

Trash is removed from waterways during the annual Green River Spring Cleaning

In a 2012 Tryon Daily News Article, Mark Byington, organizer of Big Sweep, stated: “In Polk County, the Green River Gorge is a major asset in terms of natural beauty and tourism dollars. The tens of thousands of citizens and visitors that come to the Green River however often leave debris and litter along the river and the adjacent roadsides.”

On the morning of April 13, a total of 50 volunteers contributed their time to clean up the waterways of the Green River and Lake Adger on behalf of the citizens of Polk County. The 9th annual Green River Spring Cleaning, started by Shane Benedict of Liquidlogic kayaks, is now organized in partnership with MountainTrue’s Green Riverkeeper, Gray Jernigan. This year the cleanup resulted in 2500 pounds of trash being removed from the Green River from the Narrows down the Lower Green to Big Rock and included a porta potty, a broken kayak, tires, and an old metal frame from an antique car – possibly a Model A. There was enough trash and debris to fill two dumpsters.

Volunteer residents of Lake Adger have been participating in a lake shoreline cleanup since 2009 as part of the Big Sweep program but for the past three years have partnered with the Green River Spring Cleaning teams of MountainTrue and Liquidlogic. This year, 22 Lake Adger volunteers removed 7 bags of recyclables and 11 bags of trash for an estimated weight of 450 pounds. Items included an orange construction barrel, a large blue plastic barrel, a fire extinguisher, and a computer monitor. To date over 500 flip flops have been removed from Lake Adger and this year we finally found not one, but two matching pairs.

The items that make up the major portion of trash on the Green River and Lake Adger consist of single use items such as plastic water bottles, aluminum cans, and disposable cigarette lighters. While many of these items, along with the large number of flip flops, are unintentionally disposed of, this litter is an environmental contaminant. Litter is not only ugly, but it can harm plants and animals that make their homes in streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands. Much of the trash deposited in the Green River watershed makes its way downstream into Lake Adger during rain events.

According to the [EPA website](#):

“Trash can travel throughout the world's rivers and oceans, accumulating on beaches and within gyres. This debris harms physical habitats, transports chemical pollutants, threatens aquatic life, and interferes with human uses of river, marine and coastal environments.

Of all trash, plastic trash has the greatest potential to harm the environment, wildlife and humans. It can be found floating at the surface, suspended in the water column, or on the bottom of almost all water bodies. It is transported by rivers to the ocean, where it moves with the currents, and is often eaten by birds and fish, concentrating toxic chemicals in their tissues, and filling their stomachs, causing them to starve. Plastic aquatic debris is much more than a mere aesthetic problem.

Aquatic trash also reduces the aesthetic and recreational values of rivers, beaches and marine resources.”

A big thank you to all the volunteers who took time out of their Saturday to help make the Green River Watershed a cleaner environment that the public can enjoy and that will prevent harm to wildlife and human health. Thank you to Shane Benedict and Gray Jernigan for organizing this event every spring. A special thank you goes to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources staff for picking up and disposing of the collected trash. Please remember to dispose of your trash responsibly. Reduce, reuse, and recycle.

Submitted by Jamie Davidson, coordinator for Lake Adger shoreline cleanup