

## 2013 Rivers Alive Cleanup A 14-Year Tradition

### Topline Messages:

- **Why is waterway trash a problem we need to address?** Waterways are our planet's life support system. When we choke the rivers, lakes and ocean with our trash, we jeopardize our own health, the survival of animals and the health of Georgia's economy.
  - **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. In 2012, Rivers Alive volunteers spent over 108,000 hours cleaning up their local waterways. That translates to \$2,260,752 worth of time and labor.
  - **It's a threat to wildlife and habitat:** Waterway trash can entrap and strangle wildlife. Also, if animals eat trash, they can absorb high concentrations of toxins. This has been seen in both seabirds and sea turtles, where higher levels of contaminants have been found in the blood of animals that had ingested plastic particles.
  - **It's a threat to our health and food safety:** Toxic chemicals are transferred up the food chain as large aquatic predators—many of which we eat—accumulate toxins eaten or absorbed by smaller fish and plants. The concentrations of toxins in these predators increase considerably as they move up the food chain.
- **Trash jeopardizes the health of the waterway, economy and people. It's in our rivers, lakes and ocean – and it's here to stay unless we change our practices.** Trash is one of the biggest threats to the health of our waterways. For 14 years we have watched as trash has threatened wildlife and ecosystems and undermined tourism and economic activity.
  - In 2012, 29,300 volunteers (29,316) cleaned over 2,100 miles (2,140) of waterways and removed over 360 tons (727,232 pounds) of trash and garbage including tires, cans, shopping carts and refrigerators from Georgia's waterways.
  - **Future generations will be the ones dealing with our trash.** We think this can and will look different in the future. By working together, we will take significant steps forward in understanding and preventing waterway trash.
    - Estimated time it takes for these products to decompose:
      - Fishing line: 600 years
      - Plastic Bottles: 450 years
      - Aluminum cans: 200 years
      - Plastics bags: 1-20 years
  - Cleanups are an essential step in educating the public about the importance of preventing litter pollution.
- **What you use, eat and drink in your everyday life could end up in the water.** Every year our Top 10 list includes items such as cigarettes, utensils and beverage containers – trash that comes from our everyday lives and households. Items that are not only unnatural to the environment but are also dangerous to the wildlife that relies on the ecosystem.
- **Rivers Alive, in partnership with the Ocean Conservancy, is digging deeper into waterway trash. Starting this fall, Rivers Alive will distribute new Ocean Conservancy data forms that will help us learn more about what kinds of debris are polluting waterways in Georgia and around the world.**
  - The cleanup data forms are more specific, asking volunteers to note not just the type of items they find but what they are made of as well. Understanding what kinds of materials are on our beaches is important in order to advocate for product redesign or new policy solutions that would address the most problematic items and materials.

- **Every piece of trash that is picked up during a cleanup should be a challenge for change.** Trash simply shouldn't be in the rivers, lakes, or oceans. Questions we should think about for every item picked up: How did it get there? How can we prevent it from happening again?
  - Whether it is by changing your habits to create less trash, or pushing industries and governments to find alternative uses, we can work together to find a solution.
  - **We have a responsibility all year long to reduce, remove and reinvent.** From product development to disposal, we all have a role to play.
- **We can't do it alone.** While solutions are built on individual actions of people, organizations and companies, it will take a collective movement to make the biggest change. We need more volunteers than ever to join our movement and make a bigger difference.
  - **Commit to cleanup.** Trash in our streets, cities and neighborhoods inevitably ends up in our waterways, beginning a long, slow march towards the ocean. The next time you see trash blowing by or lying in a gutter, pick it up today and keep it out of the waterways and beaches for next year.
  - **Join a cleanup.** Check out our website to find one near you. Can't find one? Gather friends and neighbors and organize a cleanup in your area.
  - **'Up' your trash awareness.** Know where it goes. Follow your items from consumption to landfill to find out what ends up where. Reduce your overall consumption of one-time use products to lower your contribution to the waterway trash problem.
  - **Pledge to fight trash.** What would happen if 10,000 people decided not to make as much trash for one month? We could reduce the trash on Earth by over a million pounds. Take the pledge to help turn the tide on trash.
  - **Support Rivers Alive.** Visit our website and donate today to support our critical waterway work all year long.
  - **Become a sponsor.** Sponsorship helps Rivers Alive achieve its mission of creating awareness of and involvement in the preservation of Georgia's water resources.
- **Our vision is for trash free streams, rivers, lakes, beaches and wetlands.** This problem is human-generated and preventable. Keeping our waterways free from trash is one of the easiest ways we can make a difference. From product design to proper trash disposal, we all have a role to play in keeping Georgia's waters clean and free of debris.

### Rivers Alive 2012, by the numbers:

#### **Total:**

- 29,300 volunteers (**29,316**) cleaned over 2,100 miles (**2,140**) of waterways and removed over 727,000 pounds (**727,232**) of trash.
- During the past 14 years, over three hundred thousand volunteers (**314,777**) spent over one millions hours (**1,149,418**) removing nearly eight million pounds (**7,979,544**) of trash from more than twenty-two thousand miles (**22,563**) of coastline and waterways in Georgia.

#### **Volunteers found:**

- **19,866** cigarettes
- **1,176** feet of fishing line
- **8,967** glass bottles
- **11,661** plastic bags
- **2,053** tires
- **7,359** wrappers