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Ijams River Rescue Removes ~21 Tons of Trash from Area Waterways

Close to 560 volunteers removed an estimated 21 tons of trash from East Tennessee's waterways and shorelines during the 33rd annual Ijams River Rescue presented by TVA on March 19.

Groups collected 1,440 bags of trash and 146 tires at 44 sites in Knox, Anderson, Blount, Loudon and Roane counties.

Since the nonprofit nature center started tracking what cleanups collected in 1995, more than 1 million pounds of trash has been removed from areas in and around waterways.

In addition to typical trash, such as plastic bottles, drug paraphernalia, Styrofoam, and food wrappers, this year's volunteers found unusual items including a patio umbrella, a chest of drawers, an unopened beer, suitcases, a Polaroid camera, car parts, a computer screen, televisions, an electric scooter, hoses, garlic spray, and, as one volunteer reported, "a rug that ties the room together." For the second time, a gun was found at Williams Creek and was handled by authorities.

Ijams Volunteer Coordinator Sammy Shorey said illegal dumping sites are a big part of the problem, but it's just as shocking to see all the trash that washes up on shorelines and collects at creek mouths.

"It's unbelievable how much single-use plastic and household trash ends up in the environment," Shorey said. "It seems so easy to put something in a trash or recycling bin, but too many people leave trash wherever they go without thinking about the harm it can cause.

"The best way to reduce this kind of garbage is to choose reusable containers to prevent it from entering the waste stream in the first place," she said. "Choosing biodegradable options, or aluminum and other easily recycled materials, helps but if it doesn't make it to the right receptacle, it doesn't help."

Ijams Nature Center is working to implement more sustainable practices at its 318-acre campus. The staff recently replaced single-use water bottles with water in aluminum cans, and will be switching from plastic to aluminum cups when the Ijams Beer Garden opens later this spring at Mead's Quarry. The nonprofit nature center already uses biodegradable plates for event rentals and does not allow vendors to use Styrofoam.

Visitor Services Director Sarah Brobst also plans to replace large, opaque recycling bins with Clear Stream containers to improve the collection of plastic, aluminum, paper and tin.

"Ijams' mission is to educate and inspire people to be good stewards of the planet, and that includes leading by example," Brobst said. "These containers have been proven to be more effective at encouraging correct recycling because people can easily see what's being collected. Studies also indicate that people are less likely to contaminate these recycling bins with trash."

"The Ijams River Rescue cleanup is a large event with an impressive result, and Ijams truly appreciates the volunteers and sponsors who helped make it possible," Shorey said, "But even every day, small changes can make a difference."

The Ijams River Rescue presented by TVA was made possible thanks to the generous support of TVA, City of Knoxville Stormwater Engineering, Dow, First Horizon Foundation, The Thompson Foundation, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Knoxville TVA Employees Credit Union, Waste Connections, CAC AmeriCorps, and Water Quality Forum.

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NOTE: Photos available on Ijams Facebook Album at @ijamsnaturecenter at:
<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=ijamsnaturecenter&set=a.3228982053791678>