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It's Time for Fall Cleaning in the Highlands!

Millboro Springs. In the Alleghany Highlands, we all associate the fall with beautiful tree colors, harvest festivals, brisk mornings, and hunting season. But there's another important activity that happens this time of year around the world. September and October are becoming recognized as worldwide waterway cleanup months. On large and small scales across the planet, volunteers come together to clean up the most easily preventable pollution source for the earth's waters – human litter. Our region is no exception.

On October 25th, members of the Cowpasture River Preservation Association (CRPA) cleaned up litter on the Walton Tract, U.S. Forest Service parcel just off state route 42 in Bath County. The cleanup involved areas of the Tract that are open to the public throughout the year, favorite spots to canoe, camp, and picnic. The CRPA does this twice a year as a participant in the Commonwealth of Virginia's *Adopt-A-Stream* program. The work this weekend was also in collaboration with the Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup program (ICC) which is administered in Virginia through *Clean Virginia Waterways* at Longwood University.

In spite of the rain, it was fairly warm and a small, hearty crew generated 15 bags of refuse including a mattress spring, dirty diapers, shoes, cans, bottles, and more from three sites along the river. Polly Newlon, executive director of the CRPA noted, "To me, it's mind-boggling that people can come and enjoy such a beautiful place and just toss their refuse into the bushes as though it's one giant trashcan! We will continue to conduct these cleanups at least twice a year with the hope that each time the amount we bring out will decrease."



After a morning of cleaning up, CRPA members pose proudly beside the Cowpasture with their well-earned sign provided by the VA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation. From left to right are executive director Polly Newlon (Highland) and CRPA board members, Jean Howell and Joe Wood (Bath) and Mike Jamison (Alleghany). The sign will be posted on Route 42 near the Walton Tract entrance. Photo: Cathy Wood.

Over the past two years improvement is being seen at the Walton Tract. The initial cleanups brought out 3 times as much and included such things as large household appliances. Newlon added, "We really hope that people will realize how privileged we are to have such gorgeous rivers in this part of Virginia, and will help us to keep them clean. With state and federal budgets for recreation being what they are, it is important for the citizens themselves to play a part. If each visitor would simply pack a few extra garbage bags and make sure they take out whatever they bring in, we'd be happily out of a job!" Even when refuse is not thrown into the river itself, trash that is strewn around river banks such as at riverside picnic and camping areas can end up in the river during high water events that are common during the spring, and can ultimately be carried as far as the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, both of which are suffering direct effects on wildlife and general health as a result.

Since its enactment and appropriation in May of 1998, Virginia's Adopt-A-Stream program has made great headway in recruiting citizen stewards and raising public awareness of the magnitude of trash accumulating in Virginia waterways. Round blue and white *Adopt-A-Stream* signs around the Commonwealth signal to all passersby that someone nearby cares. Similarly, the International Coastal Cleanup program, begun in 1986, has grown to include participants from 100 countries, including 378,000 volunteers around the world in 2007. The ICC Virginia report from 2007 shows that over 5,000 people covered 432 miles of waterway collecting over 280,000 pounds of litter. In our region, citizens from Highland, Bath, and Alleghany counties came together last weekend to do their part on behalf of the Cowpasture River.

The canoe "take out" area on the Walton Tract is a very beautiful, popular and (unfortunately) littered area where all sorts of potential pollutants were found in abundance. Photo: Polly Newlon.

