

Environmental Heroes Clean Public Lands in Morris County

On July 9, 2021, a group of volunteers conducted a cleanup of Waterloo Valley Road and wooded areas of Stephen's State Park in western Morris County. The 805-acre park is maintained by NJ Division of Parks and Forestry (NJDEP). This beautiful area is home to wildlife and draws nature lovers, bird watchers and those who enjoy mountain biking in its wooded expanse. Unfortunately, it is also a popular region for those looking to illegally dump trash and litter the beautiful surrounding with bottles, cans and food wrappers! Litterbugs and illegal dumpers feel secure in the remote area that is camouflaged by trees and bushes as they do their dirty deeds. It is disheartening that people are so disrespectful to Planet Earth!



Michael Flora, Investigator for the Morris County Department of Law and Public Safety, Solid Waste Enforcement, patrols this area on a regular basis. Mike has caught and fined some of the perpetrators. Regrettably, signs reminding the public that illegal dumping is prohibited and unlawful, are not enough. Mr. Flora is very dedicated to his work and helped coordinate this cleanup effort for the second time. This year, 2.67 tons of illegally dumped trash was removed and approximately 880 pounds of tires. This in comparison to the cleanup conducted by the same group in 2018, which yielded nearly 11 tons of trash, is (sadly) an improvement. The Morris County transfer station in Mt. Olive is not far from this area and is open 6 days a week, to accept trash. There is no excuse for illegal dumping and the degradation of the environment.



Our group of heroes set their plan in motion early in the morning and brought an army of heavy equipment along that included an excavator, a Bobcat, a front-end loader and roll-off containers. Ed King of NorthStar Contracting Group provided the equipment, several employees and the machine operators. Members of JORBA (Jersey Off-Road Bike Association) and others from Marty's Reliable Cycle were on hand to provide much needed assistance. The volunteers, pulled mattresses, a sofa and loveseat, along with 40 tires out of the woods! In addition, a load of wood chips and random plastic bags that were marked Asbestos, were also found and removed. The excavator removed piles of construction debris and other illegally dumped objects that tarnished the beauty of this scenic area. Volunteers filled plastic bags with other random pieces of trash they found. Before leaving the site, Mr. King had the machine operators move large boulders along the roadway to prevent access to areas where illegally dumped debris is commonly found. This will make it more difficult for the lawbreakers to back into remote areas and will discourage illegal dumping. Anonymity breeds shamelessness. The Morris County Clean Communities program provided gloves, trash bags, grabbers and paid the disposal fee for the trash removed from this cleanup.



Liz Sweedy, Morris County Clean Communities Coordinator, would like to thank everyone who participated in the cleanup and is very grateful for a job well done! Mike Flora has been in communication with NJDEP regarding the area at Stephen's State Park and hopes to obtain assistance going forward with keeping a close eye out for offenders. Mike will continue his pursuit to find and penalize those who are responsible for illegal dumping and littering! Fines **begin at \$4,500.00 to \$5,000.00**, with additional fines imposed for mandated recyclables found. Please keep Morris County litter free!

