

MiSustainable Holland

About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

Environmental Awareness/Action: Environmental education and integrating environmental practices into our planning will change negative outcomes of the past and improve our future.

ODC Network volunteers clean up Dunton Park

By Sydney Quillian
ODC Network

Have you been to Dunton Park this week and noticed far less litter lying around? Last Saturday, Sept. 30, a group of volunteers and staff from ODC Network went out to clean up Dunton Park.

The group assembled at 10 a.m. for safety instructions and snacks, and promptly at 10:05 the group dispersed. On land, with buckets and grabbers in hand, volunteers and staff got to work surveying the park's boardwalks, parking lots, and vegetated areas. Each member of the team quickly filled their five-gallon bucket with cigarette butts, snack wrappers, balloon fragments, and more.

Keeping our parks clean and picking up this litter is crucial to the wellbeing of local wildlife and habitats. When cigarette butts are left behind, they can leach toxic chemicals into the soil and water which harm wildlife. When birds and other animals come across brightly colored plastics, they are tricked into thinking it will make a satisfactory snack and end up starving when the plastics in their belly can't be digested.

And the plastic materials that aren't ingested by wildlife may take thousands of years to break down. Over time these plastics will fragment into smaller and smaller pieces, but they will likely never truly disappear. Like cigarettes, plastics also leach harmful chemicals and toxins into the environment.

While some teams focused on land, a fleet of volunteers in kayaks dispersed in Lake Macatawa to retrieve abandoned cans and bottles nestled in the shoreline of Dunton Park and fishing line dangling from low-hanging trees.

Like plastic, aluminum and glass will never fully decompose. Because of this, litter from cans and bottles can fragment and harm wildlife. Additionally, discarded fishing line can entangle fish, birds, or any animals that accidentally get caught in it.

Whether discarded intentionally or unintentionally, litter ends up everywhere in our natural areas. Without dedicated volunteers and organizations, this litter would be left behind for centuries to cause harm to wildlife. The time and effort put in by individuals involved in cleanups like these help create safe ecosystems and habitats for local wildlife to live and thrive in.

Every pound of trash, every cigarette butt, and every microplastic collected and properly disposed of can make a difference, because we never know which piece of litter might be the one to impact wildlife.

At the end of the cleanup, the teams came together to weigh what was collected. The five adult volunteers, five youth volunteers, and five staff members collected and removed 70 pounds of trash from Dunton Park.

ODC Network hosts clean up events like this twice a year. If you would like to keep up to date with when events like this are taking place, follow @odcwatershed on Instagram and "like" ODC Watershed Stewardship on Facebook.

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