

# Garbage River & Trash Can Lake



Picture by Hopkins North Junior High 9th Grade Commercial Art Class.

## What Is the Problem?

Minnesotans recycle 46% of their trash, yet still throw away three million tons of solid waste each year. Fig. 1 shows what is in trash. Some will end up on land and in water. The Center for Marine Conservation finds ocean beach trash is 61% plastics. Much other trash sinks or disintegrates, releasing pollutants.

Trash is an eyesore—and much worse:

- Dumped tires create ideal habitat for the mosquitoes that carry encephalitis.
- Spills and roadside dumps may contain motor oil, cleaners, pesticides, paint, batteries, and other toxic chemicals that can seep into ground water.
- Wildlife gets caught in wires and strings and chokes on fibers and bits of trash.
- Diapers, food, and other garbage often contain harmful bacteria.
- “Trashed” areas become devalued and attract further dumping.

### Success Story: Byron

Each year, seventh grade students at Byron High School clean up the Zumbro River at Oxbow Park in Olmsted County. One year they uncovered an illegal dump site. In addition to pop cans, plastic bags, wire, and candy wrappers, students uncovered an old wagon wheel and a whole car.

## What Can We Do About It?

Minnesota Adopt-a-River groups clean up 270,000 pounds of trash each year. Cleanups often introduce volunteers to local lakes and streams. Many groups then go on to monitor water quality, restore native habitat, and organize public support for taking care of waterways.

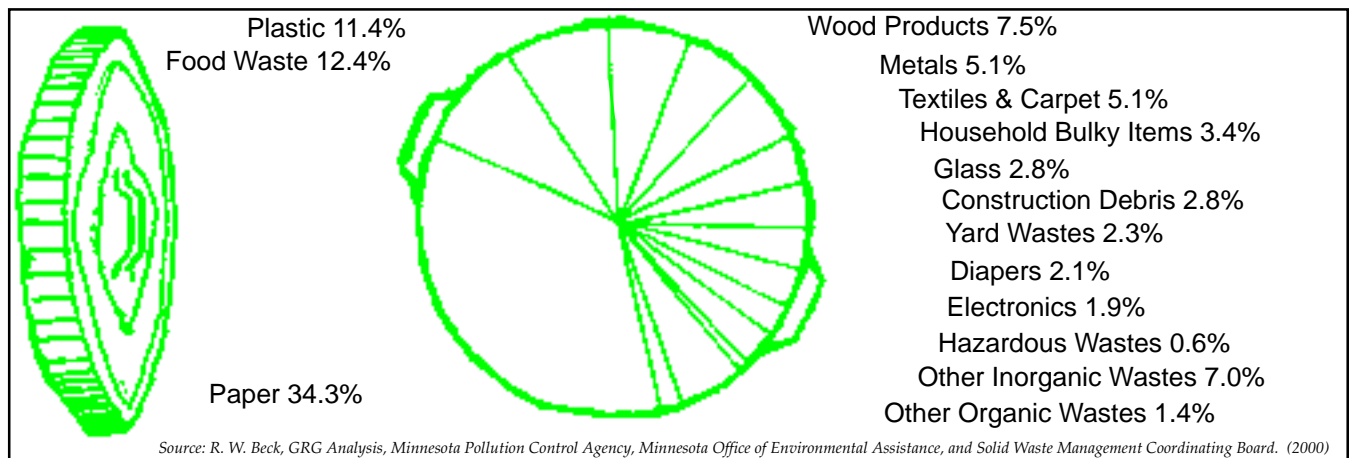
### Mo' Info.

Step-by-step instructions on how to organize cleanups and other service projects: *Pollution Prevention Project Guide*; Call Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance for a copy (651) 215-0232.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Adopt-a-River Program registers groups to care for a shoreline. Free organizing kit and help identifying a site, getting trash hauled away, and more. 500 Lafayette Rd., St. Paul, MN 55155 (651) 297-5476 or (800) 766-6000.

Local Partners: [www.bwsr.state.mn.us](http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us) - Hit button for “Local Gov’ts,” then find your county and/or watershed. Also call your city.

Fig. 1: Inside Minnesota’s Trash Can: Trash Composition After Recycling



Watershed Resources Youth Stewardship Project

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Supported by: Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources