

2019 Rivers Alive

Georgia's Year Round Waterway Cleanups

- **For the past few years, the total amount of trash items picked up during Rivers Alive cleanups each year weighed more than a half a million pounds. This total is an indicator of the tremendous amount of trash found on rivers, streams, lakes and shorelines and in the ocean and waterways around the globe.**
 - **People Pounds & Miles:** Since 1999, 488,000 volunteers removed 11 million pounds of trash from streams, rivers, lakes, beaches and wetlands as well as from the water. They did this by walking and boating 34,000 miles of Georgia's waterways.
- **Trash is a threat to our economy, environment and health – and is here to stay unless we change our practices.**
 - **It's a threat to our economies:** There are a number of costs associated with waterway debris, from educational programs to the technology and manpower needed to remove waste and trash. Rivers Alive volunteers have spent over 1.5 million hours cleaning up their local waterways. That translates to near \$30,000,000 worth of time and labor.
 - **It's a threat to wildlife and habitat:** Waterway trash can entrap and strangle wildlife, many of which are listed as threatened or endangered. Also, if animals eat trash they can absorb high concentrations of toxins. This has been seen in fish, birds and turtles, where contaminants in the animals' blood and tissues were attributed to ingested plastic particles.
 - **It's a threat to our health and food safety:** When trash makes it way to the ocean, toxic chemicals are transferred up the food chain as large ocean predators – many of which we eat – accumulate toxins eaten or absorbed by smaller fish and plants. The concentration of toxins in these predators, such as tuna and mahi-mahi, increase considerably as we move up the food chain.
- **Future generations will be the ones dealing with our trash.** We think this can and will look different in the future. By working together to find solutions, we can take significant steps forward in understanding and preventing ocean trash.
 - Estimated time it takes for these products to break down:
 - Fishing line: 600 years
 - Plastic Bottles: 450 years
 - Aluminum cans: 200 years
 - Plastics bags: 10-20 years
- **Rivers Alive, in partnership with Ocean Conservancy, invites everyone – citizens, businesses and policymakers – to join in this effort to achieve our vision of trash free streams, rivers, lakes, beaches and wetlands. Working together, we can apply our collective power to stop trash from ever reaching our coasts and waterways, and here are a few key steps we can take:**
 - **Eliminate trash items from the International Coastal Cleanup's "Top 10 Items Found" list such as straws, cigarette butts, plastic bags, bottle caps, food wrappers and beverage containers.** Some of these items are likely left behind by individuals who enjoy the great outdoors and are careless about disposing of their trash. Much of this trash is destined for landfills, but too easily finds its way into water that flows into storm drains and other waterways eventually emptying into the ocean. By changing our personal behaviors and waste management practices, we can greatly reduce this "Top 10 Items Found" list.
 - **Move from a linear to a circular business economy to remove items from the trash stream.** Manufacturers can move toward a fundamentally different business model, one based on a

circular economy where products are designed with the expectation that after their useful life, the materials used in these products will be recovered and reused in new and creative ways.

- **Reduce the global input of plastic waste into the ocean.** Plastics are a remarkable material – they protect valuable products in transit, save thousands of lives in hospitals and provide safe access to food and water following natural disasters. But not all plastics are created equal. There are some applications – like plastic bags – where the negative impacts of their use far outweigh any benefits derived from their momentary use. These types of plastic products, for which suitable alternatives exist, no longer need to be a part of our daily lives. By taking a much broader, systemic policy approach to reducing the use of these products, we can greatly reduce the amount of plastics that reach our ocean each year.

Rivers Alive 2019, by the numbers:

Total:

- 25,000 volunteers (**25,219**) cleaned over 1,200 miles (**1,292**) of waterways and removed more than 534,000 pounds (**534,499**) of trash.
- Since 1999, over four hundred and eighty-eight thousand volunteers (**488,500**) spent over 1.7 million hours (**1,776,777**) removing more than 11.6 million pounds (**11,602,833**) of trash from more than thirty-four thousand miles (**34,146**) of coastline and waterways in Georgia.

In 2019, volunteers found:

- **29,033** cigarettes
- **16,217** plastic bottles
- **7,879** glass bottles
- **2,236** plastic straws
- **2,098** tires

Results for each year can be found on the Results page on www.RiversAlive.georgia.gov.