

More Volunteers Find More Trash at New River Clean-up

By Joel Frady

A slightly chilly breeze whisked over the New River on Saturday morning as volunteers congregated and drank coffee in parking lots. It was much like a work day as people discussed the job at hand, but there was no office - only a canoe, a pair of gloves and the desire to clean up a natural landmark.

For four hours volunteers waded through the river and such hazards as fallen branches and spider webs to pull trash from the river. Although most of it is the normal (beer cans, soda bottles), the event turned up the usual slate of odd finds such as shopping carts, patio chairs, a doll house and a water heater.

Courtney Wait, advocacy coordinator for the National Committee for the New River (NCNR), said that it was the largest group of volunteers she has seen in her four years organizing the event.



"This year we saw 44 more volunteers, 1,420 more pounds of trash and almost a mile more of river cleaned up than last year," said Wait. She noted that there were 32 fewer tires this year despite the rise in total trash," which she called a "great sign." Overall, 150 volunteers cleaned more than 36 miles of the river and collected approximately 4,700 pounds of trash.

Volunteers came to Ashe County from all over the state to participate in the clean-up. Don Hart, who resides in Raleigh, said that he woke up at 4 a.m. to make the trip to the mountains for his sixth clean-up.

"It's just really important for me to get the trash out of the river," he said. "It's a beautiful river and I can't understand why people enjoy it, yet they trash it. It's beyond my comprehension." Hart noted that he has a second home in the county and uses the river to fish, swim, canoe and kayak, and he feels a responsibility to help keep it clean.

"We use the river and we have a lot of fun in the river," said Hart. "We want to pay back, help clean it up and keep it clean. It kind of helps pay for our use of the river."

For Jonathan Halsey, a recent addition to the NCNR's board of directors, it was a chance to find out first-hand what they do.

"I thought this would be a good way to get to know the organization better, meet some of the staff and enjoy a nice day on the river," he said. Halsey added that he also enjoyed the "camaraderie" between volunteers and "everybody just working together for a good cause."

The annual clean-up is one of several similar events held by NCNR throughout the year. Wait noted that local outfitters, who provide the canoes for the event, are another key part of the event.

"We're so lucky to have the help not only of the volunteers who join us on this one special day to clean the river, but of the New River State Park, and all the outfitters (Rivergirl, Zaloo's, New River Outfitters, Rivercamp USA, and Riverside) along the New- without these donations of time, energy, and boats this effort wouldn't be nearly as successful as it has continued to be," said Wait.

To find out more about the National Committee for the New River and future clean-up events on the river, call (336) 982-6267 or click to www.ncnr.org.