

Giving back to the river

Emily Lindstrand Tuesday, September 11, 2018



Annual cleanup on the Clackamas River connects boaters, floaters, divers with litter

This weekend, hundreds of volunteers removed trash from the Clackamas River while on boats, flotation devices and diving under the water. On Sunday, Sept. 9, the 16th annual Down the River Cleanup brought participants to a 20 mile stretch of the scenic stream between Estacada and Oregon City. The event, co-hosted by the Clackamas River Basin Council and We Love Clean Rivers, is the largest and longest-running cleanup of its kind in the state.

Alix Danielsen of We Love Clean Rivers said there was "a really good showing" of participants this year. Around 400 people had registered for the cleanup. Danielsen noted that Barton Park is typically a popular site for attendees to start cleaning the river, and this year, Carver Park and Milo McIver State Park were also highly frequented sites. Volunteers also worked near Riverside and Clackamette parks.

Numerous individuals and organizations participated in the cleanup, including the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office Dive Team, Clackamas Fire Water Rescue and the Valhalla Dive Group, a team dedicated to helping injured veterans through diving. "We want to have a way to build community," said Jasmine Stoner, the group's activities director. "The veterans are certified to dive, and we want to help clean the river. This is our first big event, and we're excited for such a good turn out."

Volunteers assisted with the cleanup in a variety of ways. While many collected trash from boats, others acted as safety captains on the river and garbage scouts on smaller boats who ferried full trash bags from the boaters back to shore. Divers searched for items underwater, and additional volunteers helped with registration and sorting the garbage once it made its way back to land.

Mike Keyes, a first time participant of the cleanup, worked underwater with the group Eco-Dive Northwest Scuba. He focused his efforts in the Carver stretch of the river. "It was fun. It's different from normal diving," he said. "Someone else explained it as an adult Easter egg hunt. You start to find stuff

and get excited as you look for more." Keyes noted that most of the trash he found was toward the middle of the river rather than near the shoreline. He picked up several fishing hooks, shirts, plastic oars and a scuba mask. He also encountered several fish while underwater. "I swam with steelhead and other fish I didn't expect to run into," he said.



ESTACADA NEWS PHOTO: EMILY LINDSTRAND - Boaters pick up litter at Barton Park during the annual Down the River Cleanup last weekend.

On the shores of the river at Carver Park, husband and wife team Joyce and John Nagy sorted trash after it had been brought in by volunteers on the water. The couple has a long affiliation with the Clackamas River. "We grew up a mile from here. We swam this river in high school and spent a lot of time at the Carver boat dock," Joyce Nagy said.

Once items were brought in from volunteers on the water, the Nagys sorted them into trash and recycling. Joyce reported finding cans, paddles, a chainsaw bar and a live crawdad in a Mike's Hard Lemonade bottle and noted that there were more recyclable items than garbage.

Meanwhile, volunteers Morgan Parks and Molly Shea floated the river while they picked up litter, ending their journey at Barton Park. "It's a great day to come out to do some hands-on stewardship," Parks said. Shea, who hadn't visited the Clackamas River prior to the event, noted how clean the water was. "There seem to be a lot of people who care about it," she said. "It was good to give back to the local ecosystem."

Holly Mulcahey participated in the cleanup by collecting trash from a paddle boat, finishing up at Barton Park. Though it was her first time volunteering in the event, she lives in the area and visits the river "all the time." She appreciated the variety of wildlife she encountered throughout the day. "It was exquisitely beautiful," she said, noting that she saw ducks, birds, fish, adult deer, fawns, eagles and ospreys. She also enjoyed the variety of volunteers she worked with. "There was a diverse group of people who showed up to clean the river on a wide range of floatation devices," she said.

Many volunteers like meeting new people at the cleanup. "It's great to help improve the quality of the river. It's a lot of fun to meet up with different groups and work together for the same cause," John Nagy said. "These are people who love the water and want to keep (it) in a pristine state. There's a sense of camaraderie working toward the same goal." Many involved with the event are already looking toward the next cleanup event.

"I would totally love to do this again," Keyes said.