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What's Up With Recycling?

A Message from Julie Ferreira, Chairperson

It probably does not surprise you to learn that not 'all' the stuff we place in recycling bins is actually recyclable. There is an endless litany of things that residents throw into their curbside recycling carts figuring that they "ought" to be recyclable. It's estimated that an average of one in six items dumped into bins is not recyclable.

Funny enough, there's a name for the type of person who wants to do the right thing, but they have a habit of throwing non-recyclable materials into bins just in case they 'might be' or they 'should' be recyclable. They are called "aspirational recyclers". We've probably all been there at one time or another.

One description of an "aspirational recycler" is the person who dutifully collects all their cans and bottles, puts them in a plastic bag, then drops the whole kit and caboodle into their recycle bin. It was easy for them to do, it kept everything tidy. In the 'ideal' world there should be some munchkin that would empty those cans and bottles out of that plastic bag. Unfortunately no one can count on bag emptying munchkins on the other end. Those recyclables are now considered 'contamination residue' and often are sent to the landfill. Sometimes the result is even worse. It's not unusual for recycling facilities to shut down once an hour so that workers can cut layers of plastic bags off the machinery. Plastic bags and the equipment do not mix.

A big question in my mind has always been, why did we switch to the single stream method of recycling? Remember when that first 65 gallon container was delivered to your house? Before that, the customer would separate out their own plastics, paper, and glass. Many experts say it's a no-brainer because it allowed municipalities to increase their recycling volumes and reduce high recycling costs. However just because more stuff gets collected in the recycling bin doesn't mean more stuff gets recycled. Bottom line is that there have been both gains and losses and contamination is a growing problem recyclers are having to deal with.

It turns out that the value of collected recycled items has plummeted and the recycling market has been in a tailspin for a number of years. The reasons can range from the decline in newspaper readership, to the decline in the glass market. Who knew that the effects of reading news online affected the recycle market? As the circulation for print newspapers plummeted, the recycling industry lost a massive customer that required large quantities of reclaimed paper fiber. Also as readership declined, the large demand for incoming recyclable material began to disappear. This means the market for paper fiber is crashing and what was five years ago a valuable commodity, has less value now.

Mixed paper or the co-mingling of various paper sources such as old mail, magazines, computer paper, egg cartons,

and paperboard packaging (up until recently) has gone to the Chinese market. Few U.S. domestic paper mills are currently set up to deal with these materials. Much of America's waste is shipped overseas, largely to China and Asian markets. Most Americans give little thought to how our waste is dealt with, we are happy to just trust that it is being dealt with effectively. However "effective" is an elusive word.

Now China is putting new limits on importing "foreign garbage". This is a good thing for their country. Their political leadership has finally decided to deal with their growing domestic waste problems and the black acrid smoke that created chronic health problems for their many residents when the remnants of all that residue of non-recyclable materials would be burned.

The Chinese government has now blocked all imports of 24 types of foreign trash. The ban took effect on Jan 1st. This left industrialized countries, including the U.S., with few alternative destinations for the mountains of plastics, paper, mobile phones and electronic waste that were being bought by China's recycling industry. The U.S. unfortunately has been slow to enact policies of corporate responsibility. Product manufacturers should be held accountable for the waste they generate from the cradle to the grave. The U.S. solution has always been to pass the buck along to the consumer.

We also have another growing problem; glass. It's surprising to find out that in most American cities the glass bottle you toss in the recycling cart has lost its value. As far as I know, glass has been included in all recycling programs since the advent of collection programs. We've always been told that glass was the easiest item to recycle with the quickest turnaround of any item. Reclaimed glass could be back on the shelf in 30 days. However, now glass has been usurped by plastic. And it has very minimal market value.

Some municipalities have simply stopped collecting glass in their curbside recycling programs. Santa Fe overhauled its recycling program saying it would no longer collect glass from households. Cities like Harrisburg, PA, and Charleston, WV, have instructed their residents to place glass containers in the normal trash rather than in a recycling bin because it is more cost effective for these cities to not include glass.

With the single stream methodology being used, glass is now seen as a 'heavy' commodity. Specialists argue that by the time you separate glass, and then try to truck it three or four or five hundred miles to get it to a market, the hefty freight rates make it a negative-value material.

For now, Advanced Disposal, the waste disposal company for the City of Fernandina Beach, is continuing its pickup services for glass. Doesn't it just seem in this world that we take three steps forwards and then fall back two? Eventually I feel sure that the glass market will rebound once we figure out that the industry of mining sand has its negatives also. Will it be in my lifetime? I don't know, but I sure hope so.

The good news is that aluminum markets appear to be improving. So when you want to pop a top, perhaps it should be an aluminum can.

However, the bad news is that low oil prices are one of the culprits when it comes to producing plastic. Since there is such a glut of oil, it's now much cheaper to produce new plastic. As a result, manufacturers don't have as much need for reclaimed plastics because of cheap oil. We are literally drowning in plastic. We all now are beginning (Go to Pg. 2)

What's Inside?

Recycling in City 1

Right Whales 2

Calendar/
Events/Outings 3Water Testing
Lunch Invite 4**CONTACT US!****Facebook:**Sierra Club Nassau
County Group**Phone:**

(904) 432-8633

What's Up with Recycling? *(Continued from page 1)*

to understand the global impact of our plastic dependency and the effect it is having on our oceans and marine life.

Since our society seems hell bent on unsustainable consumption, we, as environmentalists, need to push the State of Florida to cut back on plastic waste. Limiting the use of plastic bags through financial disincentives is one initiative that Sierra Club has pushed for. Banning disposable, one-use plastic drinking straws that take over 200 years to break down is another. We also need to push the legislature to relook at deposit and return schemes for plastic bottles, drink cans, and glass as another way to incentivize behavior. Really, everything falls back to education.

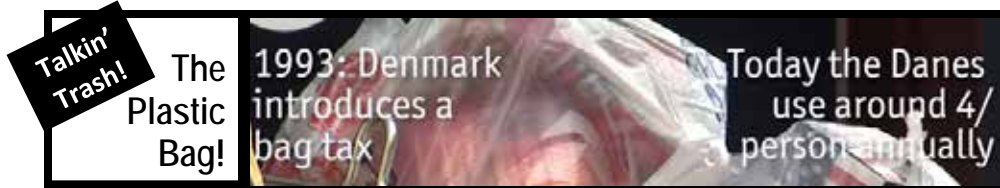
One issue that locally is being brought to our

attention is the record amounts of trash going into the recycling bins. To that end, Nassau County Sierra Club is organizing a tour of our material recovery facility in Jacksonville on May 9th. (See the next page for meet up details for carpooling to the facility.)

The tour will be limited to thirty people.

Call Chuck Oliva at (347) 495-7771 to reserve your spot. Reservations are necessary.

We hope you will join us.



Right Whales on the Brink of Extinction

By Chuck Oliva

The Right whale got its name because it was deemed to be the "right" whale to hunt. Right whales were a preferred target for whalers because of their docile nature, their slow surface-skimming feeding behaviors, their tendency to stay close to the coast, and their high blubber content (which not only produced high yields of whale oil, but also makes them float when they are killed). For these reasons, right whales have been hunted for centuries and were driven close to extinction. Their population dwindled to what was perhaps as a few dozen individuals at the start of the 20th century. They were one of the first whales to be given international protection in 1935.

The North Atlantic right whale has been listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) since its inception during the Nixon administration. After being given these protections their numbers rebounded slightly but, the population has since dropped to 450 individuals.

Right Whales feed and mate in Cape Cod Bay and other areas along the Northeast Coast. The females then migrate to the calving grounds between South Carolina and the southern tip of Florida to give birth. Right Whale births have been recorded since 1989. Since then, an average of 18 calves are born each year. This year, no births have been recorded. Additionally, 17 individuals have washed up on the Florida shores – a victim of fishing line entanglements and boat strikes. The right whales are on the brink of extinction.



The timing could hardly be worse. Right whales are facing a "perfect storm" of problems. Female right whales give birth once every 3-5 years, but due to environmental stresses that interval is getting longer. After giving birth and spending the summer nursing their calves, the mothers are desperately thin. In this delicate state, the whales make the long trek north to their feeding grounds in the waters around Cape Cod.

These waters were once rich with their preferred food: copepods, a small crustacean rich in lipids. Unfortunately, due to the warming of the oceans the widespread appearance of the copepods no longer corresponds with the timing of the arrival of the right whales from the south. Additionally, while they are in Cape Cod Bay their proximity to human activity results in an increase in boat strikes. And the political climate could hardly be less supportive. In the 2019 budget proposal, President Donald Trump and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke refused to allocate a single dollar to the Cooperative

Let's find out if the bag in the cereal box is recyclable. Is the cap of a pop bottle recyclable or only the bottle? What about the aseptic juice carton? What about paper coffee cups, clothes hangers, or frozen food boxes?

The road often seems long and hard but any society where sustainability is absent is destined to, at some point or another, fail. Sustainability is the name of the game.

Endangered Species Conservation Fund, a program authorized by the Endangered Species Act that funds states and territories for voluntary species and habitat conservation projects on non-federal land. And a new political appointee picked by President Trump to oversee wildlife and parks at the Interior Department, Susan Combs, has been called a fierce opponent of the Endangered Species Act.

With a heightened sense of concern, our local Sierra Club group has invited the NOAA Right Whale Biologist, Barb Zoodsma, to talk about the plight of this imperiled species at a Sierra Club event in the Fernandina Library on Friday, April 13th at 7:00 pm.

Ms. Zoodsma will outline the gravity of the right whale's situation and discuss some of the steps that we can take to decrease the number of boat strikes and fishing line entanglements that plague these magnificent animals.



April 13, Friday, 7:00 pm - Free

Fernandina Beach Library

NO Right Whale Calves? - NOAA Right Whale Biologist, Barb Zoodsma, will outline the gravity of the right whale's situation and discuss some of the steps that we can take to decrease the number of boat strikes and fishing line entanglements that plague these magnificent, endangered animals.

April 21, Saturday, 9-11 am Free

Park at Dee Dee Bartels Boat Ramp (end of N 14th St.)

EARTH DAY!★

Waterway Clean Up & Free Lunch at White Oak Plantation!

Sierra Club is partnering with White Oak and the St. Mary's Riverkeeper in a "waterway" clean up. You will be supplied with gloves and bags. **YOUR BAGS OF TRASH earn you a wrist band from your site captain for a FREE LUNCH at White Oak after the cleanup. RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!** Call Chuck Oliva at (347) 495-7771 to reserve NOW! (Space limited to 20.) NO PETS PLEASE! Animal Conservation Area!



Directions to White Oak Plantation will be given at the Clean Up site on April 21st to clean up participants.

April 28, Sat., 7 am -3pm

***RECYCLE EVENT!** City of Fernandina Beach Paper shredding along with a recycling event. Accepted items: glass/plastic bottles, propane tanks, steel, aluminum cans, paper, cardboard, metal, **electronics, appliances,** oil, filters, **tires,** hazardous chemicals, fluorescent bulbs, paint, **batteries,** non-prescription medications. **PLEASE BRING A NONPERISHABLE ITEM FOR DONATION TO THE BARNABAS FOOD PANTRY.** LOCATION: Maintenance/Utilities Complex 1017 South 5th Street Fernandina Beach, FL 32034

May 9, Wed., 9 am - Free

Carpool - West side of Loop parking lot, near the corner of 8th & Sadler Rd.

TOUR the RECYCLING PLANT- Ever wonder how they separate your bottles, cans, and plastics? See the machinery in action. Get tips on what is REALLY able to be recycled and learn about the latest industry trends. Bring your questions! **MUST WEAR CLOSED TOE SHOES. Facility is located in Jacksonville.**

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED! Call Chuck Oliva at (347) 495-7771. Reserve NOW! (Space limited to 30.)



May 11, Friday, 7:00 pm - Free

Fernandina Beach Library

To Be Announced: For further information see the Calendar section at the bottom of our website page <http://www.sierraclub.org/florida/nassau> or find more information about the events and outings at our Facebook Page: "sierra club nassau county group".

May 19, Saturday, 11:30 am - Free

TWO events at Main Beach, Fernandina Beach

HANDS ACROSS the SAND! (only takes 30 minutes) A popular annual event! Join us in making a statement against offshore drilling and for clean energy! The photo is worth the trip!

WILD AMELIA -Wildlife Festival, 10 am – 3pm

This popular event features groups from all over the area featuring our wildlife and our coastal environment. Great for children and adults alike, this is truly a fun educational experience for all.

May 23, Wed., 1:30 pm - Free

Meet in parking lot of City Central Park (NW side)

TOUR the City Water Treatment Plant

Mr. Mandrick of the City of Fernandina Beach will conduct a tour of the facility and will answer questions as to the origin of our drinking water, its treatment, testing, and its distribution method. This is a timely tour for those expressing interest in the Sierra Club neighborhood water testing program. **RESERVATIONS REQUIRED! Call Chuck Oliva at (347) 495-7771 to reserve NOW!** (Space limited to 30.)

June 8, Friday, 7:00 pm - Free

Fernandina Beach Library

State of E. Coli in the River -Any progress?

Riverkeeper, Rick Frey, will give a progress report of the health of the St. Mary's and Amelia Rivers. Updates from state and federal agencies will also be discussed along with the progress of grant opportunities for pollution cleanup. Opportunities to assist with water testing will be discussed.



What's in Your Drinking Water?

The City of Fernandina Beach and Nassau County are required by the EPA to complete routine testing for lead and other contaminants. The City of Fernandina Beach, a historic town, has an aging water distribution system. If you would like to participate in a neighborhood water testing program,

Sierra Club Nassau is sponsoring a free and simple testing program to identify neighborhoods that may need assistance in identifying their drinking water concerns. For participation or for more information contact Faith Ross (904) 798-0979 or John Baker (202)716-4802.

EARTH DAY!

April 21, Saturday, 9-11

Waterway Clean Up & Free Lunch

YOUR BAGS OF TRASH earn you a wrist band from your site captain for a **FREE LUNCH** at the **WHITE OAK Plantation** after the cleanup.

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED!

Call Chuck Oliva at (347) 495-7771.

Reserve NOW! (Space limited to 20.) NO PETS PLEASE! White Oak is an animal conservation area! For more information see the Calendar Page inside.

**For ALL event details
See Calendar Page Inside!**

CALENDAR

April 28th - Saturday, 7am-3pm!

Recycle Event for electronics, etc.

May 9th - Wednesday, 9 am

TOUR the Recycling Plant
In Jacksonville

May 19th - Saturday, 11:30 am

HANDS ACROSS the SAND
Join us in making a statement
against offshore drilling
and for clean energy.

May 19th - Saturday, 10-3 pm

WILD AMELIA – Wildlife Festival
Come visit our booth.

May 23rd, Wednesday, 1:30 pm

TOUR the City Water Treatment Plant

June 8th, Friday, 7:00 pm

Fernandina Library
State of the River - Riverkeeper



Nassau County Sierra Group
P. O. Box 38
Fernandina Beach, FL 32035