

Only Rain Down the *Drain!*

Have you ever thought about taking action to protect our environment, only to become frustrated because you don't know where to begin? Well, the best way to start your own "conservation crusade" is to contact your local government officials. That is what one Summit County resident found out recently, when she voiced concerns about pet waste being dumped in storm drains only to end up in the pond in her neighborhood.

Storm drains lead directly to streams and rivers and lakes. When pet waste enters our surface waters, it becomes a form of non-point-source pollution which severely impacts water quality. Because pet waste contains nitrogen, it acts as a fertilizer and creates an over-abundance of nutrients in our lakes and ponds. The excess nutrients contribute to algae blooms. As a result, when the algae die and decay, oxygen levels in the water are drastically reduced by the decomposing organisms, which also need oxygen. The fish and aquatic organisms that depend on oxygen for life, cannot survive in these oxygen-depleted waters and a dead-zone, devoid of life forms in the lake. Pet waste may also contain harmful bacteria such as fecal-coliform, which can cause intestinal illness in people and animals.

When our concerned resident came upon another person actually dumping bagged pet waste into the storm drain and inquired about it, she was told that the storm drain led to the sanitary sewer and the treatment plant. But of course, the storm drain led directly to the lake and the bagged pet waste ended up in the first resident's front yard.

This led to an investigation of the storm drain openings in the development, and the discovery that many of the storm drains had markers attached to them which said "No Dumping-Drains to River." These stickers help to draw attention to the drains and let people know their purpose, (not to be used as a trash can.) So our resident called her city officials and volunteered to attach markers to the storm drains that were not already labeled.

Once informed about the problem, the city joined in and used this situation as an opportunity for the education and public involvement of its citizens. The neighbors and municipal staff hung bags containing educational materials about storm water quality and pet waste, on all of the door knobs in the neighborhood. Storm drain markers were also attached to the remaining storm drains in the neighborhood. The residents will also be able to attend an educational event sponsored by the city, featuring a presentation on storm water quality by the Summit Soil and Water Conservation District.

So become a "Conservation Crusader" and the next time that you are concerned about an environmental issue in your locality, don't hesitate to call your local officials and give them the opportunity to correct the situation and educate their residents. You can also call Summit SWCD with questions or concerns about water quality issues and healthy environmental practices, at (330)-929-2871, or go to <http://www.summitswcd.org>. You will be amazed at what you can accomplish. Remember, "every conservation practice is multiplied many times over to protect our environment."