

saving_our_streams_01

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waterways, recycled, water, litter, wash, contribute, fertilizer, nonpoint source pollution, bottom, pollution, manmade, system, galveston bay, decomposers, houston ship channel, defray, bacteria, streams, fertilize, harris county

SPEAKERS

Randy Hull, M. A. Bengtson, Norm Uhl, John Ramsey, Voice Over

Norm Uhl 00:12

Most of us have only brief encounters with the streams in our area as we pass over them on bridges. But down here you can savor the real beauty of our waterways. You can also see the havoc wreaked upon them by people. This five-part series you're about to begin watching endeavors to show the consequences of our actions, as we learn about some simple lifestyle changes that can make a big difference. In part one, we deal with nonpoint source pollution. Now that's a fancy name for anything that ends up in the water that can't be traced to its exact point of origin. Things like litter. A better name for it might be pointless pollution. There are 3000 miles of waterways in the Houston area; all of them drain into Galveston Bay and then the Gulf of Mexico. But these streams bring more than just water to Galveston. The proof can be seen even in areas accessible only by boat, or helicopter. All this track was not inhabited so it's not coming from people here. Where is it coming from?

M. A. Bengtson 01:19

It's coming from upstream or in through the bayous, the creeks, the drainageways, everything that empties into the bay.

Norm Uhl 01:27

It begins with litter thrown out of car windows or blown from unsealed trash cans. It collects in natural ditch lines and manmade drainage systems waiting for the next rain. Some of it sinks to the bottom; the rest floats to places like the shoreline along the Houston Ship Channel. Here the Bayou Posse is using probationers to clean up the mess. The trash is sorted for recycling to defray the cost of garbage bags and other supplies.

Randy Hull 01:57

Two and a half tons of glass, close to 500 pounds of plastics has been recycled. And 300 tires just out of this one small area.

N

Norm Uhl 02:06

So how much of this stuff can be recycled?

R

Randy Hull 02:08

Probably about 70%.

N

Norm Uhl 02:12

Randy Hull would rather see this manpower used for erosion control and the restoration of wildlife habitat. But as it stands, they can't even keep up with the litter. Each new rain brings more trash. It also brings oil, used oil dumped directly into storm drains as illustrated in this simulation. By the way, that's molasses. But you also contribute to the problem if your car leaks fluid. These hydrocarbons are also washed by rain into our waterways. And the amount that ends up in Galveston Bay may surprise you.

M

M. A. Bengtson 02:49

Every year in the Houston metro area, off of our streets we have enough oil and gas to equal 40% of the Exxon Valdez spill washing into the bay system.

N

Norm Uhl 03:01

You also contribute to pollution if you overfertilize and then overwater your lawn. Some nutrients in the water system can be beneficial. Too much can kill.

J

John Ramsey 03:13

You may as well just come down here and put the fertilizer directly on the water and sprinkle it. There is no difference between that and having it wash down your storm sewer. Fertilizers fertilize the lawn. And when they wash off they also fertilize plants and our waterways. Sometimes there could be overgrowth, we can have algae blooms. When they die, they go to the bottom. Bacteria decomposers start acting on this plant material. And because bacteria are alive like every other living thing, they consume oxygen. And so the amount of oxygen in the water system declines. And when it gets below certain kinds of thresholds, well you're gonna have a fish kill.

N

Norm Uhl 03:50

The number one polluter in Harris County is its citizens. We all contribute to the problem and together we can solve it. But we won't truly succeed until the shores of our waterways are as beautiful close up as they are from outer space.



Voice Over 04:07

And there you guys are.