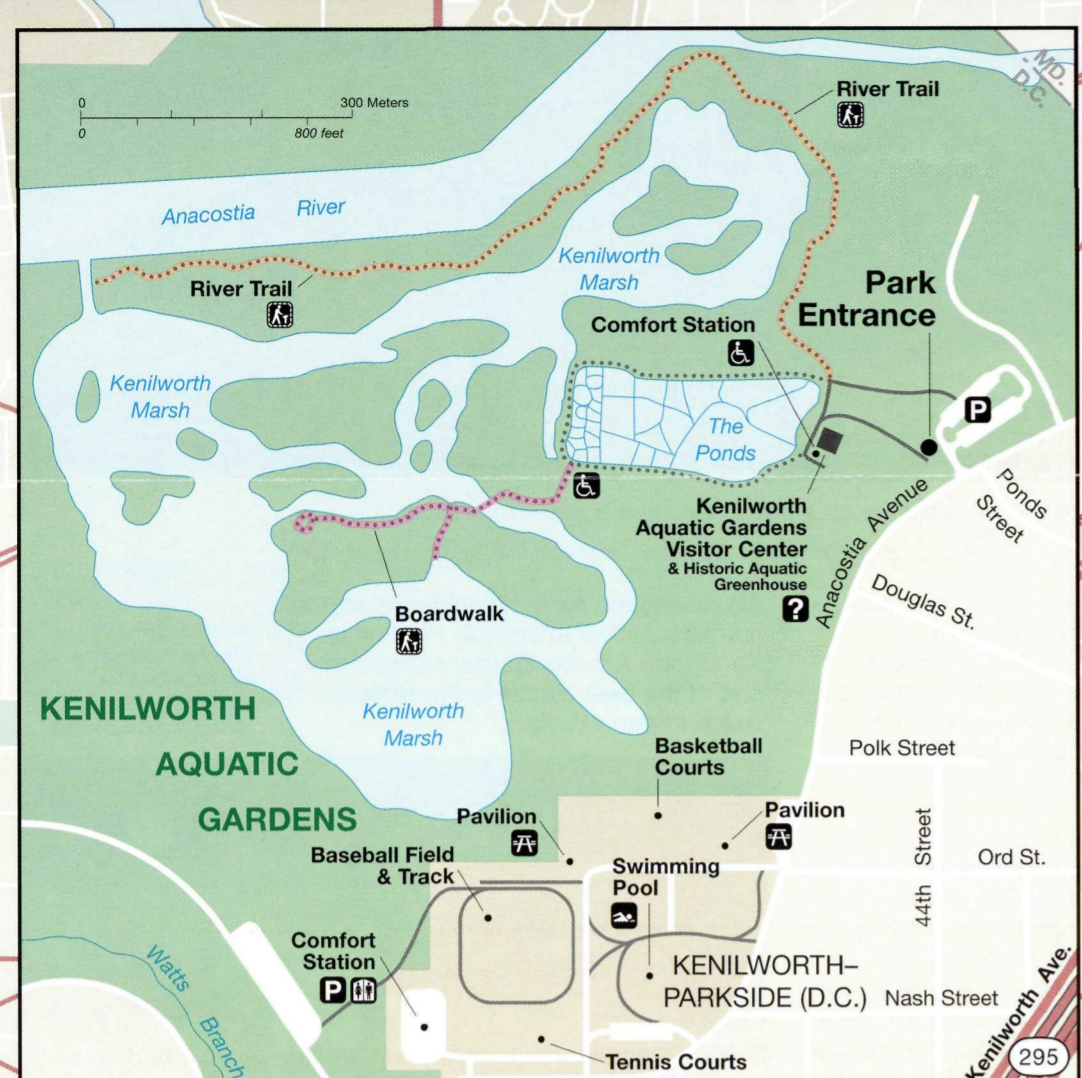
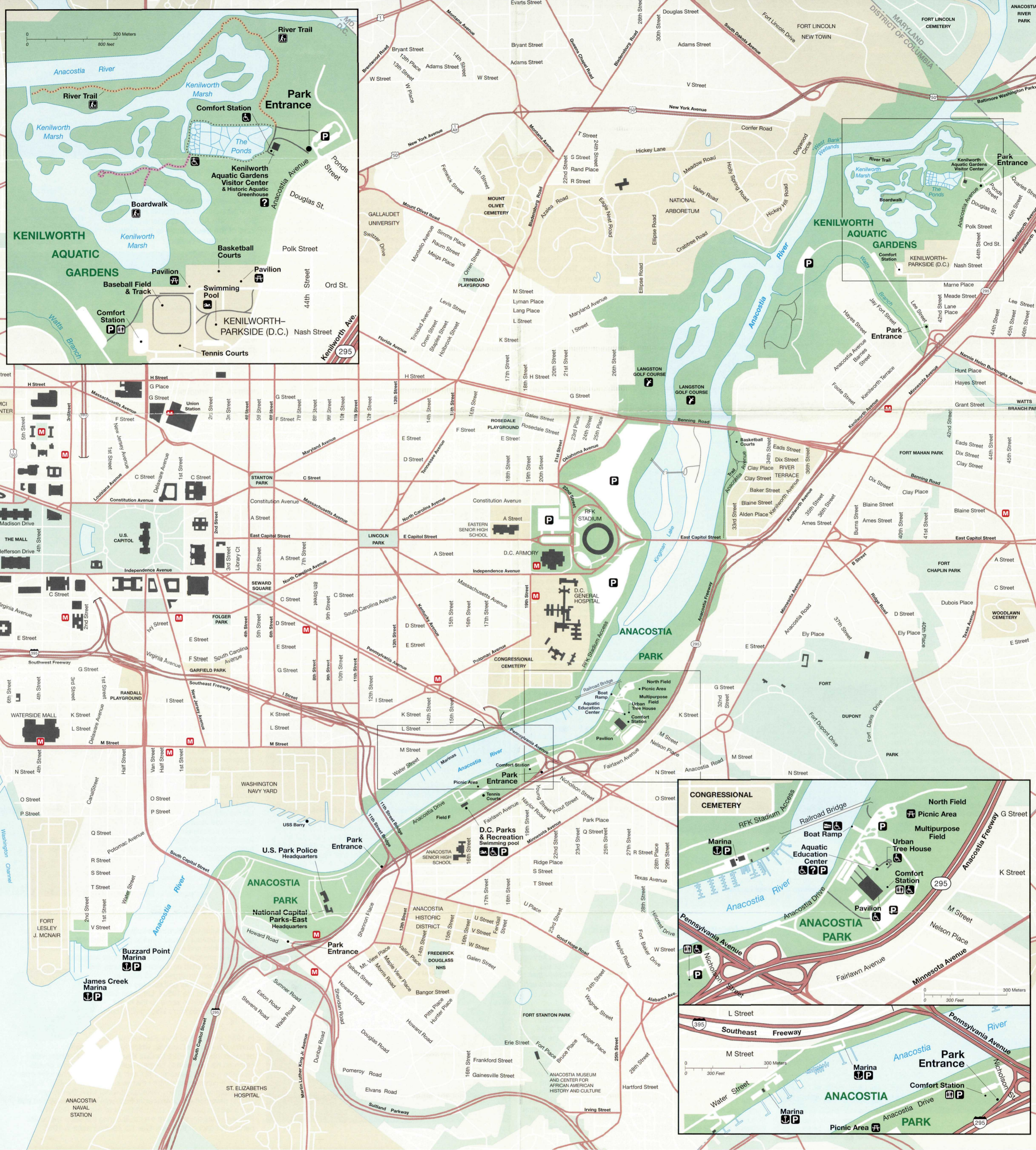
Watershed and Environment

The Anacostia River is a tidal freshwater river that fluctuates approximately three feet twice per day. The river has suffered greatly from decades of wetland destruction, uncontrolled runoff, illegal dumping, inadequate sewage facilities, industrial wastes, and other forms of pollution. Nonetheless, the river and watershed support a wide variety of plants, birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians (as well as people!).

The realization that a healthy river means a healthy community has led to intensified efforts in recent years to restore and upgrade the Anacostia River and the surrounding communities to clean and livable conditions.

Visitors enjoy a scenic view from the boardwalk at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens.





- Metro
- Boat launch
- Golfing
- Marina
- Parking
- Restrooms
- Self-guiding trail
- Swimming
- Visitor information
- Wheelchair accessible

Visiting the Park

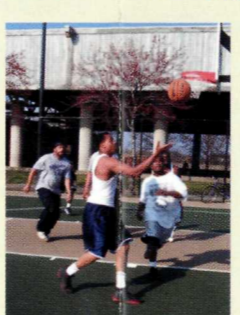
With more than 1,200 acres and 11 miles of shoreline, Anacostia Park is one of Washington, D.C.'s largest and most important parks, with diverse recreational opportunities, natural areas, and historic sites. Included in Anacostia Park are **Kenilworth Park** and **Aquatic Gardens** and the restored **Kenilworth Marsh**. The Aquatic Gardens' annual **Waterlily Festival** in July attracts thousands of visitors at the peak blooming season; a **boardwalk** from the garden ponds leads



American heritage. The District of Columbia Division of Recreation and Parks operates a

swimming pool and the **Aquatic Education Center** in lower Anacostia Park, as well as the **Kenilworth-Parkside Recreation Center** in Kenilworth Park. The historic **Langston Golf Course** offers an 18-hole course as well as a driving range, and three concession-operated **marinas** and a public **boat ramp** provide access to the tidal Anacostia River for recreational boating. Above the railroad bridge, and extending upriver to **Kenilworth Park**, much of the Anacostia

Park river bank is forested. The upper Anacostia is a favored place for **kayaking** and **canoeing** through natural areas; the lower section is favored by **sculling** and **rowing** crews for its broad, flat water. Anacostia Park's many river access opportunities also provide for **fishing**, **birdwatching**, and just **relaxing!** It is a haven from the nearby urban hustle and bustle, and thousands of people annually come to Anacostia Park for recreation and relaxation. You come, too!



Acknowledgments

The Anacostia Park brochure is a cooperative project of the Cultural Resources Diversity Initiative and National Capital Parks-East, National Park Service (NPS), and the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA)/D.C. Communities Program. The project was funded by the Challenge Cost Share Program of the National Park Service, the Seraph Foundation, and the Marpat Foundation. Alan Spears of NPCA and Antoinette J. Lee of NPS wrote the text. MapQuest.Com prepared the map, and Sue Dodge provided editorial and design services. Moriba N. McDonald of NPS coordinated the brochure project and conducted research on historical illustrations.

Stephen Potter, Stephen Syphax, Gary Scott, James Rosenstock, and Frank T. Faragasso provided valuable comments on the text. The project benefited from the support of Robert Stanton, former NPS director; Tom Kiernan, Iantha Gantt-Wright, and Francisco Morales-Bermudez of NPCA; Fran P. Mainella, NPS director; Katherine H. Stevenson, deTeel Patterson Tiller, John Robbins, Samuel N. Stokes, Major F. Horsey, John Hale, Janet Braxton, Lori M. James, Tina Short, and Clarendra Drake, all of NPS.

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