

TRASH

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adds discarded fishing line, bottles, cans, dirty diapers and even an occasional syringe.

Just as shocking, over 4,000 tires have been rolled away, about half still on rims. It's hard work. Volunteers must get them to the shoreline, hoist aboard boats, off load at a dock, and stack for pick up by Bridgestone Americas for recycle.

Most of the tires are not old enough to originate from flooding Chatham County land when the lake was filled in 1981. As further proof, we've returned multiple times after a thorough cleaning only to discover the arrival of yet more tires. The tires were also not intentionally put into the lake to attract fish because there are no holes for a cable tether. The most probable sources are illegal dumping and accidental entry during high water events, e.g., from junk yards located near feeder streams in the watershed.

From our records of over 280 cleanups, about 80 percent of the trash is attributable to the flushing action of rainfall runoff. That leaves 20 percent from littering by recreational

users of the lake. We've calculated about two tons of trash arrives at the lake with each significant rainfall.

Despite the trash, the lake is far from dead. It is a vibrant and vital natural resource. Last year, Jordan Lake State Park recorded 1.4 million visitors, near the very top for all parks in North Carolina. Visitors can see soaring bald eagles, graceful great blue heron, and far more. Nevertheless, trash destroys the aesthetics of the lake, threatens wildlife habitats, injures or kills wildlife and is dangerous to visitors.

Chemical residuals in trash could cause degradation in water quality though difficult to prove. Even so, a water body that supplies drinking water to 300,000 citizens deserves maximum protection from contamination. Citizens should not be left to wonder if the trash piling up on the shoreline poses a risk to their health.

We want to remove trash from the shoreline and prevent its recurrence. Our work is never ending because each heavy rainfall and busy holiday weekends brings us back to the same locations for more cleanups. While challenging, we're accomplishing this with no paid staff.

We've established several programs to

encourage volunteerism. Our semi-annual cleanups attract several hundred. In addition, 18 groups are in our Adopt-A-Shoreline Program to remove recreational litter three times per year at popular access points. Our new Adopt-A-Feeder Stream Program is intended to intercept trash before it reaches the lake. We also facilitate community service projects by corporations, civic and religious groups and schools year around.

Unfortunately, no government agency has the resources to tackle the problem.

Trash prevention is far beyond our reach for now because we need to engage local and state government. Raising public awareness will take decades. It will require a huge investment in public service announcements and in public educations. Our recent Public Awareness Pontoon Boat Tours for leaders of Durham and Chatham County are on a small scale but still encouraging. They've led to new initiatives such as separating out recyclables. More counties will be invited in the future.

We're able to sustain our programs by cash donations, grants and donated goods and services. Especially critical has been the support of Chatham County's Solid Waste and Recycling Division since we started in 2008. Dumpsters

(and now recycle containers as well) are delivered and hauled away for free.

Public interest in Clean Jordan Lake is growing. We now have over 800 members in our meetup.com/helpcleanjordanlake group. Partnerships with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, NC Wildlife Resources Commission and the NC State Parks are essential. All three have management authority for the lake. Each has a different mission that we must respect. But all recognize trash as a serious problem and are willing to help us.

Francis A. DiGiano is Past-President and co-founder in 2009 of Clean Jordan Lake, a grass-roots nonprofit based in Chatham County. Its mission is to restore Jordan Lake to a healthy and vibrant aquatic resource by removing trash from the shoreline and preventing its recurrence. Before his retirement, he served 26 years on the faculty of the Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering at the Gillings School of Global Health at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

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