

LITTER AND TRASH IN OUR PARKS AND FORESTS

Most of us love to go to the park or hike in a forest. We love to walk among the trees and enjoy nature. We enjoy the outdoors and seeing the wildlife that lives in and around the trees.

If we are lucky we may see squirrels and chipmunks up in the trees or scampering along the ground. We may also hear and see birds nesting, searching for food or flying overhead. If we are quiet we may even see a deer, a bear or other animals that live there.

But did you know that our parks and forests are both complex and fragile ecosystems where the animals and plants that live there are greatly impacted by litter and trash left by people?

Often when we are walking in the park or hiking in the forest we see litter and trash that people have left behind. People do not stop to think about the damage that litter does to the environment and the animals and plants that live there.



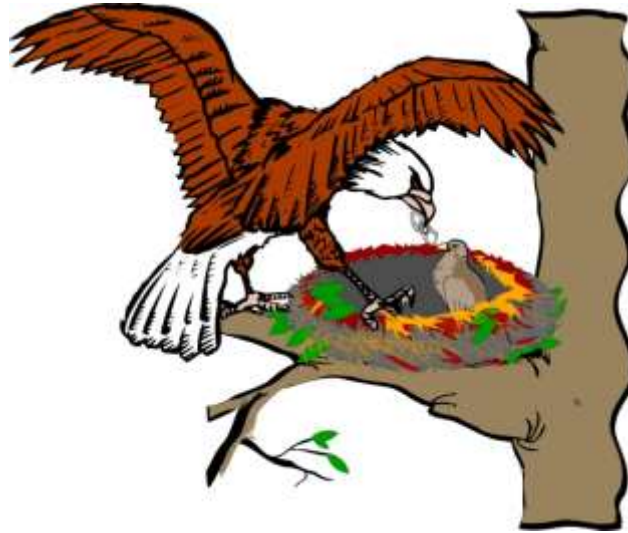
Entanglement:

Did you know that animals that live in and around trees are hurt or killed each year when they get entangled in plastic wrapping and other trash left on or along our hiking trails or in our parks? Small animals like squirrels, chipmunks and rabbits can get tangled up in plastic wrappings and other litter when they are looking for food. If they do they are often either injured or die when they can't get untangled.



Ingestion:

Hundreds of animals are also hurt or killed by eating or ingesting litter and trash left behind in our parks and along our hiking trails. Park rangers report that birds such as hawks, eagles and woodpeckers will pick up shiny objects and take them back to their nests for their babies to eat. If eaten by the baby birds it often leads to death for the babies.



Additionally bears and other mammals eat food left behind in and around our campgrounds and along our hiking trails. In some cases litter like plastic bags, metal cans and paper wrappings lead to painful injury and/or death. Litter also attracts bears and other animals to where people are camping and hiking. This creates a dangerous situation for both people and the animals that are attracted by the food and the litter.



The Accumulated Effects of Trash and Litter:

In some areas there is so much litter and trash that it not only attracts bigger animals but it also attracts large numbers of flies, mosquitoes and other flying insects due to the smell and odors coming from the rotting waste. These insects in turn can bite other animals and people which can lead to painful bites and even disease. Where trash and litter has been left for a long time it can lead to an extremely unhealthy environment for everything that lives there or visits the area.



So what can we do to help?

The first thing we all can do is make sure we pick up our own trash and litter, and don't leave anything behind. Secondly we can take extra bags with us when we go camping or on a hike or walk and pick up litter that we see. When we go to a park or walking anywhere we can stop and pick up litter and put it in a trash can. Hopefully there are garbage cans or trash receptacles nearby. If not, we can always take it with us and place it in a garbage receptacle on our way home or put it in our own trash can when we get home.

Lastly you might want to consider organizing a park, campground or hiking trail cleanup day or event. The event may only involve your family, or family and friends....OR it could even be a community event.... But most importantly **REMEMBER**....

TRASH AND LITTER HURTS ALL OF US!



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