

tennessee

Milking an Idea

When it's just people, canoes, and nets, picking up trash in streams can be tedious. So a few years ago, the Tennessee Chapter invented a "litter skimmer" made of empty milk jugs and other recycled materials. They started placing the skimmers across local streams. The contraption skims the water's surface and captures floating trash, which members periodically collect in bags (over eight hundred bags to date). "The ultimate goal is to have this program grow into various communities, letting the people take care of their own watersheds and subwatersheds," says Mark Campen, the chapter's education and membership director. "Civic groups, individual landowners, and Ike chapters are great candidates to implement this kind of litter control."

Here's what you need to get started:

Milk Jugs

Gallon-sized, empty, and clean. Check local recyclers. You'll need lids to keep water out. The Tennessee Ikes worked a deal with a local dairy to get new lids with the seals intact. The number of jugs depends on the stream's width. Allow slack. The skimmer needs to be in a slow-moving, readily accessible pool. Try to create a "J" shape, which encourages trash to accumulate near one bank, where you can easily collect it with nets and bags.



Plastic Construction Fencing

Two purposes. First, it keeps everything together. Second, it provides the nooks, crannies, and flexibility to catch floating debris. Because it's very durable, it can handle trash that is swept downstream by heavy rains. To find used fencing cheap or even free, check with local construction companies.

Twist Ties

Get the heavy duty ones. Use them to secure the fencing to the jug handles. This allows the skimmers to be flexible and helps keep them from breaking apart. Says Campen, "When heavy rain events happen, the skimmers get trashed; sometimes beyond repair. Most often though, the skimmer rips in two and can be repaired."

Rope

Weave heavy nylon rope through the entire length of the skimmer. Secure the rope on the bank to anchor the skimmer. Use some kind of bungee cord or spring where it attaches to the bank, which allows some give for light to moderate rain. The skimmer should easily detach when the force of the water becomes too great.

