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CONTACT:

Brent Bolin, Anacostia Watershed Society
301-699-6204, bbolin@anacostiaws.org

Dottie Yunger, Anacostia Riverkeeper
202-391-9807, dottie@anacostiariverkeeper.org

**Anacostia Environmental Groups Call on DC Council Members and Candidates for
DC Government to Take Action to Clean Up Anacostia River Toxic Hot Spots**

WASHINGTON, DC, September 1, 2010...Toxic sites along the Anacostia River have threatened public and environmental health for decades, yet the government agencies responsible for their decontamination continue to haggle over minute details and jurisdictional boundaries. While the dangers are well known, action has not been forthcoming. Today, environmental groups call on DC council members and candidates for DC government to take action.

On September 7th at noon, Anacostia Riverkeeper, Anacostia Watershed Society, Anacostia Watershed Citizens Advisory Committee, DC Environmental Network, Groundwork Anacostia River and the Sierra Club Environmental Justice Program ask council members and candidates for DC government to pledge to take transparent and legally enforceable actions to address the contamination at six sites along the Anacostia River. This press conference will be along the banks of the Anacostia in Southeast, at the former Washington Gas Light site, a known toxic site. At the time of writing, Council Chair Vincent Gray, Councilmember Tommy Wells, Councilmember Harry Thomas, and representatives from the offices of Councilmembers Yvette Alexander and Michael A. Brown have committed to attending, and many other council members and candidates have been invited.

For years, advocates of restoring the polluted Anacostia River have been working to move government bodies to take action to clean up these toxic sites. "Enough is enough," said Brent Bolin, Director of Advocacy at the Anacostia Watershed Society. "For years we have waited for the responsible government agencies to do the right thing, but all that has gotten us is more of the same. It is time to hold our elected officials accountable."

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There are six known toxic hot spots on and in the river: the Washington Navy Yard, Southeast Federal Center, Poplar Point, Kenilworth Landfill, Washington Gas Light and PEPCO Benning Road. These sites are contaminated by a range of toxics, including PCBs (Polychlorinated biphenyls), PAHs (Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons), and heavy metals – toxics that endanger the health of the river and the communities that live, work, and play near it. Clean-up efforts, which have not been transparent, are sporadic at best. Meanwhile, the Anacostia River and the people and wildlife that inhabit it suffer; two thirds of the brown bullhead catfish, a popular catch for local fisherman, have cancerous lesions or sores. This is yet another way economically disadvantaged communities bear the brunt of this environmental issue. Three of these sites are in census tracts where residents have household median incomes of less than \$40,000.

“In its failure to clean up these sites along the Nation’s forgotten river, has the government forgotten as well its responsibility to the communities that live along it?” asked Anacostia Riverkeeper Dottie Yunger.

The federal government and the District seem unable to agree on their respective responsibilities for cleaning these toxic sites. On August 16th, US EPA Region III sent a letter to Mr. Frank Dawson, chair of the Anacostia Watershed Restoration Partnership (AWRP), reporting on the EPA’s work. In the letter, signed by Regional Administrator Shawn M. Garvin, the EPA says that “if measures to comprehensively address these sites in a transparent and legally enforceable manner are not in effect by mid-December 2010, the EPA intends to address these sites using appropriate Federal authorities.” At the August 26th AWRP meeting, District Department of the Environment Director Christophe Tulou stated his support for cleaning up the toxic sites and his intention to meet the EPA deadline. While this is a promising first step, it is unclear if the entire District government shares his sentiment, and – given the long history of inaction at these sites – the citizens of the District deserve a process that creates the structure, accountability, and resources needed to produce a solution to this long-overlooked problem.

Potential Interviews: Several current DC Council members as well as mayoral and council candidates; representatives from the following organizations: Anacostia Riverkeeper, Anacostia Watershed Citizens Advisory Committee, Anacostia Watershed Society, DC Environmental Network, Groundwork Anacostia River and the Sierra Club Environmental Justice Program; an environmental contaminant expert; and Historic Anacostia Boathouse Association representatives. *Following the press conference, members of the press are invited to take a short boat ride to visit several of the hot spots.*