



January 2006

**LIKE WINDS  
AND SUNSETS,  
WILD THINGS  
WERE TAKEN  
FOR GRANTED  
UNTIL  
PROGRESS  
BEGAN TO DO  
AWAY WITH  
THEM. NOW  
WE FACE THE  
QUESTION  
WHETHER A  
STILL HIGHER  
'STANDARD OF  
LIVING' IS  
WORTH ITS  
COST IN  
THINGS NATU-  
RAL, WILD AND  
FREE. PERHAPS  
OUR GRAND-  
SONS, NEVER  
HAVING SEEN A  
WILD RIVER,  
WILL NEVER  
MISS THE  
CHANCE TO SET  
A CANOE IN  
SINGING  
WATERS.**

— Aldo Leopold, *A Sand  
County Almanac*

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## WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP ACTION KIT

# A Guide to Watershed Cleanups



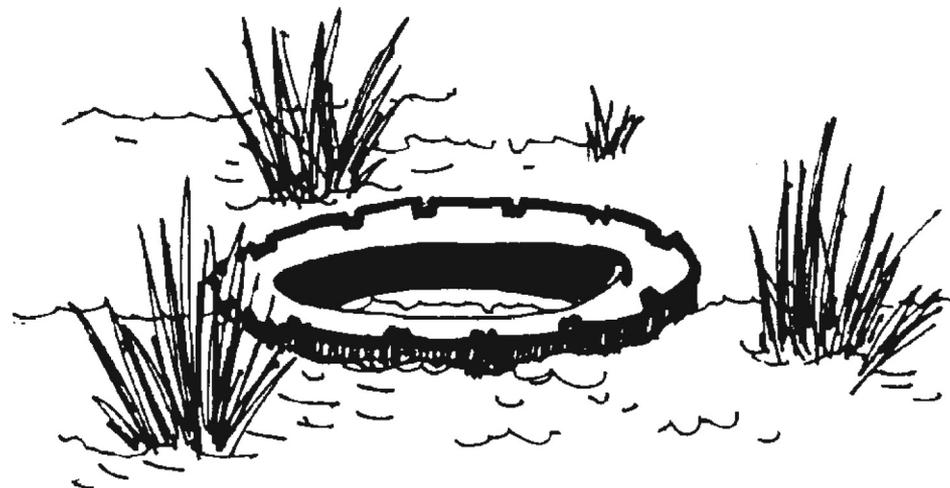
It is important to keep the area around your local waterways clean. When left on the ground, litter eventually will be blown or carried by wind or rain into a waterway, where it can interfere with spawning beds and injure fish, wildlife, and people. Litter can also block free-flowing water and hinder recreational uses.

You can help keep local water bodies litter-free by conducting a watershed cleanup. A watershed cleanup is easy to plan and allows the entire community to participate. It can also be an excellent way to start the community working on larger, more comprehensive watershed conservation projects. This factsheet describes how to organize a fun and successful stream, wetland, or highway cleanup in your watershed.

### ORGANIZING THE CLEANUP

The first part of organizing a cleanup is determining the person or group that will lead the cleanup effort. It is important to have one overall leader and several other people willing to work on the event. This group should meet to determine all of the tasks that will be involved in conducting the cleanup and to assign tasks to each person. Some of the tasks that need to be accomplished include:

- Obtaining permission from property owners to access the site. If the site is a park or other public property, contact the park managers to request permission.
- Obtaining equipment and supplies. This includes determining what equipment will be needed and the cost of equipment and supplies, including food for volunteers and first aid supplies.
- Fundraising and soliciting donations of time and supplies.
- Publicizing the event. This includes greeting reporters who attend the cleanup and following up with reporters after the event.
- Manning the registration table at the event.



- Speaking about the project and reviewing safety information at the event.
- Taking pictures at the event.
- Following up with thank you letters to donors and volunteers.

The event leader may want to hold additional meetings and keep in regular contact with all people working on the event to track overall progress.

## OBTAINING EQUIPMENT

The following is a list of suggested equipment and supplies needed for a cleanup. You can provide these items or ask volunteers to bring them.

- Work gloves
- Work boots
- Long pants and long-sleeved shirts
- Rakes
- Shovels
- Pitchforks
- Tin snips
- Heavy-duty rope
- Heavy-duty trash bags
- Orange safety vests
- Glass jars to dispose of hypodermic needles and other sharp objects
- Posterboard for signs
- Cameras and film
- Map of cleanup area
- First-aid kit
- Beverages and snacks
- Flagging or stakes
- Educational materials on watersheds and pollution prevention (copies of fact sheets from this *Watershed Stewardship Action Kit* would work well)

If there are large items such as cars and appliances that need to be removed, you may need heavy equipment to remove them. Trees or logs should only be removed if they are causing erosion and flooding problems or are restricting water flow. Contact your local government or state transportation agency. They might be willing to donate equipment and labor. Also, contact local construction contractors and developers who might want to lend a hand. Many local governments also can provide trucks, trash bags, maps, and

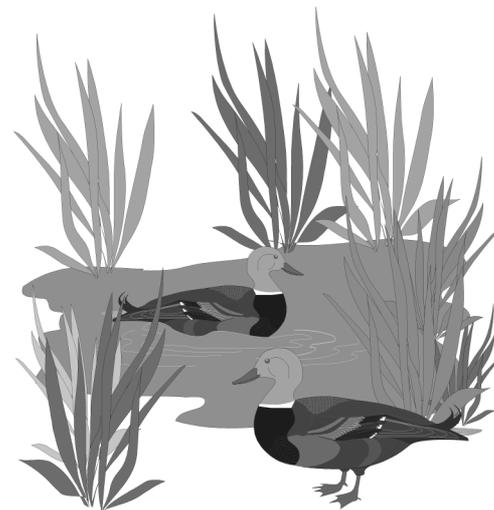
personnel. Contact your recycling coordinator or landfill staff for more information on how to recycle or dispose of items in your community.

## FUNDRAISING AND SOLICITING DONATIONS

Little money, if any, is needed to hold a cleanup event. Ask local grocery stores to donate food and drinks for your volunteers. Manufacturers such as Pepsi and Coca-Cola routinely give free drinks to community projects. Dairies might donate milk and ice-cream. Local hardware stores, pharmacies, and other stores might donate rakes, trash bags, and gloves. If there are canoe liveries on your river or wetland, ask them to donate canoes to participants. This will allow people to reach floating trash safely. Be sure to explain that you will recognize donors both at your event and through all publicity prior to and following the event. Simply post a sign or banner (which you might be able to get donated as well) at your event that reads something like, "Beverages made possible by a generous donation from \_\_\_\_\_." Also, be sure to thank all donors in press releases, flyers, and community announcements.

## PUBLICIZE THE EVENT

After organizing the cleanup, send notices of your cleanup to local media outlets. Emphasize how the project will benefit the entire community. Remember to ask local civic groups, environmental organiza-



tions, and schools to participate and help publicize the event. Also, be sure to invite residents who live in the cleanup area. Local media often are happy to print or air announcements and may even do a story on your project. Invite a reporter to cover the event. Be sure to greet any reporters at the event and follow up with reporters after the cleanup.

## **AT THE EVENT**

Post a sign at your cleanup site so volunteers know they are in the right place. Set up a table with food, water, and a greeter. The greeter should welcome participants and get their names, addresses (mailing and e-mail), and phone numbers so that you can contact them about future events.

You may want to start the cleanup effort with a brief program. Welcome and thank volunteers and discuss safety issues. You also can use this time to educate volunteers about watersheds and pollution prevention, to introduce your group and explain why the cleanup is important, and to thank volunteers and donors. If you are organizing the cleanup as part of a larger conservation effort, be sure to inform the volunteers of your other plans and activities. Invite their participation in the larger effort.

Warn volunteers to be aware of slippery rocks, glass, poison ivy, ticks, snakes, and steep banks. Suggest that volunteers work in pairs. Also, take the time to teach volunteers how to use tools properly. If you suspect there are hypodermic needles in the area, you may want to assign one person with the task of collecting them and instruct other volunteers to mark their presence with flags or stakes. Refer to “Safety and Fun in Your Watershed” in this publication for more information on making the event safe.

If you are cleaning up a large area, you may want to separate the area into segments and assign team leaders. Deposit piles and bags of trash in previously designated spots for collection. You may want to keep separate bags for recyclable materials.

Make sure that you take plenty of pictures and document how many tons or bags of trash you collect. The

volunteers will feel proud of their accomplishment if you can quantify their hard work. Donors also like to know what you have accomplished with their support. Send information about the cleanup and pictures of the event in a thank you note to donors.

## **DON'T FORGET TO HAVE FUN!**

Invite everyone back to a central location at the end of the day for a picnic or barbecue. You may want to arrange for music or a speaker to provide entertainment. A post-cleanup party can be your way of saying “thank you” and ensuring that the volunteers will be happy to help you again.

