

Do Your Doody - Pet Waste and Water Quality

Suzanne Wade, UWEX Rock River Basin Educator for Natural Resources

Annually, I give dozens of talks about water quality and runoff pollution. During the talk I highlight sources of phosphorus and other pollutants such as bacteria.

In the Rock River Basin the largest source of phosphorus comes from agriculture, primarily from animal manure either directly washing into streams and rivers or washing off from farm fields.

Other sources include phosphorus being discharged from wastewater treatment plants or from industry, within their permit limits. But also from sewage overflows during large rain events that overwhelms the treatment plant's capacity.

In my talks I highlight other sources including urban wildlife, such as geese, and from our best friend, the dog. Instructing people to pick up after their dogs seemed like an easy thing for people to do, and it had a social up-side of removing the 'yuck' factor from the roadways.

Secretly, I always felt a bit silly, comparing dog waste to the amount of phosphorus and organics coming from animal agriculture. I decided I needed to do some research to help quantify the problem, and boy, was I surprised with what I found out! Never again will I feel funny about telling people to pick up after their dogs to help water quality.

Here's what I learned: 35% of households in Wisconsin have dogs, and the average number of dogs/household is 1.5*. Using those state averages, Watertown, a typical mid-sized city with 8,046 households, would have 4,224 dogs.

The average size for dogs is 40 lbs and each average sized dog deposits 3/4 pound of feces/day. So if the estimate for dogs is



correct, then in Watertown, a nice city, with the Rock River winding through it, 3,168 pounds of dog pooh are being deposited each and every day. Now this happens 365 days a year which equals to an amazing 1,156,320 pounds per year or 578 tons!

Not all of that washes to the river of course, several studies along the East Coast found 40 - 50% of dog owners don't walk their dogs. While some of that waste may end up washing off their property, there aren't any studies I could find that quantified how much, so we'll eliminate these dogs from the total.

Of those who do walk their dog, these studies showed that about 35% never clean up after their dogs. Once the dog 'goes' in the street there is nothing to stop it from being washed down the street to the stormdrain and out to the river.

One spot of good news for the basin, in a 2003 Dane County survey of 500 residents, only 10% reported that they didn't currently pick up after their pets. Hopefully that's true throughout the basin.

If we use, however, the study's 35% figure, it would mean that in Watertown 813 dogs, that are walked, aren't picked up after. Which means that up to 111 tons of dog feces could be washing off of the streets, down the storm drain and into the Rock River. Even if just one percent of the dog waste washes off, that's still ONE TON of dog waste flowing into the river every year from just one city.



*American Veterinary Medical Association US Pet Owners Demographic Source Book



Reasons Dog Owners Give for Picking Up or Not Picking Up After Their Dog

(Home and Garden Information Center, 1996 unpublished survey by the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension)

Reasons for not picking it up:

Because it eventually goes away
 Just because
 Too much work
 On edge of my property
 Its in my yard (or in the woods)
 Not prepared
 No reason
 Small dog, small waste
 Sanitary reasons
 Use as fertilizer

Reasons for picking it up:

It's the law
 Environmental reasons
 Hygiene/health reasons
 Neighborhood courtesy
 It should be done
 Keep the yard clean

In the whole Rock River Basin we have about 316,000 households with 166,848 dogs, meaning 125,136 pounds of feces are produced every day, or 23,000 tons a year. Of this 8.7 million pounds of dog waste is not picked up and properly disposed of. - Amazing.

Additionally, dogs can be a major source of pathogens in urban watersheds. Many dogs carry salmonella and the parasite Giardia and all release coliform bacteria: 23 million bacteria/gram of waste.

The 35% of dog walkers who don't pick up after their dogs, tend to be very resistant to change, with almost half saying they wouldn't change even with fines, complaints from neighbors or if given convenient options for retrieving and disposing of the waste.

An article on "Understanding Watershed Behavior" from Watershed Protection Techniques suggests that an alternative message for these 'resistant to change' folks, is to encourage them to use rudimentary manure management techniques by training their pets to use non-mowed areas that are not hydraulically connected to a waterway, road, or ditch.

Figure out your community's P (pooh) index

Go to www.rockrivercoalition.org and follow the links to an Excel spreadsheet that will allow you to figure it out, using 2000 census data.

Let's keep Bend dog-friendly by being responsible dog owners. For your convenience, Bend Park and Recreation is providing dog clean-up stations in parks. But don't just rely on those. It's always a good idea to carry your own bags. So unless you've got your dog thoroughly toilet trained—don't forget, clean up after your pet. Find out how to get involved by contacting Softpaws, a volunteer group advocating responsible dog ownership, at www.softpawskg.org

De-Poop-Da-Park
 Dog Waste Clean-Up Campaign

Brought to you by Softpaws and Ruff Wear.
 Together promoting responsible dog ownership.

Bend Metro Parks and Recreation District • Mt. Bachelor Kennel Club • Deschutes Veterinary Clinic
 Bend Pet Express • Paul Evers Design • Dogging Studios • Leonard Media Arts • The Bulletin

Here, and on the previous page, are a few of the media campaign posters that have been developed around the United States to encourage pet waste clean-up. These, and materials on other topics, can be found online in the EPA Nonpoint Source Outreach Toolbox. Which do you find the most compelling?

IF YOU THINK PICKING UP DOG POOP IS UNPLEASANT, TRY SWIMMING IN IT.

Pet Waste Pollutes Our Rivers, Lakes & Streams

CLEAN WATER CAMPAIGN
 www.CLEANWATERCAMPAIGN.COM

Let's keep Bend dog-friendly. Be a responsible dog owner and pick up after your canine friend. For your convenience, Bend Park and Recreation is providing dog clean-up stations in parks. But don't just rely on those. It's always a good idea to carry your own bags with you whenever you take your dog, just in case of you know what. And don't forget to teach your dog responsibility. Especially if there are children or other animals around. So unless you've got your dog thoroughly toilet trained—don't forget, clean up after your pet. Find out how to get involved by contacting Softpaws, a local volunteer group advocating responsible dog ownership, at www.softpawskg.org

De-Poop-Da-Park
 Dog Waste Clean-Up Campaign

Brought to you by Softpaws and Ruff Wear.
 Together promoting responsible dog ownership.

Bend Metro Parks and Recreation District • Mt. Bachelor Kennel Club • Deschutes Veterinary Clinic
 Bend Pet Express • Paul Evers Design • Dogging Studios • Leonard Media Arts • The Bulletin