

CLEANING OUR LAKE AFTER STORMS:

WID's Men and Machines Swing into Action

BY

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The sky darkens, the wind howls and torrents of rain pour into the watershed feeding Lake Barcroft. As the lake begins to rise, the dam gate opens to pass volumes of gushing water from Holmes Run and Tripps Run. Unfortunately, most of the trash, debris and organics that ride the swollen streams into the lake remain while the excess water flows away. The organics include sticks, branches and even tree trunks up to four feet in diameter and ten feet long. Much of the trash is Styrofoam cups, bottles and all manner of paper from fast food containers and napkins to yesterday's newspapers. Also bobbing in the current are trashcans, patio chairs, clothes and the occasional dead animal. (The mythical Volkswagen said to on the lake bottom was not storm borne.)



Left in this condition, the lake is a health hazard for swimmers and an obstacle course for boats. It is not pleasant to view from a beach or a deck, and, at its worst, will snap a party barge's shear pin. Enter the WID staff. They start their engines and engage in what may be days of using the "debris

harvester," working barges, grapples, trashcans, bags and nets to clear the water of debris.



Last September (2011) a huge storm filled the lake with thick mats of debris and vegetation. WID staff worked to remove everything from trees to cups for nearly a week. They even ventured onto the lake during the storm to catch debris as it arrived from Holmes and Tripps Runs. Two staff members spent the storm night at the dam to keep an eye on the water flow and the dam gate's operation. When the storm cleared the next day, all four staff jumped back into cleanup mode. Finally, staff devoted half of their weekend and worked into the following week to finish filling more than 160 barges of floating junk. The staff saw clearing such a huge mess as a major accomplishment, and we are proud of their effort and dedication.





But it doesn't take a huge storm to fill the lake with debris. Steady rain for several days or sporadic gushes can deliver piles of unwanted waste material. Thanks to the WID "Lake Debris Management Plan" the staff acts quickly and efficiently to get the lake clean. This plan provides the sequence of cleanup in all parts of the lake to protect the dam gate from debris jamming and to move expeditiously, snagging the large wind-driven mats that develop and eventually sweeping clean the smaller coves. We wish we could clean everyone's area all at once, but instead have to prioritize by the size of the storm and the amount and movement of debris in the wind and currents.

WID's ultimate objectives for lake cleanups are to keep the water as aesthetically and environmentally clean as possible and keep the lake as recreationally safe as possible for swimming and boating. This requires alternative plans for various sized storms:

Significant smaller storms occur perhaps 10 to 15 times a year and can result in collecting 1 to 10 large trash cans of floating debris (mostly cups, bottles, bags, and small sticks). This is a one-day cleanup effort for 1 to 2 persons and equipment. Medium storms, 4 to 6 times per year, can result in 25 barge loads of woody debris and 30 trash cans of cups, bottles and plastic bags, etc. The storm on May 26th is an example that required a 2 day cleanup for 3 to 4 staff.

The September 2011 event is an example of a large storm that can result in as many as 160 barge loads of all types and sizes of debris from full size trees to small pieces of Styrofoam. A rainfall of this magnitude happens about once every 2 to 3 years. The cleanup requires a week or more effort for full staff of 4 persons and during the summer season may include an intern as well.

WID has adopted its Lake Debris Management Plan to govern staff actions for the daily survey and cleanup of light debris to a full storm response. The box below shows this detailed and comprehensive guide that underscores WID's commitment to a clean and safe Lake Barcroft.