Impact Project Report

Master Naturalist creates two-pronged approach to tackle litter

Issue

Keeping litter out of lakes protects aquatic life, reduces the cost of drinking water treatment, and preserves scenic beauty and recreational value. It's cheap to prevent litter, but expensive to clean up. In 2021, North Carolina's Department of Transportation spent over $19 million cleaning up litter along our roadsides.

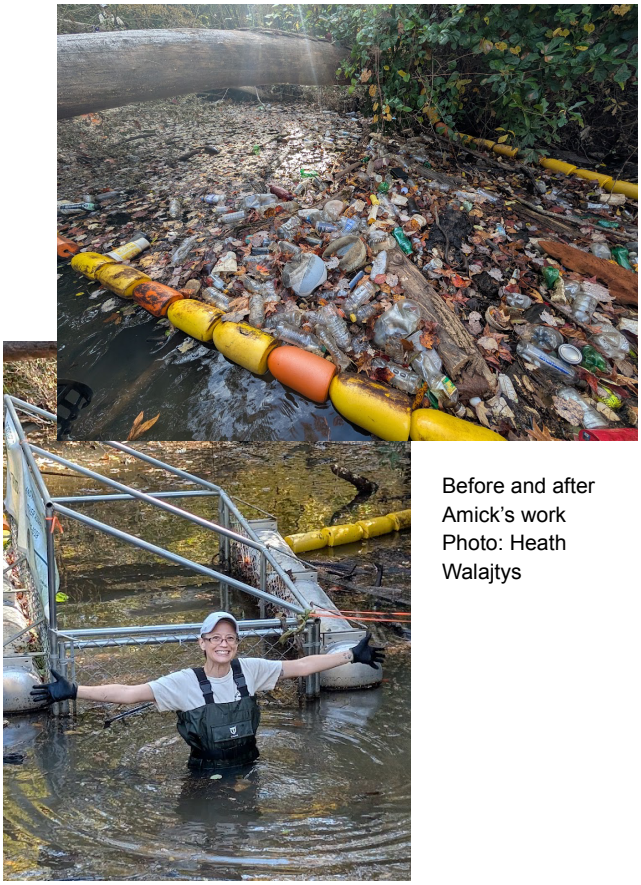
Litter is a complex problem. Master Naturalist student Halle Amick decided to focus on Durham's Third Fork Creek, which has the second-highest population density of all of Durham's watersheds.

Project

Amick became a Trash Trap Leader for the Haw River Assembly (HRA). Trash traps are purpose-built stormwater litter traps. These traps sit in urban creeks and streams, keeping human-made trash from entering main waterways. Amick became responsible for leading monthly clean outs of the trap that sits in Durham's Third Fork Creek and helping collect data on the items removed. Data collected from the traps are used to inform policies at the local and state levels.

The second prong of Amick's approach was working with Keep Durham Beautiful (KDB) to develop presentation materials on preventing litter that can be used in our community (e.g., schools, HOAs, civic groups). Amick's materials can be used by both KDB staff and volunteers.

During 2024's cleanouts of the Third Fork Creek trap, 42,932 items were removed, of which 81% were styrofoam fragments. Not only did this litter not end up in Jordan Lake and beyond, the data show that by focusing on styrofoam, a huge impact on litter reduction is possible. Amick will continue on as a Trash Trap Leader, doing good work that has a positive impact on our community.



Before and after Amick's work
Photo: Heath Walajtys

Student

This project is the work of Halle Amick.

Impact Projects

Beyond classwork, a key feature of the Master Naturalist Volunteer program are the Impact Projects students develop. These projects integrate course concepts and benefit a Partner Organization.

Highlights

Partner Organizations

Haw River Assembly
Keep Durham Beautiful

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