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## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

# River cleanup planned for spring

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An Illinois-based environmental group plans to spearhead a large-scale environmental cleanup in the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers in late March.

The Capital River Relief cleanup effort, launched by Chad Pregracke of the Living Lands and Waters non-profit agency in cooperation with a host of local environmental groups, will work to remove trash from the polluted rivers waters starting March 28. This year's efforts seeks to beat the 40 to 50 tons the cleanup pulled from the rivers last year.

The program, which lasts until April 22, calls on hundreds of volunteers to scour the shoreline of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers picking up trash that will be stacked onto a 110-by-30 foot barge which stores the bottles, bowling balls, refrigerators and coconuts that Pregracke said volunteers have found over the last three annual cleanups.

By the end of the nearly month-long event, the trash on the barge

resembles an aluminum popcorn bag after heating on a stove, ready to burst, Pregracke said.

"It really speaks loudly about the extent of how bad our rivers are," Pregracke said. "It makes a statement without making a statement."

The Potomac and the Anacostia Rivers have been on the decline since the early 1900s due to a combination of untreated sewage traveling into the water and deforestation and development in Prince George's and Montgomery County that let loose tons of soil into the rivers, dramatically altering the look and health of the once-pristine waters.

Events such as this can raise the public profile of the rivers to the general public, said Jim Connolly of the Anacostia Watershed Society which will participate in the March cleanup.

"You can't get people to believe in the possibilities for the river if they see trash in it," Connolly said. Pregracke, who travels the country assisting in similar environmental projects across the country, aims to grow not only local interest, but support from Capital Hill.