

About 100 people help clean up Poudre

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On an overcast yet warm Saturday morning, about 100 volunteers helped pick up trash along Poudre River near Lee Martinez Park.

Organized by Mountain Whitewater Descents, and co-sponsored by Save the Poudre and the city of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, the cleanup has been running for the past 12 years.

First-time volunteer Stacey Baumgarn of Fort Collins said he had heard about the cleanup for years but always after the event.

"I mean, you can always come out here and do something like this on your own, but I really appreciate the spirit of people coming together and cleaning up," Baumgarn said as he fished an old beer can out of the river with a long stick.

The event was started by Mountain Whitewater Descents owner Brad Modesitt and his brother when they took a canoe trip from Fort Collins to New Orleans and noticed the dirtiest section was right in their backyard.

However, because of a scheduling conflict, Modesitt couldn't attend the event for the first time, so his manager and 11-year employee Ben Costello was in charge.

As volunteers arrived, grabbed trash bags and signed waivers explaining they wouldn't be paid for Saturday's event, Costello made sure trash collection bikes with large trash cans attached to their backs were ready to go.

"Back when we first started, there were only about 20 or 30 of us," he said. "Now we had about 120 or 130 last year, and this year, it looks like it will be the same," he said.

After a quick rundown of some guidelines by Costello, such as not picking up anything that looked heavy or dangerous, or anything that might belong to a homeless person, a group photo was taken, and everyone split off into small groups headed to the north and south, while Costello's employees took canoes to drop into the river to collect the harder-to-reach trash.

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“We don’t encourage the volunteers to get into the water for safety reasons, so that’s why we bring the canoes,” Costello said. “That way we can get the island trash.”

Brian Park of Fort Collins came out with his daughter, Cambria, and her 4-H group, from which he learned about the event. “It’s a great way to give back to the community, and surprisingly enough, it’s fun,” Park said.

Park and his family brought along grabber tools, which they said they bought at a dollar store to help them with the harder-to-reach trash. However, other volunteers came up with slightly less-traditional methods of trash collection.

Fifteen-year-old Milagros Pizo of Fort Collins dangled his friend, Gren Clearwater, 13, of Littleton by his feet so he could grab trash Pizo raked toward him with a large stick. Most of what they seemed to find were old beer cans and a few tennis balls.

Catherine Dillon, service learning educator for the city of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, said they will be coordinating more cleanup events this summer, both along the Poudre and at other locations. Those dates have yet to be determined.

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