

Volunteers Remove and Catalogue Trash at Grayson Creek

By Sean Mitchell, Boy Scout Troop 239

A recent Grayson Creek cleanup not only cleaned a stretch of creek, but also catalogued the trash removed, helping future efforts to understand how trash makes its way to our local waterways. The cleanup took place at the section of Grayson Creek between Golf Club Road and Chilpancingo Parkway on Saturday September 23, 2017, as part of the Pleasant Hill Community Service Day.

Nearly 3,000 items were collected by more than 50 volunteers who worked for about three hours. While most volunteers collected trash, a smaller group (led by Boy Scout Sean Mitchell) catalogued what types of items were being collected.

The cleanup has many benefits. It helps reduce flooding in the area by removing blockage from the creek and allowing water to flow through it more easily. Removing trash also helps reduce the amount of polluting garbage that reaches San Francisco Bay and the ocean (joining the pacific garbage patch) and reduces the threat to wildlife in the creek. It also raises property values and makes the creek more beautiful.

This kind of trash does not just appear by magic. Casual littering brings items like wrappers, bottles, and cigarettes, which may be thrown in the creek by people who work or live nearby. It can be brought from somewhere else by the storm drain systems. Or it may come from those who have nowhere to throw trash or who wish to do so in secret, such as homeless people or people using illegal drugs or drinking, which leads to trash like needles, alcohol containers, and clothing. Large items like furniture and shopping carts are often brought to the creek for intentional illegal dumping.

When you see a stray piece of paper or other item, it looks like a small amount, but in fact there is a lot of trash in one stretch of creek. The volunteers for this cleanup alone found more than 20 cubic yards of trash filling four dumpsters, with extra garbage that did not fit. They found some strange things, such as a safe missing its door, and the empty shell of a computer, but most of the waste was simple items that can easily be thrown away or recycled in proper containers.

The most commonly removed item recorded by the volunteers was cups (typically with lids and straws), totaling 237. Other commonly found items were 201 cigarette butts (not including 15 complete cigarettes), 233 soft pieces of plastic, 174 pieces of paper, 160 food wrappers, 140 hard pieces of plastic, 115 pieces of Styrofoam, 106 glass bottles, 93 plastic wrappers, 85 clothing items, 84 plastic bottle caps, 74 plastic bottles, 64 pieces of cardboard, 48 aluminum cans, 61 food containers, 55 pieces of glass, and 47 items that were not categorized.

Less common items included 43 pieces of aluminum foil, 41 pieces of PVC pipe, 27 plastic utensils, 27 pieces of wood, 26 pieces of fabric, 22 metal bottle caps, 17 syringes, 17 pieces of synthetic rubber, 16 pieces of e-waste, 16 pieces of wire, 15 shoes, 14 shopping carts, 12 pieces of furniture, 12 metal pipes, 12 auto parts, 12 balls, 11 plastic bags, 11 batteries, 11 pens, and 11 pieces of foam rubber.

Items numbering below 10 were newspapers, spray paint cans, tobacco packages, ceramic pieces, pieces of rebar, pieces of concrete, pieces of rope, pieces of animal or human waste, paint cans,

appliances, pieces of mail, fliers, dead animals, bricks, oil containers, fluorescent lights, tires, pieces of hose, stuffed animals, a magazine, a car battery, and a bag of trash.

Even though the cleanup is over, there is still more that can be done to keep Grayson Creek and others like it clean. First, and most obvious, do not litter. Second, pick up any litter you see during your day and if you see illegal dumping or pollution, report it to the clean water hotline (1-800-NO DUMPING). Third, walk around your neighborhood and remove trash from storm drains when it rains. Fourth, join one of the many groups that help keep our creeks clean. Finally, even if you missed this cleanup, there will be more to come, so you can volunteer at one of those or organize one of your own.

Here are the contacts to join a creek-cleaning group or to volunteer for (or organize) a cleanup:

Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks

Web: www.pleasanthillcreeks.org

Email: pleasanthillcreeks@gmail.com

Facebook: [@PHcreeks](#)

Other Local Watershed Organizations: <http://www.pleasanthillcreeks.org/resources.html>