

Editorial

Our View: Our river resource

Annual cleanup a chance to appreciate the water

October 6, 2007

Ancestral Inland Northwest Indian tribes understood how the health of the Spokane River was intrinsically connected with the health of the humans who lived next to it. The trash scattered along the river's banks now shows our modern-day disconnection. At today's annual Spokane River cleanup, volunteers can expect to find needles, condoms, abandoned sofas and all manner of other garbage. A few years ago, Friends of the Falls co-founder, Rick Hastings, found a rusted shotgun.

Rather than feel discouraged by all the river trash, Friends of the Falls, the main sponsors of the cleanup, believe that each year more people make the connection between the river's well-being and their own. Last year, more than 650 volunteers helped out. This year, 800 volunteers are expected. The cleanup garnered additional sponsors this year, plus a partnership with Spokane Transit Authority to help with the parking crunch at High Bridge Park. All good news, because when people get to know the river, they often become stewards of it.

Taking care of the Spokane River will require more sacrifice and more taxpayer money in the near future. Here's what's coming:

- Higher utility taxes: The wastewater treatment plants along the river, including Spokane County's proposed new one, will be treating their wastewater with technology designed to remove algae-causing phosphorus. This is expensive technology, and part of the cost will be passed along to consumers.
- Phosphate-free dishwasher detergent. The Washington Legislature passed a law requiring it statewide in 2010, but Spokane County residents will need to be in compliance as early as next year.
- Less water at the well. The Spokane River and the Spokane Valley-Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer exchange water in several places. The health of the two are intertwined. The aquifer is not an infinite resource. In Idaho, domestic well permit holders can now use up to 13,000 gallons of aquifer water per day. Those 13,000-gallon days, however, are limited.
- Mandatory water restrictions, especially in the summer. Move over Phoenix, Long Beach and other drought-and-desert cities. Spokane and North Idaho might not be far behind when it comes to water conservation mandates.

Hastings sends this challenge to all Inland Northwest residents: "Get down to the level of the river. Walk the shoreline. A wild river flows through our urban area. This is Spokane's trump card, and it's right there under our noses."

Today's cleanup is a chance to get to know the river better. Pick up the trash,

If you go

What: Spokane River cleanup

When: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. today

Cleanup central: High Bridge Park. Parking will be limited. Beginning at 8:30 a.m., STA buses will run every 15 minutes between Spokane Falls Community College and High Bridge Park.

More information: (509) 981-6296.