

Staffers Aid River Cleanup

By John McArdle
ROLL CALL STAFF

Not to make you jealous, but if you're a Capitol Hill staffer, you might be interested to know that a number of your colleagues are currently out boating on the Potomac and Anacostia rivers.

Well, they're doing more than just boating.

For the second year in a row, staffers will head to Washington's riverbanks today to lend a hand at Capital River Relief's Capitol Hill Day, and instead of falling into their usual Monday routines, dozens of staffers are trading in their suits and dress shoes for hip waders and rubber gloves as they work to clean up the city's dirty waterways.

Last year, 50 Hill staffers representing 15 different offices joined some 800 other volunteers in the Capital River Relief effort which, over three weeks, removed 50 tons of garbage from the two rivers.

This year, volunteers from offices including those of Reps. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) and Ed Case (D-Hawaii) and the House Sergeant-at-Arms will pick up trash from two sites, one along the Anacostia and the other on the Potomac. They will use motor boats and a 140-foot trash barge to reach areas not typically accessed by land-based cleanups.

Dino Teppara, a senior legislative assistant in Wilson's office, said he and his chief of staff are heading down to the rivers because they "thought it would be a good way to help out the local community and meet new people."

Teppara said he occasionally jogs along the Potomac River and often notices debris along the shore.

"This'll be a good way to help out, get some exercise and let people know about our office," he said.

Leading the cleaning crews once again is environmentalist Chad Pregracke, a sort of modern-day Huck Finn who lives on a river barge most of the year and spends his days facilitating cleanups and educational programs through his Illinois-based environmental group Living Lands and Water.



Pregracke

"We want [staffers] to get a sense of just how bad some of these places are, particularly on the Anacostia," said Pregracke, who will venture to the Hill on April 21, the day before Earth Day, to meet with House Resources Chairman Richard Pombo (R-Calif.). "These guys really help in making a lot of the decisions [on Capitol Hill], and hopefully they'll go back and talk to their bosses about what they saw down here."

Mary Beth Jarvis, spokeswoman for Koch Industries, which has sponsored Capital River Relief for the past two years, echoed those sentiments.

"They are dealing with these issues from a legislative and appropriations standpoint every day. This is a chance for them to physically get out there on the rivers and get muddy doing it," Jarvis said.

"One of the big focuses of the project is that if the rivers are going to be gorgeous anywhere, here we are in the nation's capital and we should showcase our commitment to these resources," she said. "The response has been excellent, and clearly we're hoping for good weather."