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Cleanup yields 2-1/2 tons of trash

By Doug Cook

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Diana Breitenstein hurls bags of trash collected from Willow Creek during the Granite Creek Park cleanup Saturday.

PRESCOTT - Perry Breitenstein plucked a long frayed rubber hose from the bed of a pickup and chucked it onto a makeshift pile of garbage bags on the asphalt parking lot at Granite Creek Park Saturday morning.

With the city's annual Earth Day-weekend celebration taking place only a few hundred yards away, Breitenstein - a member of the Prescott Flycasters non-profit fishing contingent - couldn't think of a better way to volunteer his free time improving the local environment.

However, he and the others in his party were nonetheless flabbergasted at the volume of manmade debris they extracted from a tiny half-mile stretch of Willow Creek off Sylvan Drive in just 2-1/2 hours during the community's 14th annual Granite Creek Cleanup.

Ann-Marie Benz, watershed coordinator for the non-profit Prescott Creeks preservation group, said a total of 311 volunteers picked up 2-1/2 tons of trash from the Upper Granite Creek watershed, which stretches from the [Prescott National Forest](#) south of the city to the Granite Dells.

For the second straight year, the [City of Prescott](#) and Prescott Creeks joined forces to spearhead the effort. They received help from local schools, the public library and outdoor recreation clubs.

Breitenstein and a half dozen other Prescott Flycasters volunteers spotted all sorts of misplaced or haphazardly discarded items along the piece of waterway they worked to improve.

"We found a lot of garden hose, sewer pipe, construction debris, water bottles and sealable bags - all in Willow Creek," Breitenstein said. "Unfortunately, I just think people throw things away and they believe it's not going to harm anything."

The crew collected some construction debris that it thinks inadvertently flooded from a higher elevation and into the creek from seasonal rains, but they believe most of the items had no reason being there.



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Jacob Israel, 5, gets a little help painting from Salli Maxwell, left, and Jenna Israel during an Earth Day event.

"If it was dumped where it was supposed to be, we wouldn't be cleaning it up," said Diana Breitenstein, Perry's wife. "We didn't even cover a large expanse."

Standing on top of the bed of his white pickup Garth Ezell, president of the Prescott Flycasters, arrived in the parking lot shortly after noon with posts, corroded metal bars, plastic bottles and aluminum cans.

He and his group collected at least 20 bags of trash, along with loose iron posts and a Realtor's "For Sale" sign.

"Some of this we know for sure is illegal dumping," said Ezell, who helped with the cleanup for the first time Saturday. "We found whole bags of trash where it looked like somebody just threw it over the side. It's unbelievable."

For these fly fishermen, who crave clean waters for their catch, their efforts inspired them to want to do it again next year.

"It feels really good to go out and clean it up and do something, but at the same time, it makes me feel really sad because people are so careless and not mindful," said Diana Breitenstein, who trudged into Willow Creek in her bare feet to collect trash and debris.

Ezell, who lives in Chino Valley, said he has also thought about getting the Prescott Flycasters involved with the Arizona Department of Transportation's Adopt-a-Highway program to pick up and properly dispose of trash along the state's highways and freeways.

"Every day I drive out to Chino, I can't believe how much stuff is sitting along Highway 89," Ezell said. "A lot of it is incidental, but I can't stand it. It drives me crazy."

Contact the reporter at dcook@prescottaz.com

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