

# How to Remove **90** Tons of Trash and **3,400** Tires

By: Francis DiGiano, President of Clean Jordan Lake

**Our mission statement reads** “Restore Jordan Lake to a healthy and vibrant aquatic resource by removing trash from the shoreline and preventing its recurrence.” As a small nonprofit, Clean Jordan Lake (CJL) has no paid staff and relies completely upon volunteers for cleanups and donations of cash, goods and services. As a bare minimum, we need about \$2,000 annually to cover rental of a supply storage unit and minimum liability insurance. To raise funds, our website ([cleanjordanlake.org](http://cleanjordanlake.org)) includes an Online Store page where we offer T-shirts, a Simple Pleasures of Seafood Recipe Booklet and an Eagles of Jordan Lake poster for sale as fund raisers. We also have annual donation appeals to 500 on our mailing list.

We have a two-pronged approach to trash removal. For the chronic recreational trash, there is an Adopt-A-Shoreline Program. For stormwater driven trash, we organize semi-annual cleanup events open to the general public and host community service days by corporations, religious groups, schools, universities and civic groups throughout the year.

Our Adopt-A-Shoreline Program is explained at our website and at [meetup.com/helpcleanjordanlake](http://meetup.com/helpcleanjordanlake). It was initiated by a grant from the Biogen Idec Foundation that allowed us to design and produce an attractive adoption sign that is posted at each site to acknowledge the group. An online map shows the adoption location sites available. Since its creation two years ago, 14 groups have agreed to participate. Their responsibility is to clean the site three times per year for three years. In 2013, these groups accounted for 300 volunteers who removed 5 tons of trash and 200 tires.

In May 2014, we initiated an Adopt-A-Feeder Stream Program. The idea is prevent trash from reaching the lake’s shoreline by removing it closer to the source. The Town of Apex is financing adoption signs for our first two locations.

We have also reached out to the boating community for help. A BoatUS Foundation grant allowed us to produce a Trash Tips for Boaters sign that the Jordan Lake State Park and the Corps has installed at all of their public boat ramps. On each sign post is a box holding brochures that describe the work of CJL. We need to add brochures quite frequently, a hopeful indicator of interest in our cause.

The major thrust of our cleanups so far has been to address stormwater driven trash along the Haw River Arm of the lake near the dam. Of the 180 miles of shoreline, by far the most trash is along 25 miles of this section of the lake. The Haw River flushes trash off 1,400 of the 1,700 square miles of watershed. Some of this trash moves up-lake during extremely high river flows.

Of the 114 cleanups so far, 55 have dealt with stormwater driven trash. They account for 2,700 volunteers who have removed about 85 tons of trash (that’s roughly 8,500 large trash bags) and 3,200 tires. The largest event attracted over 200 volunteers.

Our semi-annual events are held in conjunction with NC Big Sweep across N.C. in October (CJL is Chatham County coordinator) and with the Haw River Assembly’s Clean-Up-A-Thon in March. These are announced to the 500 members in our [meetup.com/helpcleanjordanlake](http://meetup.com/helpcleanjordanlake), at all other CJL social media outlets and at three volunteer recruitment websites in the region. As an incentive to volunteer, we offer a Trash Treasure Hunt. Unique items of trash are tagged during our prior survey of shoreline. Volunteers finding them are given tickets to be redeemed for merchandise prizes at the end of the event.



(above) A “Trash Mosaic” from a boat tour in 2009

In addition, the number of organizations looking for community service opportunities continues to grow. We have hosted eight since January 2014 and four more are planned through October so far. Many groups return each year, including GlaxoSmithKline and Biogen Idec in the Research Triangle Park.

**“Of the 114 cleanups so far, 55 have dealt with stormwater driven trash.”**

Our success greatly depends on donated services. We are recognized as an official partner with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps provides two boats and operators for pre-event surveys of trash, ferrying volunteers and trash and other logistical support such as a meet up location at their headquarters. The NC Dept. of Transportation keeps us supplied with trash bags. NC Big Sweep is a statewide trash cleanup each Fall organized by groups in 100 counties. Clean Jordan Lake as the Chatham county coordinator obtains gloves and publicity from NC Big Sweep. Chatham County Solid Waste and Recycling delivers one or two dumpsters that each hold 300 trash bags for our major cleanups. Trash is disposed free of charge. Bridgestone America picks up and recycles tires after each major event. The Wildlife Resources Commission provides permits for our volunteers to enter the Game Lands. So far, these donated services along with the donated labor by volunteers exceed \$350,000.

Our trash removal mission can easily be construed as Sisyphean in nature. Sisyphus was condemned to an eternity of useless efforts and unending frustration as punishment by Zeus for his deceit and craftiness. Zeus made Sisyphus roll a huge boulder up a steep hill, enchanting it to roll back down, forcing him to begin again.

For us not to be likened to Sisyphus, we need to prevent the recurrence of trash. That will require us to reach out to the eight counties in the 1,700 square-mile watershed. As a start, we recently produced a 5-min video with funding from the Walmart Foundation that describes why trash is a problem and how counties can help solve it ([youtube.com/watch?v=bV3lAXbEXC4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bV3lAXbEXC4)). We will be asking county elected officials and staff for their cooperation in enforcement of anti-litter and illegal dumping laws and for expansion of recycling programs. As important, we will ask for development of public education programs about the connectivity between the local landscape and the downstream shoreline of the lake.

Five years into our mission, it is easy to get discouraged to see trash reappear after our volunteers have worked so hard. But, without our efforts, there would be 90 more tons on the shoreline! ✕



(above) **Community Service Day by GlaxoSmithKline assisted by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**



(right) **Trash cleanup along Haw River Arm**

(far right) **Participants in Clean Lake Jordan's Adopt-a-Shoreline Program**



**Were you inspired by Clean Lake Jordan's Stewardship efforts?**

Visit [www.americancanoe.org/Stewardship](http://www.americancanoe.org/Stewardship) to learn how the ACA can help you protect your local waterways.