



# STORIES OF PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING HEALTHY WATERS

## EPA Region 3 Water Protection Division

### Building Environmental Awareness

Washington, D.C. · December 8, 2016

Middle school students from vulnerable communities in the Washington, D.C. area are gaining a greater appreciation for the environment this fall as part of a weekend program largely funded by EPA.

The 20 students from 14 different schools are participating in the Saturday Environmental Academy (SEA), a program of the Anacostia Watershed Society. The 10-week program, offered in the fall and spring, is supported this year by a \$50,000 [EPA Urban Waters grant](#).

SEA provides the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders with hands-on learning activities and outdoor experiences to build their environmental interest, knowledge and awareness, and develop skills in team building, critical thinking and scientific investigation.

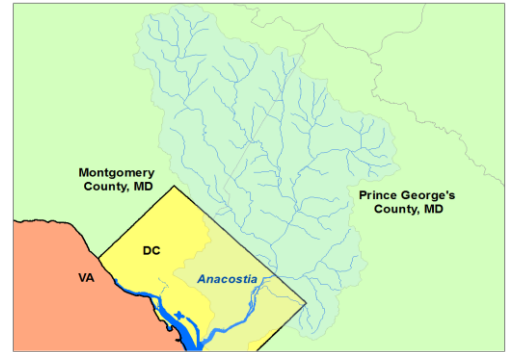
The program's theme this fall is "Celebrating Parks in Your Community," inspired by the National Park Service's centennial. The sessions have involved trips to national and local parks in the Anacostia and Potomac watersheds.

"It's going really well," said SEA Program Director Catherine Estes. "The Urban Waters grant was extremely helpful and we're very grateful for the funding." The program is free to students.

Among their activities, the students have helped conduct a tree inventory on the National Mall, competed in "Bio-Blitz" teams to identify species in Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens, paddled canoes in the West River during a special weekend overnight trip, held local wildlife like pine snakes and box turtles, did nature journaling along Rock Creek, and learned how parkland helps to capture and filter stormwater and improve the health of the Anacostia River.

The student activities are captured on the program's [Facebook page](#). One post from a trip to Huntley Meadows Park notes, "We participated in a naturalist-led program about the importance of parks and wetlands to wildlife, plants, and people. It's much more fun to get outside so a little rain didn't stop SEA from then hiking through the forest and out into the wetland. We learned about and saw beaver lodges, snapping turtles, green tree frogs, bull frogs, great egrets, and more."

The Urban Waters grant to the Anacostia Watershed Society is one of two awarded in EPA's Mid-Atlantic Region this year. The other was provided to Virginia Commonwealth University to develop a community greening and green infrastructure plan for its two campuses in downtown Richmond, as well as the Richmond Arts District.



#### AT A GLANCE

- Program offers students unique opportunity to learn about the environment.
- Urban Waters grant provides funding.



Naturalist at Potomac Overlook Regional Park speaks to students participating in the Saturday Environmental Academy. Photo: AWS

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