

District Waterways Advisory Commission

Wednesday, April 22, 2026



AGENDA

1. Call Meeting to Order
2. Commission Logistics
3. Review Meeting Objectives
4. Overarching Themes: Review Key Existing Conditions and Considerations
5. Topic Area #1: Boating and Recreation
6. Topic Area #2: Environmental Conservation
7. Breakout Room Discussion: Governance
8. Next Steps
9. Adjourn



Commission Logistics



Meeting Objectives



Meeting Objectives

Today's meeting is the first of four meetings focused on the eight topic areas.

	Mar 2026 <i>In-Person</i>	Apr 2026 <i>Virtual</i>	May 2026 <i>In-Person</i>	June 2026 <i>Virtual</i>	July 2026 <i>In-Person</i>
Meeting Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introductions and Plan Objectives and Visioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boating and Recreation Uses• Environmental Conservation and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinated Economic Growth• Public/Private Uses of Property and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Safety and Security• Transportation Gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interagency and Regional Coordination• Opportunities for Local Control

Discussion Topics for This Commission Meeting

Today's meeting will focus on:



Topic 1 – Boating and Recreation:

The orderly, safe, and efficient use of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers and the Washington Channel for boating and recreation.



Topic 2 – Environmental Conservation:

Environmental conservation and management of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, the Washington Channel, and adjacent property.

Meeting Objectives

The goal of the next four topic-specific meetings will be:

1. Identify existing conditions and key challenges and opportunities.
2. Discuss a set of preliminary goals for topic areas that will inform the Advisory Plan – 3 goals per topic area.

After today's meeting, preliminary goals will be reviewed, considered in the context of all topic areas, community engagement, and other stakeholder engagement, and finalized as part of the Advisory Plan.

Vision

Today's
Meeting

Three Goals Per Topic Area

Three Strategies Per Goal

Overarching Themes



Overarching Themes

Before exploring the two focuses for today, there are considerations that cut across topic areas worth examining:



Existing Waterways and Waterfront Governance

How is governance structured for the waterways and waterfronts? Who is responsible for what? Who are the key actors?

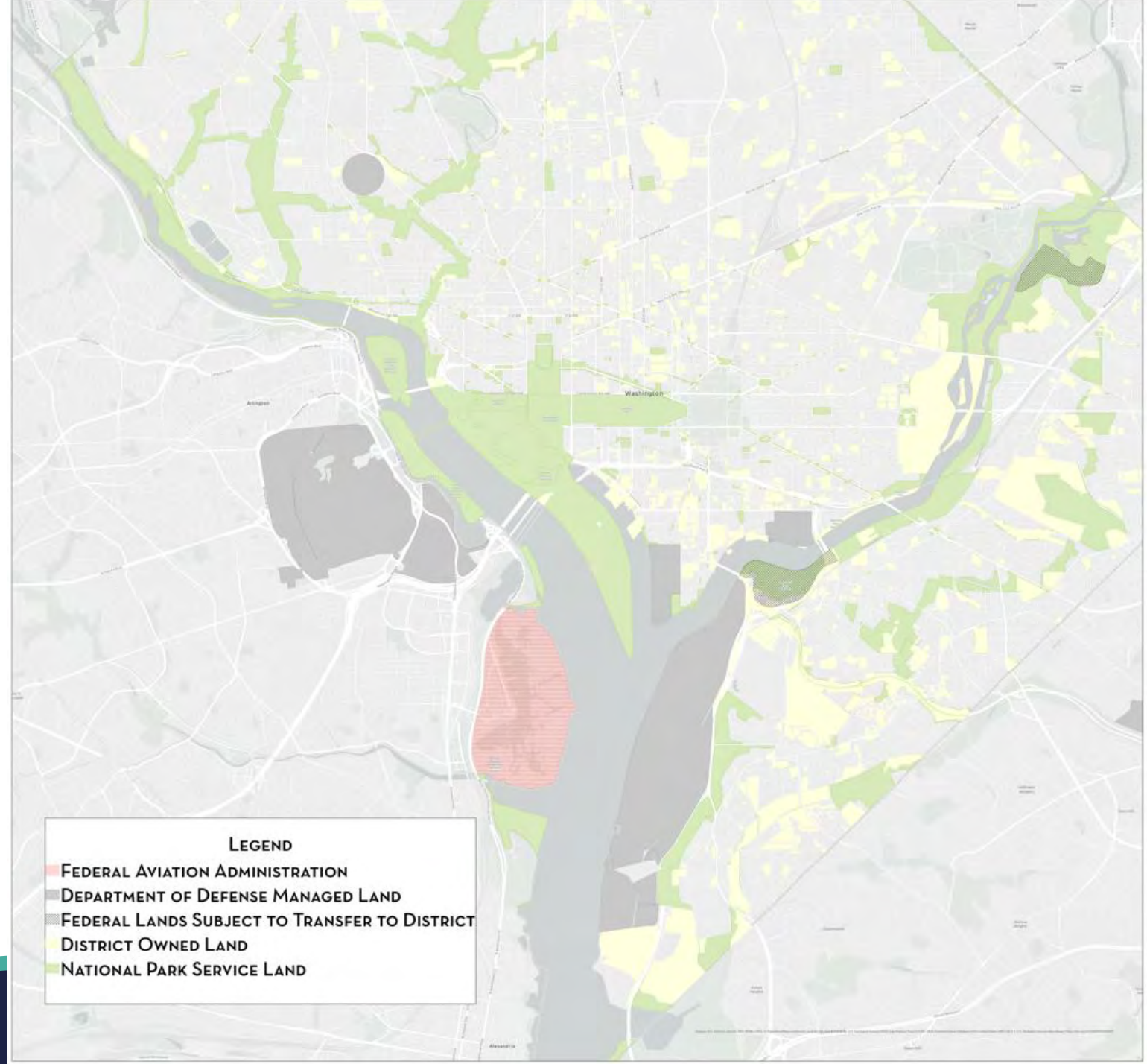


Safety

How are we defining safety? How does safety inform the work of this commission?

Overarching Themes: Shoreline Governance

The National Capital Planning Commission estimates that 85% of DC shorelines are owned by the federal government.



LEGEND

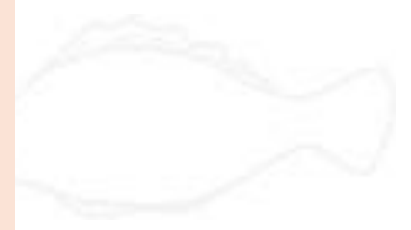
- FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION
- DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE MANAGED LAND
- FEDERAL LANDS SUBJECT TO TRANSFER TO DISTRICT
- DISTRICT OWNED LAND
- NATIONAL PARK SERVICE LAND

Waterfront Governance



<p>Federal</p>	<p>National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) Approval authority for projects on federal land in National Capital Reg. Advisory authority for projects on District land.</p>	<p>Army Corps of Engineers Issue and execute construction of piers, wharves, marinas, and other projects.</p>	<p>Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Oversees cleanup or cleanup funding for Superfund and brownfield sites.</p>	<p>National Park Service (NPS) Owns and manages large segments of land along the waterways.</p>	<p>Other Federal Landowners Department of Defense (DoD) Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)</p>	
<p>District <i>Mayor is the Chief Executive overseeing agencies. DC Council establishes policies.</i></p>	<p>Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) Regulate stormwater systems, storm sewer systems, and green building, and administer Brownfield Revitalization Act</p>	<p>Office of Planning (OP) Oversees development and zoning proposals. Supports long-term waterfront planning. Preserves historic structures. Zoning Commission approves development and zoning</p>	<p>Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) Manages District-owned parkland along the waterways.</p>	<p>Department of Transportation (DDOT) Manages and oversees use of some public spaces, streets, and trails along the waterfront art.</p>	<p>Department of Buildings (DOB) Approves building permits and floodplain permits.</p>	<p>DMPED Drives District planning and econ. development policy-making, incl. for major waterfront developments such as RFK Stadium and Poplar Point.</p>
<p>Non-Profit/ Other Orgs</p>	<p>Business Improvement Districts Support development and programming at waterfront sites.</p>					

Waterways Governance



Federal	U.S. Coast Guard Licenses commercial vessels, establishes restricted access zones, maintains buoys and markers, permits events on the water, and conducts search and rescue.	Army Corps of Engineers Issues permits and executes dredging and restoration, operates debris removal vessels.	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Sets water quality standards, establish pollution limits, issues and enforce discharge permits, mandates pollution cleanup.	NOAA Conducts natural resource damage assessments, assesses wildlife injuries from contamination, coordinates restoration requirements from polluters.	US Fish and Wildlife Service Evaluates impact of federal projects on fish and wildlife, manages habitat restoration.	
District <i>Mayor is the Chief Executive overseeing agencies. DC Council establishes policies.</i>	Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) Permit stormwater and storm sewer systems, oversee sediment remediation, enforce environmental regulations, manage habitat restoration programs	DC Water Operates the combined sewer overflows and the Clean Rivers tunnel project, skims debris from rivers.	Metropolitan Police Dept. – Harbor Patrol Enforces boating rules and safety equipment compliance, oversees marinas, conduct water rescues.	DC Fire and EMS Responds to water emergencies, supporting rescue and dive operations	Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin Coordinates water supply and environmental protection across region.	Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments: Coordinate regional collaboration on waterways emergency management plan, water quality, environmental protection, trash and debris removal, and transportation
Non-Profit/ Other Orgs	Anacostia Riverkeeper Conducts outreach, advocacy, and research on the Anacostia.	Potomac Conservancy Conducts advocacy, outreach, and research on the Potomac.	Chesapeake Bay Foundation Supports river restoration, advocacy, and education for the broader region.	Anacostia Watershed Society Supports river restoration, advocacy, and education for the Anacostia.	Potomac Riverkeeper Network Conducts outreach, advocacy, and research on the Potomac.	

Boating and Swimming

Managing waterway use requires implementing strategies that rationalize, prioritize, and clarify what types of activities occur and where.

Motorized Boating

- Where: shallow to deep water
- Safety: required licensing and life safety materials. Established maritime standards.
- Commercial Activity: requires additional licensing, established, fixed routes, and coordination between businesses.

Non-Motorized Boating

- Where: shallow to deep waters
- Safety: required licensing and life safety materials. Additional certifications may be required.
- Commercial Activity: requires additional licensing and coordination between businesses.

Swimming

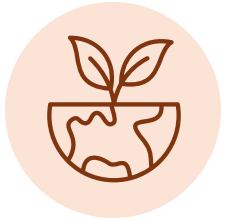
- Where: shallow waters
- Safety: supported by physical infrastructure. Sectioned off from open waters.

Cross-Cutting Themes: How Did You Define Safety?

Emergencies
 Security
 Protection
 Boater
 Swimmable
 Quality
 Regulations
 Education
 Wildlife
 Environmental
 Preparedness
 First Responders
 Access
 Infrastructure
 Clean

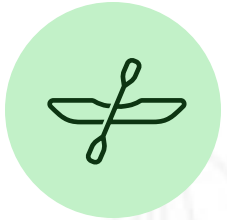
Cross-Cutting Themes: Safe Access To Water

When discussing safety, there are three dimensions we need to consider:



Environmental Conditions

Are bacteria levels below EPA standards for human health? Are there other contaminants in the waterways that are harmful to human health?



Traffic/Interaction of Uses

What types of activities are allowed and where? Where can boats access? Kayaks? Swimmers?



Natural Conditions

Does the waterway flow at a rate that is safe for the average swimmer?



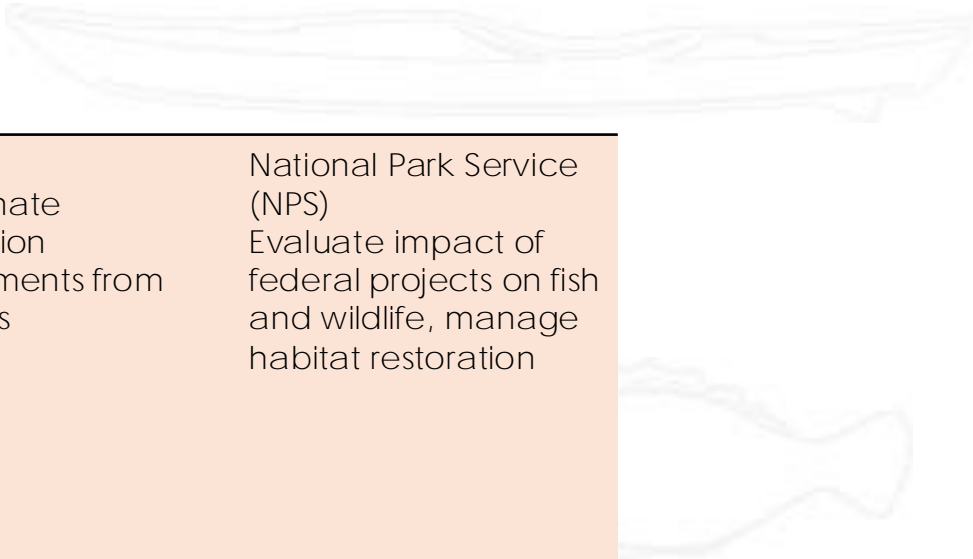
Shoreline Conditions

Do conditions along the waterways (e.g. seawall conditions, lighting, etc.) support safe recreational activities?

Topic Area #1: Boating and Recreation



Governance of Boating & Recreation



<p>Federal</p>	<p>U.S. Coast Guard License commercial vessels, establish restricted access zones, maintain buoys and markers, permits events on the water, and conducts search and rescue</p>	<p>Army Corps of Engineers Issue permits and execute dredging and restoration, operate debris removal vessels</p>	<p>Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Set water quality standards, establish pollution limits, issue and enforce discharge permits, mandates pollution cleanup</p>	<p>NOAA Coordinate restoration requirements from polluters</p>	<p>National Park Service (NPS) Evaluate impact of federal projects on fish and wildlife, manage habitat restoration</p>
<p>District <i>Mayor is the Chief Executive overseeing agencies. DC Council establishes policies.</i></p>	<p>Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) Permit stormwater and storm sewer systems, oversee sediment remediation</p>	<p>DC Water Operates the combined sewer overflows and the Clean Rivers tunnel project, skims debris from rivers</p>	<p>DC Metropolitan Marine Police Enforce boating rules and safety equipment compliance, oversee marinas, conduct water rescues</p>	<p>DC Fire and EMS Respond to water emergencies, supporting rescue and dive operations</p>	<p>Department of Transportation (DDOT) Manages and oversees use of public space, streets, and trails along the waterfront</p> <p>Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) Manage District-owned parkland along the rivers</p>
<p>Non-profit/Other Orgs</p>	<p>Recreational organizations / businesses Boathouses run by non-profits and concession operators facilitates recreational activity on the waterways for clubs, universities, high schools, and the public</p>	<p>Marinas Provide boat slips for resident and transient vessels, fuel sale, and waste pump-out services</p>	<p>Business Improvement Districts Support development and programming along the waterfront</p>	<p>Educational river nonprofits Host boat tours and informational sessions</p>	<p>Potomac River Safety Committee provides rowing community with guidelines for the safe use of the river, promotes boat safety awareness, educational, and self-help initiatives.</p> <p>"Friends of" Groups Friends of National Arboretum / Kenilworth Aquatic Garden / Fletchers Cover, Anacostia Park and Community Collaborative,</p>

Recreational Use

Evidence suggests recreational usage of the waterways has recently increased across the DMV.

Evidence



Stakeholder perspectives indicate an increase in recreation along and on the waterways post-pandemic.



Overall outdoor recreation has increased by +30% in DC since 2019.



Rowing and power boating are the most common recreational activities on both the Potomac and Anacostia.

Opportunities

The District could consider opportunities to:

1. Document use of the waterways to identify conflicts, adapt activities, and provide guard rails as needed
2. Clarify what types of activity occur where and implement strategies to formalize activity hubs

Swimming

Swimming via the shoreline is banned along the waterways, with exceptions for special events in the Potomac River and Anacostia River since 2018.

Evidence



1971 District Law banned swimming from the shoreline due to high pollution levels leading to illness. Legislation was passed in 2012 that created exceptions for special events in the Potomac, contingent on water quality testing. In 2018, that legislation expanded to include the Anacostia.



The Tidal Basin is the only waterbody segment that consistently tests as safe for primary human contact.



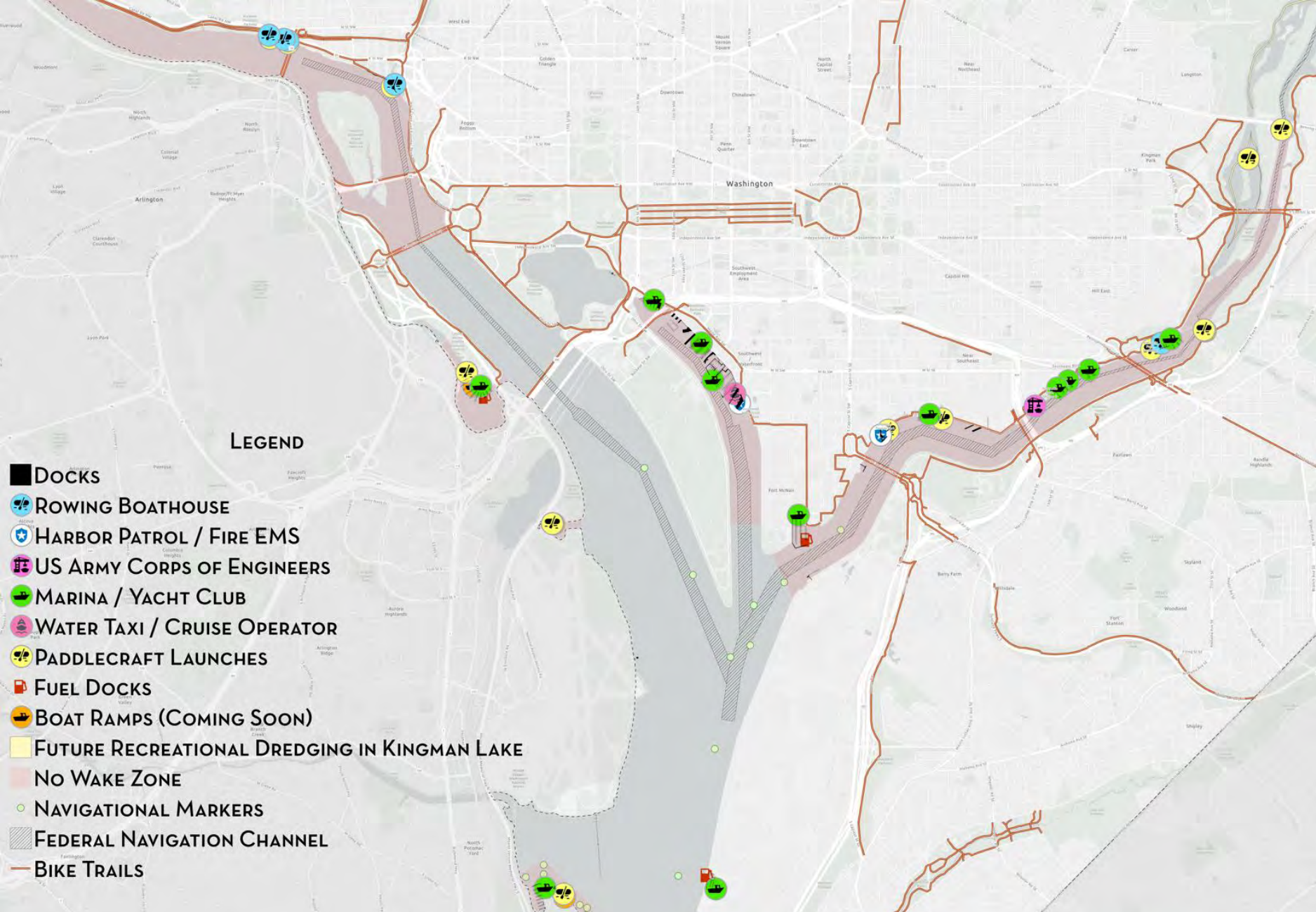
Turbidity, pH, and temperature are typically not issues for human contact. However, waterway currents and urban runoff may pose safety risks.

Opportunities

The District could consider opportunities to:

1. Expand water quality testing to enable more frequent swimming access
2. Amend legislation to allow public swimming access
3. Develop physical infrastructure to protect swimmers from open waters
4. Continue replacing combined sewer system with a modern system

Centers of Activity for Boating & Recreation



Boating and Recreation Discussion

Question 1:

Do these issues and opportunities resonate with you? Why or why not?

Question 2:

What ideas do you have and are excited to explore?



What are your reactions to these hypothetical goals?

Goal 1

Increase the recreational opportunities and access points along the waterfront

Goal 2

Foster a safe and accessible boating environment for all users

Goal 3

Establish zones for safe swimming in the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers

Topic Areas #2: Environmental Conditions



Governance of Environmental Conditions



<p>Federal</p>	<p>Army Corps of Engineers Issue permits and execute restoration, operate debris removal vessels</p>	<p>Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Set water quality standards, establish pollution limits, issue and enforce discharge permits, mandates pollution cleanup</p>	<p>NOAA Conduct natural resource damage assessments, assess wildlife injuries from contamination, coordinate restoration requirements from polluters</p>	<p>US Fish and Wildlife Service Evaluate impact of federal projects on fish and wildlife, manage habitat restoration</p>	
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<p>Organizations</p>	<p>Anacostia Riverkeeper Conduct outreach, advocacy, and research on the Anacostia</p>	<p>Potomac Conservancy Conduct advocacy, outreach, and research on the Potomac</p>	<p>Chesapeake Bay Foundation Support river restoration, advocacy, and education for the broader region</p>	<p>Anacostia Watershed Society Support river restoration, advocacy, and education for the Anacostia</p>	<p>Potomac Riverkeeper Network Conduct outreach, advocacy, and research on the Potomac</p>

Water Quality in the Potomac River

In the Potomac River, water quality issues stem from the combined sewer overflow system and urban runoff.

Evidence



The Potomac passes safety standards for swimming 70% of the time. Three “hotspots” only pass standards 10% to 48% of the time.



PFAS substances were present in analyzed fish in 2023, showing contaminants in waters in the Potomac.



While polluted runoff remains an issue in the Potomac, common river pollutants have declined in recent years (nitrogen, phosphorus and contaminated sediment).

Opportunities

The District could consider opportunities to:

1. Continue replacing combined sewer system with a modern system
2. Reduce industrial and chemical pollutants by increasing environmental best management practices (BMPS) and a natural shoreline buffers.

Water Quality in the Anacostia River

In the Anacostia River, water quality problems arise due to bacterial contamination, sediment contamination from industrial and human contaminants, and litter.

Evidence



There is evidence of PCBs, PAHs, and heavy metals in sediment throughout the river, as well as elevated PFOA and PFOS levels.



Mainstem sites in Anacostia passed E. Coli testing 76% of the time, with tributaries passing just 13%.



Stakeholder perspectives indicate a prevalence of trash in the Anacostia.

Opportunities

The District could consider opportunities to:

1. Reduce chemical pollutants by increasing environmental best management practices (BMPS) and a natural shoreline buffers.
2. Remediate contaminated soil via dredging
3. Continue replacing combined sewer system with a modern system
4. Coordinate trash clean up and reduction efforts

Ecological Impacts

While recent restoration efforts have reduced ecological harm, industrial contamination and urban runoff are the primary risks to aquatic wildlife and plant health.

Evidence



43% of the District land are impervious surfaces. DOEE designated all waterway segments as impaired by urban stormwater in some capacity in 2024.



Submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), a signifier of water health, has fallen since 2019 from 92 acres to 52 acres in 2023, although that is an increase from 2022.



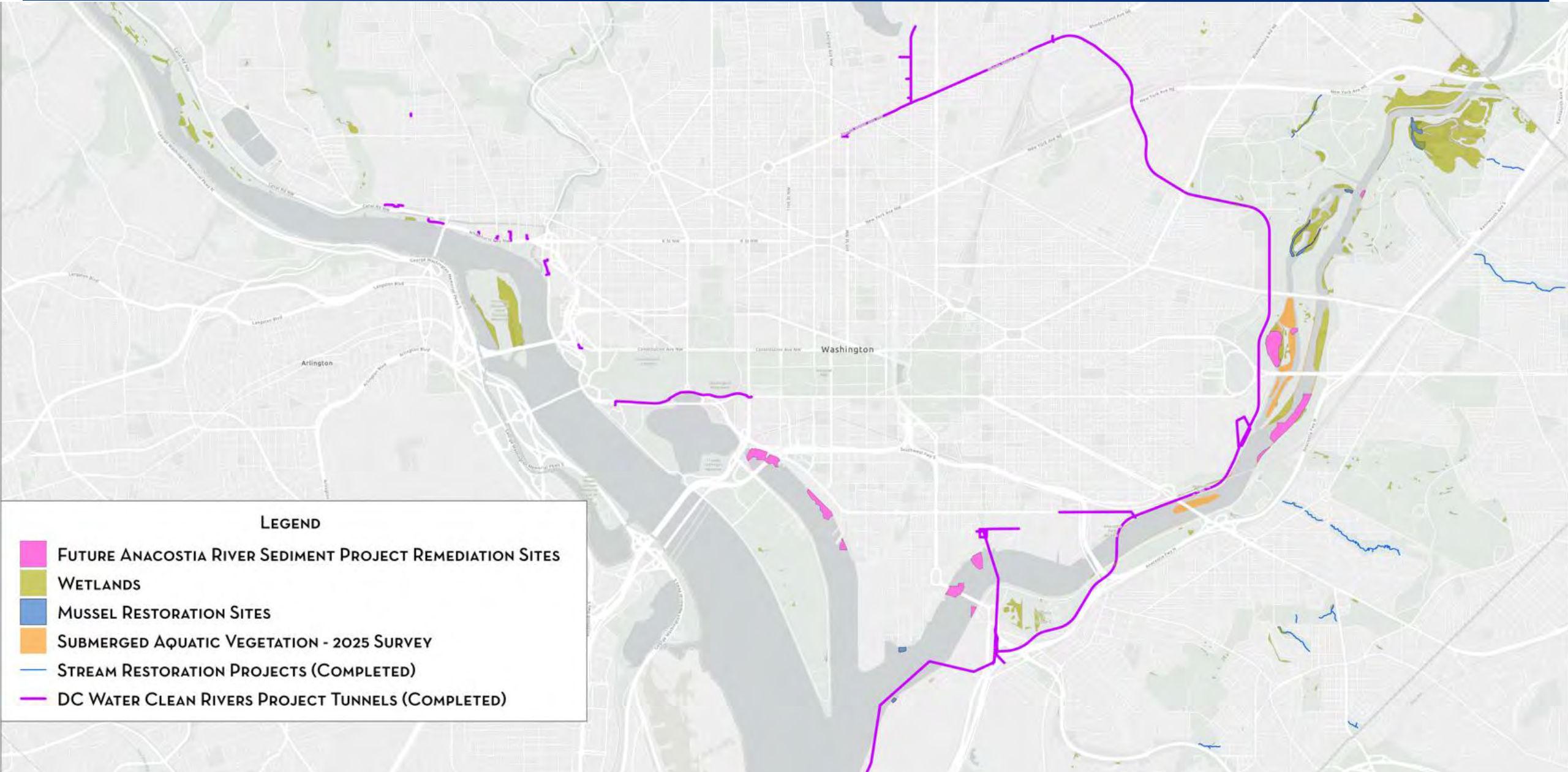
Fish population growth is mixed, with most species below historic averages and invasive species expanding. However, mussel populations have grown notably since 2017.

Opportunities

The District could consider opportunities to:

1. Mitigate runoff and chemical contaminants
2. Restore wetlands, shoreline buffers, and other native vegetation
3. Support native fish and shellfish population growth

Progress In Restoration and Remediation Efforts



Environmental Conditions Discussion

Question 1:

Do these issues and opportunities resonate with you?

Question 2:

What ideas do you have and are excited to explore?



What are your reactions to these hypothetical goals?

Goal 1

Reduce bacterial contamination of the waterways

Goal 2

Improve resilience along the waterways

Goal 3

Restore aquatic vegetation, wetlands, and native fish and shellfish populations

Breakout Room Discussion



Breakout Group Objectives:

- Refine preliminary goals for your topic
- Identify current governance structures and brainstorm how governance should work for your assigned topic

Instructions:

1. There will be two groups: Boating & Recreation and Environmental Conservation
2. Join your assigned breakout room
3. Discuss as a group – *20 minutes*
4. Share out responses with the group – *10 minutes*

Breakout Room Activity

1. (10 min) Review the initial goals and propose changes and/or additional goals that should be considered.
2. (10 min) Discuss the existing governance ecosystem specific **to your group's topic area and** propose ideas to facilitate better governance.



Next Steps



Next Steps



Roadshow Activations

- Planning activation or presentation at existing meetings or events.
- Target events include Anacostia Watershed Community Advisory Committee (5/12), Anacostia River Festival (5/16)
- Other events will be confirmed soon



Public Survey

- Survey has been live since January
- To date, we have collected over 230 responses to the survey
- Will remain open through the end of May
- Please share with your networks



Community Workshops

- Planning one in-person and one virtual workshop
- Will include a short presentation and focus-group discussion to gather feedback
- Targeting week of May 18 for virtual, week of May 25 for in-person

Next Steps

1. Determine the desire for topic area working groups
2. Provide input on potential roadshow activation locations
3. Share the roadshow activation events with your networks
4. Share the survey with your networks



Survey QR Code and Link



<https://bit.ly/DistrictWaterwaysSurvey>

Next Steps

During the next meeting, we will work to identify a set of goals regarding **Coordinated Economic Growth** and **Public/Private Uses**.

	Mar 2026 <i>In-Person</i>	Apr 2026 <i>Virtual</i>	May 20, 2026 <i>In-Person</i>	June 25, 2026 <i>Virtual</i>	July 22, 2026 <i>In-Person</i>
Meeting Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introductions and Plan Objectives and Visioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boating and Recreation Uses• Environmental Conservation and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinated Economic Growth• Public/Private Uses of Property and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Safety and Security• Transportation Gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interagency and Regional Coordination• Opportunities for Local Control• Identify Potential Goals for each topic

District Waterways Advisory Commission

Wednesday, April 22, 2026

