

Adopt-A-Stream Manual

Virginia “Adopt-A-Stream” is a statewide litter education and cleanup campaign aimed at promoting citizen-based stewardship of the Commonwealth’s water resources.

Initiated by Governor Gilmore in 1998, Adopt-A-Stream encourages citizen-based stewardship of the Commonwealth’s water resources, promoting education and outreach, and facilitates community capacity building. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation first implemented the Adopt-A-Stream program and now run by the Districts, the program is dedicated to working with citizens to cleanup Virginia’s waterways. The successful implementation of the Program depends on the involvement of and support from existing local and regional organizations, including local governments, soil and water conservation districts, and grass-roots environmental groups.



Keeping Virginia’s rivers, streams, and lakes litter-free is a task that requires cooperation and participation from governments, industry, businesses, and residents alike. Stream cleanups provide opportunities for local businesses, civic organizations, churches, watershed associations, schools, and scout groups to work independently or collectively to cleanup the Commonwealth’s water resources. The Adopt-A-Stream Program requires groups to conduct a cleanup at least once a year. Groups are encouraged to conduct more than one cleanup per year, once in the spring and once in the fall.

Waterway cleanup projects are valuable learning experiences. For example, a Saturday morning spent collecting litter from a local stream establishes a connection between citizens and the stream that runs through their community. Citizens will see, first-handedly, the impacts of their cleanup efforts on the condition of the stream and quality of the water. Ultimately, we hope such cleanups will encourage and empower citizens to participate in other activities aimed at improving water quality in Virginia.

The success of a cleanup event will depend on the organization and implementation of a waterway cleanup project plan. This manual provides the information you will need to organize and implement a waterway cleanup from beginning to end. Groups are encouraged to use the information as needed and to modify the information to suit individual needs.

Any questions or concerns should be directed to the Adopt-A-Stream Coordinator at:

Prince William Soil and Water Conservation District
8850 Rixlew Lane
Manassas, VA 20109
Phone (571) 379-7514 Fax (571) 379-8305
E-mail: waterquality@pwsacd.org

Organizing a “Stream” Cleanup

Establish an organizing committee. The organizing committee should be a core group of individuals dedicated to organizing and implementing the stream cleanup. This group of individuals must first determine the location of the cleanup and the project date (*remember to choose a rain date*). After the project site and date are chosen, the committee should conduct a site visit, arrange for trash disposal, recruit volunteers, gather materials and supplies, contact property owners, and solicit project support. The stream cleanup checklist (*included*) is a tool that may be used by the committee to monitor planning progress. Committee members should meet regularly before the project date to share successes and troubleshoot potential problems. As project volunteers are recruited, invite them to share some of the organizing tasks!

Site Selection

Determine the waterway cleanup project site. Cleanup projects are typically sited along a river, stream, creek, pond, or lake - wherever litter has accumulated. Projects can be on public lands, such as parks, or on private property, which might include individual landowners, as well as community property or open space. Whether the site is public or private property, the organizing committee must receive permission to be on the land prior to the project date.

Scouting

A member of the organizing committee should walk the stream eight to ten weeks before the cleanup. A survey of the stream section to be cleaned will give the organizing committee a better idea about the amount and type of litter volunteers will be exposed to. A survey will also allow the committee to approximate how many volunteers will be needed for the cleanup. A member of the organizing committee should also walk the stream two weeks prior to the project date. During this walk, the committee member should create a series of maps that will help cleanup crews locate accumulations of litter. Survey information might include the size, type, and abundance of objects. The surveyor should also note whether objects can be hauled out on foot and if not, whether a truck is necessary.

When scouting your community for a cleanup site, consider the following factors:

- Is the site safe (please consider steep slopes and class of rapids)?
- Is the site accessible to volunteers (easy to enter and exit)?
- What was the site used for in the past?
- Is the site too large for a single cleanup day or will several cleanups be required?
- What types of trash or debris are present?
- Are there any sensitive areas that should be treated with care?
- Are there hazardous substances present that make a stream unsuitable for a cleanup by volunteers? (*It may be helpful to contact the Department of Health, Division of Health Hazards Control at (804) 786-1763*).

Obtain Permission

Obtain written permission from landowners with property in the proposed cleanup section. Venturing onto private property without permission is trespassing and you may be subject to arrest. The Department of Conservation and Recreation does not, under any circumstances, encourage trespassing. The organizing committee should invite the property owner to participate in the cleanup. If the property owner cannot participate, the organizing committee should obtain written permission for volunteers to cleanup the trash along the stream where it passes through their land. If you are unsure of the landowner, county tax maps, located in county planning offices, can provide property ownership information. The organizing committee can also determine the property owner by talking to people who live close by.

Before sending the cleanup teams out, the organizing committee should emphasize the importance of staying on public property and public roads, except where expressed permission has been given by the property owner.

Before posting an Adopt-a-Stream sign in the Virginia Department of Transportation right-of-way, call VDOT at 1-800-FOR-ROAD (367-7623) to ask permission to post your sign along a public road. Your local VDOT residency might need to issue a permit for your sign. It's also helpful for VDOT to know who to contact about a sign in the right of way in case they need to move it.

Project Date

Select the project date and time of the event. The project date should be determined eight to ten (8 to 10) weeks before the event. Typically, Saturday mornings are the best time to schedule a cleanup. When scheduling a cleanup, be careful to avoid a holiday weekend or a weekend when the switch is made to and from Daylight Savings Time. The organizing committee should also allow adequate time for project planning and volunteer recruitment. If equipment will be borrowed, the organizing committee should make these arrangements first, and select a day when the equipment is available. Please remember to establish a rain date!

A stream cleanup typically lasts about four hours. The organizing committee should also plan on an additional half-hour before the event for setup and a half-hour afterwards for cleanup. Additional time may be required after the event, if a picnic or barbecue is planned.

Central Meeting Place

Locate and reserve a central meeting place. The organizing committee should reserve a facility or location that can be used as a meeting place for volunteers on the day of the event about 8 to 10 weeks before the project date. The meeting location should be no more than a 20-minute drive from the farthest stream section or litter accumulation. This central location will not only serve as the initial meeting place for project participants, but also as the location where trash bags are brought by pickup trucks for transfer to dump or trash trucks.

A parking lot is an ideal central meeting place, if it will not be in use on the project date for any other activity. On Saturdays, school, bank, office, or church parking lots are usually empty. The organizing committee should be sure to receive permission from the proper authorities before designating a parking lot as the central meeting place. A letter, including the project purpose, date, time, and a promise to leave the parking lot clean, will typically receive a favorable response.

Please avoid high traffic areas and always use extreme caution.

If volunteers will not have access to a restroom, seek permission from a local business to use theirs if necessary. If facilities are not made available through local businesses, the organizing committee should arrange for the rental of portable facilities.

Event Publicity

Advertise the stream cleanup project. Event publicity should complement your volunteer recruitment efforts. Volunteer recruitment should be initiated at least six weeks in advance of the project date. This time will allow the organizing committee to draft, reproduce, and distribute fliers, draft and distribute press releases to local newspapers and/or organizational newsletters, and offer presentations at group meetings.

Suggestions

- Recruitment messages should include the name, day, date and starting time of the event, the rain date, location and directions to the central meeting place, name of the adopting group or organization, and a contact's name and phone number.
- Recruitment messages should be enthusiastic and include a "sales pitch." A sales pitch should emphasize the enjoyment of the activity.
- A direct mailing should go to members of the adopting group or organization and other very similar groups. This type of targeted mailing will be more fruitful than a mailing to a "cold list" - individuals who may not be familiar with your activities.
- Have a phone number where volunteers can call to register and include the number in all advertisements.
- Coordinate cleanup events with other events and/or projects, such as Stewardship Virginia or Earth Day, and your project will benefit from greater exposure.

Volunteer Recruitment

Recruit stream cleanup volunteers from the local community. Anyone, both young and old, can assist in a stream cleanup project. If granted permission from their parents or guardians, children under the age of 18 years should be encouraged to participate; however, the organizing committee should provide adequate supervision. There should be one adult supervisor for every six children. Residents, employees of businesses and industry, school or church groups, and scout troops are all potential volunteer sources.

Volunteer recruitment should be initiated approximately six weeks prior to the project date. The number of volunteers you will need will depend upon the area to be covered and the magnitude of litter accumulations. Typically, a team of two people can cover one mile of a lightly littered stream channel in about one or two hours. As a rule, 50 percent of those people who initially sign

up for an event will not actually participate. For this reason, the organizing committee should recruit twice as many people that will be needed for the project. If more people show up than anticipated, volunteers can work in teams of three or four instead of two or three.

The organizing committee should establish a phone number (contact person) that volunteers can call to register for the event. When volunteers register, it is important to get their names, addresses, and telephone numbers. As volunteers respond to recruitment activities, members of the organizing committee should advise them on what to bring and how to dress. Volunteers should be prepared to walk or canoe distances, get wet, and get dirty. It is recommended that volunteers wear sturdy shoes or boots, long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, work gloves, and a hat or outerwear as the weather dictates. Volunteers should also be encouraged to use sunscreen and insect repellent.

The organizing committee should recruit, from the volunteer labor force, several field supervisors or site captains who will assist volunteers during the cleanup. Approximately one supervisor should be recruited for every 10 volunteers. The organizing committee should host a training session for these supervisors prior to the project date, so that their role can be defined.

The organizing committee should send reminders of the date (and rain date) and time of the event, as well as maps showing the location of the central meeting place to all registered volunteers a week before the stream cleanup. If time allows, committee members may also want to call the volunteers a few days before the event to confirm participation in the stream cleanup.

Litter Disposal

Arrange for the disposal and/or recycling of collected litter. The organizing committee should FIRST contact the District or local government officials (your local Litter Control and Recycling Coordinator or the Department of Public Works is a good place to begin) to determine what services they can provide including:

- Removal of trash bags after the cleanup is complete
- Removal of recyclables
- Removal of large items from the site, such as cars, appliances, tires (volunteers should not attempt to dislodge or remove large items - volunteers should mark the location of such items on their map for removal at a later date)
- Transportation for disposing of trash and recyclables
- If local officials are unable to help, the organizing committee should:
 - Locate the closest recycling center
 - Speak with a recycling center representative to confirm the days and hours of operation, acceptable items, limits on quantity of materials delivered, and specifications for advance preparation.
 - Call and confirm this information a few days prior to the project date
 - If the recycling center will not be open on the project date, secure a place to store recyclables until they can be delivered at a later date
 - Contact the closest landfill and confirm the days and hours of operation. It may be necessary to schedule the cleanup earlier in the day to allow enough time for delivery to the landfill
 - Consult local, private companies that may be able to provide assistance

Transportation

Cleanup crews should be instructed to deposit all filled trash bags at their assigned starting point (*project organizers should remember to assign starting points - maps will be useful*). Pickup trucks are useful shuttle

Vehicles for the collected litter. Volunteers with pickup trucks should be assigned to visit specific starting points and collect any trash bags they find there. The organizing committee should distribute a map showing the route from the central meeting place to the pickup points. Volunteers will transport these bags to the central meeting location,

where they can be transferred to dump or trash trucks. The number of trucks you will need will depend on the amount of litter and size of the items (determined in the site survey). If there are not enough pickup trucks volunteered prior to the project date, the organizing committee should explore other options, such as your local Litter Control and Recycling Coordinator or the local Department of Public Works/Utilities. If conducting a cleanup by canoe, an outboard boat may also serve as the shuttle vehicle responsible to depositing collected litter at the central meeting location.

Equipment and Materials

Gather cleanup equipment and materials. Equipment can often be borrowed from the Districts or local government offices and/or local environmental organizations. The organizing committee should make arrangements to have borrowed equipment delivered or picked up and then returned. Any equipment that cannot be borrowed should be purchased two to three weeks prior to the project date. Trash bags, gloves and safety vests are available, by request, from the Adopt A Stream program coordinator and should be requested two to three weeks prior to your clean up event.

To conduct a successful cleanup, you may wish to provide site-captains and cleanup crews with the following:

- Large trash bags and boxes for recyclables
- Work gloves
- Rakes, shovels, and/or litter poles

- Flagging tape
- Maps (each team will need two maps ❶ a map of the stream section, showing major litter accumulations; and; ❷ a road map showing the route between their stream section and the central meeting place)
- First aid kits

Refreshments and other Rewards

The provision of refreshments is one way to thank volunteers for their valuable time and hard work. It is recommended that the project sponsor provide non-alcoholic beverages. If beverages will not be provided, the organizing committee should encourage participants to bring their own. *Participants should be reminded to avoid drinking water from any stream and encouraged to take breaks and drink fluids to avoid overexertion.* Simple refreshments (coffee and doughnuts, cookies and punch) may be offered during registration and will help volunteers celebrate a job well done at the end of the day. A picnic or barbecue are also nice ways to thank volunteers. Local businesses and the volunteers themselves (pot-luck) may be willing to donate refreshments, coolers, coupons, cups, napkins, and ice.

The organizing committee could also consider providing rewards, such as certificates, bumper-stickers, tote-bags, caps, or t-shirts. Again, the organizing committee may solicit contributions, both monetary and in-kind services, from local businesses. The inclusion of handouts and other educational materials in your stream cleanup program is another option.

Project Prep

Provide site-captain training, conduct a safety meeting, and complete site preparation. A representative of the organizing committee should make arrangements to meet with site- captains prior to the project day or, if necessary, immediately before the start time on the project day.

Site-captains should be prepared to:

- Answer volunteers' questions
- Direct volunteers to cleanup and disposal sites
- If required, make sure data sheets are completed correctly and turned in
- Help organize and distribute the refreshments and rewards
- Review safety guidelines with volunteers

Everyone participating in the cleanup must have attended an Adopt-A-Stream safety meeting at least once in the last 12 months. This safety meeting may be conducted immediately before the cleanup at the central meeting location. At the safety meeting, a member of the organizing committee or site-captain must review the Adopt-A-Stream safety guidelines with all volunteers. All volunteers must complete and sign a liability release form. Immediately before the cleanup is also a good time to deliver any educational messages.

For stream cleanups, little site preparation is required. If sensitive areas are present, the areas should be cordoned off with flagging. Private property boundaries should also be identified with flagging to avoid inadvertent trespassing.

The Cleanup

Organize volunteers and initiate stream cleanup. As volunteers arrive at the central meeting place on the day of the cleanup, encourage them to “sign-in.” A sign-in sheet should include spaces for the volunteers’ name, address, and phone number. Remember to provide pencils or pens. Volunteers who have not completed and signed a safety liability release form must do so before participating in any cleanup activity. Nametags for the volunteers will help them get to know each other.

The project supervisor should introduce each of the site-captains and explain their roles. The project supervisor should also brief the volunteers on whether the litter collected is to be separated into recyclable and non-recyclable materials; where to place filled bags; the boundary of the project site; and who the project supervisors are in case of emergency. Volunteers should also be informed about the availability of refreshments and the location of the restroom facilities.

The project supervisor should help site-captains form cleanup teams. *No one should work alone - always work in teams of two or greater!* Each team will need transportation to and from their assigned section. Teams should be formed according to who has a car, canoe, or boat. Teams will be assigned a mile stream section (if necessary, section may be less than a mile). Each team will be given trash bags and a set of maps. The organizing committee should remember to keep an entire set of maps as backup. The project supervisor should specify a time for all teams to return to the central meeting area, even if their work is unfinished. Volunteers should call if they will be returning late or not at all, so that everyone will be accounted for and no one will be worried.

Site-captains are responsible for helping each team identify a starting point at their middle of the section. Generally, the abundance of litter declines dramatically as the distance from the access point increases. Site-captains should instruct teams to walk, canoe, or boat a half-mile upstream from the starting point (distance traveled upstream and downstream should be half of the total distance to be covered), then collect trash on their return trip to the access point (if necessary, separating recyclables and non-recyclables). This collection method will help volunteers avoid transporting full bags of trash great distances.

After dropping off any full trash bags at the access point or other previously identified location, teams should then walk, canoe, or boat a half-mile downstream, again collecting trash as they return to the starting point. If there is a question of how to judge when they’ve traveled far enough, simply suggest to the volunteers that they should travel until they run into the team cleaning the neighboring section.

Teams should be instructed to leave all filled trash bags at their starting point. Approximately an hour and a half to two hours later, volunteers with pickup trucks should begin visiting specific starting points to collect any trash bags left by cleanup crews. Drivers should return all collected bags to the central meeting place, where trash can be sorted and recycled. For larger cleanup events, outboard boat assistance provided by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), the U.S. Coast Guard, local fishing groups, or individual citizens may be used to transport trash from the canoes or boats to the central meeting place. If there are no pickup arrangements with the local government, volunteers should haul trash to the landfill and recyclables to the recycling center as needed.

Cleanup crews should reconvene at the central meeting place by the assigned time. Project organizers should provide refreshments and rewards to help volunteers celebrate their accomplishments.

REMEMBER

1. Never work alone - TEAM UP
2. If you get lost, find the nearest stream and follow it downstream - you will eventually reach a road crossing
3. Never drink from the stream
4. Always watch where you are going - never put your hands or feet in places where you cannot see
5. Do not trespass
6. Do not handle sharp metal objects or broken glass
7. Do not touch anything that looks toxic - report the item to the Department of Health by calling (804) 786-1763
8. Leave downed trees alone, unless they are causing flooding or erosion

Follow-up

After the cleanup, please remember to send copies of the sign-in sheets and all completed and signed safety liability release forms to the Virginia Adopt-A-Stream Program Coordinator. This information will be used to send each volunteer and organization involved in the cleanup a Certificate of Appreciation. The Department of Conservation and Recreation will also use the information to build a community database of individuals and organizations participating in stream cleanup activities. This database will facilitate networking among groups and individuals interested in water quality issues.

The project supervisor is also responsible for sending in a completed stream cleanup data form. The information on this form will allow DCR to monitor and evaluate the progress of the Adopt-A-Stream Program.

All materials should be sent, within two weeks of the project date, to:

Prince William Soil and Water Conservation District
8850 Rixlew Lane
Manassas, VA 20109
Phone (571) 379-7514 Fax (571) 379-8305
E-mail: waterquality@pwsacd.org

All adopting organizations will be awarded an Adopt-A-Stream sign upon notification of their second clean up event, which will include the organization's name, to place at a location of their choice. The adopting organization will be responsible for posting and maintaining the Adopt-A-Stream sign. Permission must be secured before posting the sign on public or private property.

Any other questions or concerns regarding the Adopt-A-Stream Program should be directed to the Adopt-A-Stream Program Coordinator at waterquality@pwsacd.org or (571) 379-7514.

You will also find much of the above information, including downloadable forms on the Adopt-A-Stream webpage at: <http://www.pwsacd.org>

