



How to Run a Scouting for Clean Waterways Service Project



Our Start-to-Finish Guide to Clearing Trash From Your Local Waterway

Waterway and marine debris pose a significant threat to the health of our oceans, lakes, rivers, and associated ecosystems. Each year, millions of tons of plastic and other man-made materials are dumped into these water bodies, resulting in devastating consequences for marine life, habitats, and the economy. From plastic pollution to discarded tires, the impact of debris on our environment cannot be overstated.

The consequences of waterway and marine debris are profound and far-reaching. Not only does it endanger marine life through entanglement and ingestion killing more than 1 million animals annually, but it also introduces pollutants and contaminants into our diverse ecosystems, affecting the health and behavior of life on land.

Scouting for Clean Waterways is empowering Scouts, Venturers & Sea Scouts to “Take Action” by participating in waterway cleanup projects every Spring. Don’t have a waterway near you. Do a land based cleanup. Over 90% of aquatic trash begins on land. Every piece of trash collected and properly disposed of is one less piece of trash that can enter our waterways.

8 Steps to Planning Your River Cleanup



1. Choose a Location & Date

The first step in planning to clean up a waterway is choosing a location. While this may seem straightforward, there’s a lot to consider to find the perfect spot and ensure it’s accessible to your volunteers.

5 Surefire Signs of a Great Cleanup Spot

- A sizable amount of trash within reach of volunteers.
- Walking distance to parking and the cleanup meeting spot.

- Low, non-poisonous vegetation that won't conceal trash.
- Multiple access points so all volunteers can participate.
- Away from deep water or dangerous rapids.

How to Choose a Waterway Cleanup Location

Know the state of your waterway:

- How much trash is there? Look at a few options before deciding on a location to ensure you have trash for your volunteers to pick up.
- Contact a local watershed association, stream watch group or other local environmental group. They can tell you where to find streams in need of a cleanup.

Know the accessibility:

- How deep is the waterway?
- How thick is the vegetation along the banks?
- How many access points are there?
- How far away will volunteers be from the trash collection area? Consider that volunteers will have to carry bags of trash back to this point, and waterlogged trash can be heavy.

Don't Have a Waterway Near You:

- Do a land based cleanup
- Most aquatic trash begins on land and finds its way to our water systems.
- Cleanup a local park or hiking trail.
- Every piece of trash collected and properly disposed of is one less piece of trash that can enter our waterways.

When to schedule your project

Pick the best season:

- Late spring is a good choice; as water levels begin to drop, trash is often left above the water line.
- April through June are the recommended months, but any timing that works for your unit's calendar is acceptable.
- Summer is usually not the best choice, as it's hot, humid and buggy. Trash is hidden by overgrowth and poison ivy can be a concern.
- Consider doing your Scouting for Clean Waterways project on or around Earth Day. Earth Day is celebrated annually on April 22nd.

Determine project start time and duration

- As a general rule your cleanup project should last three - five hours, which is manageable for most Scouts BSA, Venturing, and Seas Scout.
- If Cub Scouts, or younger family members, are participating with your unit, shorten your project time to around 90 minutes.
- Include plenty of time for breaks.

2. Get Permission for Waterway Cleanups

It's important that you have any necessary permission in writing before cleanup day or you could find your project stalled before it even starts. It may be easiest to plan to pick up trash from public property, like a park, since you don't need as many permits or permissions. However, working with the city or landowners may have more impact if those areas are particularly dirty. To do this, you'll need permission to clean up there.

Who to Ask for Permits and Permission

For government property, reach out to the land management agency or your city or township's permitting department.

For private properties, it may be tricky to figure out the owners, you must find them and

ask for permission. It's even more difficult to gain permission to work with multiple private landowners across property lines.

Use the county plot map and/or records of deeds to find the owners of properties you wish to clean up. Ensure all your volunteers know of any areas that are off-limits due to declined permission.

It's important to communicate your plans for your cleanup and get the property owner's permission in writing. Even if your cleanup is taking place entirely on public property, it's a good idea to ask the city for a letter of support. While it's not always needed, an official letter from the city can help back you up in case anyone questions your cleanup.

3. Recruit your Scouts & Volunteers

Your waterway cleanup project won't get far if no one wants to lend a hand. You may choose to do this project only as a unit activity, or you may choose to include family members and volunteers to expand your Scouting for Clean Waterways project. In addition to your unit members and their families, there may be many people in your community happy to contribute to a local waterway cleanup. Collaborating with local community organizations is a great way to increase your visibility and share the value of Scouting to our communities. Scouting units may also choose to join waterway clean up projects already planned and hosted by other community organizations. In all cases, when volunteers outside of Scouting are participating alongside of our youth it is the responsibility of the unit leadership to ensure that Scouting America's Youth Protection policies are understood by all volunteers and enforced.

Safety of our youth is our primary responsibility

- Enforce Scouting America's **Barriers to Abuse**
- Implement the buddy system.

- The buddy system is designed to provide an additional layer of safeguarding by ensuring no youth member is alone and that a buddy can get help in an emergency.
- The buddy system is used whenever youth members are outside the line of sight of qualified adult leadership and specific activities where the buddy system is required for participation.
- The adult unit leadership oversees and approves buddies.
- Buddies are two and can also be three to prevent youth members from being alone.
- A buddy pair cannot be mixed gender, where appropriate a third youth must be added (for a buddy group of 3).
- Youth siblings of the same gender may serve as buddies regardless of age with permission from their parents or legal guardians.
- Except for siblings, it is recommended that the age gap between buddies be at most three years.
- When exceptional circumstances warrant, a parent or legal guardian may serve as a buddy for their child's Scouting activities, but youth buddies meeting the above criteria, if available, are always preferred.
- Fully explain the Youth Protection Policies to everyone in attendance.

4. Gather Tools and Supplies

Your Scouts are the most important element of a successful waterway cleanup, but they're not the only piece of the puzzle. You'll need to make sure that everyone is armed with the right quantities of the right materials to get the job done efficiently and, most importantly, safely.

- First Aid Kit
- Water & Snacks
- Trash Bags - Stock at least two to three trash bags per volunteer.

- Plastic buckets for sharp materials collected during the cleanup
- Work Gloves - Instead of work gloves, use medical gloves, plan to have about 20 more pairs on hand than volunteers in case of tears. They are cheaper and usually sturdy enough for trash.
- Trash Pickers are helpful but not required. Long grill tongs can be used instead of trash pickers if needed.
- Insect Repellant & Sun Block
- A portable luggage scale is handy if you want to know how much trash was removed.
- Ask local grocery stores and other retailers for donations of trash bags, gloves, trash pickers.
- Ask local grocery stores or other food vendors to donate water and snacks for the cleanup.
- Register with National River Cleanup. This program provides trash bags to cleanups of all sizes for free.

Waterway cleanups can be a very dirty activity. Recommend that everyone wear appropriate clothing & footwear and to bring a change of clothes. Provide a washing station when possible.

5. Review Safety Procedures and the Project Expectations

It's important to make sure everyone knows the cleanup project plan and the safety procedures

- Explain the cleanup boundaries, this includes details on any water entry if needed.
- If you plan to sort out recyclable materials, explain the collection method.
- Review procedures for removing dangerous or sharp materials like broken glass or metal shards.
- Review procedures for heavy items that can't be removed.

- Explain to everyone that hazardous materials such as syringes or other medical waste should not be handled by anyone. Contact the city's household hazardous waste department to arrange safe disposal..

A Scouting for Clean Waterways project is not intended to include entry into the waterways. If entry into the waterway, by wading, swimming or boating, is determined to be necessary to achieve your cleanup goals the SAFE Scouting principles of **Safe Swim Defense** and or **Safety Afloat** must be followed.

6. Clean Up the Waterway

Now that you've set the date, found a cleanup location, gotten the right permissions, and gathered your Scouts, volunteers, and supplies, it's time to get to work.

How to Organize a the Cleanup Day

Start the day by setting out your sign-in / sign out list and creating your buddy pairs. Review all of the previously discussed Youth Protection policies, safety procedures, and project expectations. delegate tasks to specific pairs or groups and provide everyone with the needed supplies. Then, send them off to clean. Give breaks if needed or provide participants with snacks after the clean up is complete.

7. Sort Materials

Once your river cleanup is complete, you'll have played a major role in improving your community's environmental health. But why not go one step further? You can make an even bigger impact by separating the recyclables from the rest of the litter you've collected to ensure they don't end up in a landfill.

How to Keep Your River Cleanup Litter Organized

Choose to separate recycling as you work if any of the following circumstances apply:

- You don't have time and/or a suitable location to separate recycling afterward.

- Your area does not have particularly strict recycling guidelines, making a rough sort acceptable.
- Your area's recycling guidelines are simple enough for Scouts and volunteers to remember off-hand while they work.

If you choose to separate recyclable materials as you work, it's best to have two bags. Supply volunteers with one clear bag for recycling and a black bag for trash.

Choose to separate recycling post-cleanup if any of the following circumstances apply:

- Your area has strict recycling guidelines that would make sorting as you work difficult.
- Your area's recycling guidelines aren't simple enough for Scouts and volunteers to remember while they work.
- You want to keep detailed records of the various items you're recycling.

If you're recycling after your cleanup, we recommend doing this with a smaller group. Or, find examples of accepted and unaccepted recyclables for your volunteers to look at as they sort.

Overall, it's best to check what materials your local recycling facility allows. Not all recycling centers accept the same types of materials. For example, many will not take glass. Ask specific questions, like what plastic numbers they take.

8. Dispose of the Waste Properly

The biggest mistake you can make when planning a waterway cleanup project is forgetting to have a plan in place for getting rid of all the trash you remove from the waterway. This step is particularly important because you don't want to neutralize all the environmental good you did by failing to ensure that the trash is properly handled. Organize trash pickup beforehand — some cities may work with you to come collect the trash directly, or you may need to transport the collected trash to a waste disposal

facility or to a dumpster that you have permission to use. Make a note of large, difficult-to-move items (appliances, car parts, etc.) and let local watershed groups know in case they're able to arrange future removal.

Don't Leave a Mess After Your River Cleanup!

Use the following methods to get rid of trash post-cleanup:

- Contact your city's department of public works, public services department, department of solid waste or waste collection department to request free trash removal for your cleanup.
- If the city cannot provide trash pickup, find out where the collected trash can be dropped off.
- If Scouts or volunteers find items too large to move, contact a local environmental group that may be able to handle them.
- Make sure Scouts and volunteers know not to handle hazardous materials such as syringes or other medical waste. Instead, contact the city's household hazardous waste department to arrange safe disposal.
- Use a portable luggage scale to weigh your trash bags to determine how much trash was removed. If you do not have a scale you can estimate how much trash was collected by multiplying the total number of bags by 10. While it's not an exact science, this will give you a rough idea of how many pounds of trash you collected in your cleanup.

Reporting and Sharing Your Scouting for Clean Waterways Project

Please enter the service hours on ScoutBook. <<< Add instructions>>>

Share your success stories on our Scouting for Clean Waterways FaceBook Group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/cleanwaterscouts/>

Share your success stories with your local media outlets. We want everyone in your community to know about Scouting America and the great work we do to support our communities.

Citizen Science - Scouts are encouraged to participate in the NOAA Marine Debris Program by collecting and reporting data on the [Marine Tracker](#) app. Download and share the .csv file from the app with CleanWaterScouts@scouting.org.

Thank you for helping your Scouts to TAKE ACTION!