

Volunteers pull more than 1 ton of trash from river

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- [By Lauren Takores Staff Writer](#)
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Volunteers move a raft loaded with debris pulled from the Susquahanna River to an exit point at the Clark Sports Center during a Cooperstown Lions Club-sponsored cleanup, Saturday, Aug. 19. From left in water: Tom Hohensee, Bennett Sandler, Dan Evans, Chris Mattson, Marcie Foster. From left on land: George Friend, Carol Kennedy, Angie Pruitt, Ben Bauer, Jim Donaldson.

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Volunteers move a raft loaded with debris pulled from the Susquehanna River to an exit point at the Clark Sports Center during a Cooperstown Lions Club-sponsored cleanup, Saturday, Aug. 19. From left: Matt Chisdock, Maureen Rowley, Brenda Carpenter, Frank Miosek.

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About 40 volunteers from the Cooperstown Lions Club, Cooperstown Rotary Club, Rotary E-club of Global Trekkers and the community collected thousands of pounds of debris Aug. 19 during the annual Susquehanna River clean up.

The group returned for its sixth year to perform a second pass along a section of the river from the Cooperstown Water Treatment Plant to the Susquehanna Avenue bridge.

John Rowley, Cooperstown Lions Club member and past president, said that among the items removed this year were a hot water heater, 50-gallon drums, 27 tires and numerous bottles and cans.

Rowley said Monday, Sept. 4 that the group conducts two clean-ups on each section of the river. Last year, about 70 tires were removed from the same section of the river.

The reason for doing two passes is because the rafts volunteers use to collect the debris get full and need to be emptied. This year, the Clark Sports Center, 124 county Route 52 in Cooperstown, let the group use its location to unload things as a halfway exit point.

The river is west of the sports center property.

“The rafts were pretty full when we got to the exit point by the Clark gym,” Rowley said, “then we went back and loaded them again and emptied them again.”

A second exit point to remove the collected debris from the water was at home of Jim and Pat Hogan. Rowley said Jim Hogan is a Lions Club member who along with his wife has participated in river cleanups in the past.

Rowley said that the debris are sorted into metal, which can be recycled, and non-metal debris. The group collected 2,200 pounds of trash — an amount that doesn't include anything metal.

The stuff is brought by trailer to the county transfer station. The recyclable metal doesn't cost anything to be recycled, but dumping the rest of the trash incurs a per pound fee.

The Lions Club pays the fees through donated funds from the other sponsoring organizations as well as from community members.

The cleanup crews worked with the Otsego County Conservation Association and six members of the SUNY Biologic Field Station Dive Team.

“They’ve been instrumental and we certainly couldn’t have done it without them and the divers,” Rowley said.

Otsego 2000, Bruce Hall Building Supply, Westlake Ace Hardware, Stagecoach Coffee and Cooperstown Price Chopper also contributed to the cleanup event.

The cleanup lasted from about 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Rowley said that every year brings challenges. This year, the water was high and the weather was cool.

Next year, he said, the group plans to move downstream and find a new access point to set up the collection trailers.

History of the cleanup

According to a history of the Susquehanna River clean up project from Rowley, he and his wife, Maureen Rowley, would walk the riverside trail between Mill Street and Main Street in Cooperstown on a regular basis, and were dismayed by the amount of debris and garbage in that section of the river, including a large cattle feeding trough.

John Rowley proposed a clean project to the Cooperstown Lions Club, which embraced the project and set out to team up with other organizations that would assist and guide the Lions Club. Otsego County Conservation Association was one of the first organizations to join the cleanup effort.

They then contacted the SUNY Biologic Field Station and Paul Lord who coordinates the SUNY Oneonta Biologic Field Station Volunteer Dive Team.

The first cleanup was in 2018. The big feeding trough was dredged up by the group in 2019 with the help of Chuck Hascup and his father, Dennis Hascup, a longtime Cooperstown Lion.

In 2020, wearing facemasks, the volunteers moved from deeper water to a relatively shallow part of the river with pockets of deeper water. That year, the cleanup became a combined project of the Lions and Rotary clubs.

The group removed more than 70 tires, but were unable to get them all — with a disposal cost of \$5 per tire in 2020 and \$6 per tire in 2021, it was a significant part of the project cost.

“There were also large objects including three hot water heaters and an object we fondly call ‘the thing’ that had to wait until 2021,” Rowley said.

By 2021, the fourth river cleanup, community involvement had continued to grow with more than 35 volunteers on the day of the clean up.

With the help of the financial contributions from the sponsoring organizations, the group was able to build three new rafts. The use of a truck front end winch finally dislodged “the thing” and two out of three hot water heaters.