

Land, Water and People

By Ronnie Day

Creating the Fishing Dream

Early summer has finally arrived and now it is time to get the old fishing rod down, grab the tackle box, and head for the lakes, ponds, and streams. We have been waiting all winter for this chance!

As we head out to do some early summer fishing, we have visions of sparkling trout swimming in pure, crystal clear waters, and being the first ones out there to catch them. We keep picturing scenes of that lovely lake surrounded by snow capped peaks, deep green stands of spruce trees, and meadows of green grass dotted with wildflowers all reflected in those mirror like waters, rippling with feeding trout.

In reality though, we often get to the lakeshore or along the creek and discover a whole different world. We often find empty beer and pop cans, Styrofoam bait containers and coffee cups, empty fishing tackle packaging, tangles of excess fishing line, PowerBait jars, and plastic water bottles. It fouls the shore and lies on the bottom of the clear waters. There is nothing more disappointing than looking at the water and instead of seeing your reflection, you see a rusty Bud Light can and some floating cigarette butts. Other features we see in the real world are old campfire rings right along our waterways and shores. These consist of ugly blackened rocks, piles of ashes, and unburned trash such as aluminum foil and globs of black plastic.

Talk about bursting the bubble of visions of pristine waters, this is a real bummer! Unfortunately this is more the normal situation here on the public lands, than just a rare occurrence. Three really great examples are Beaver Creek Reservoir, Big Meadows Reservoir, and Road Canyon Reservoir, where if you walk the shoreline anytime of the year after the snow melts, it looks more like a landfill than a natural lake. It is a sad situation to contemplate not only for us but for our future fishermen and fisherwomen (children) as well.

The best way for all fisherman and boaters to handle this matter of litter is to practice the "Pack it in / Pack it out" ethic. In other words if you have made the effort to pack all your gear, food, and beverages down to the shores, there is simply no reason you cannot pack your trash back out and take it home for disposal.

Another thing to consider is the legal consequences of littering. If you get caught littering on the public lands, the minimum penalty is a \$175 fine and the maximum penalties can be as high as a \$5,000 fine, 6 months in jail, and additional restitution as necessary. Do you really believe the risk is worth the additional cost and embarrassment?

A final consideration is the fact that today's type of litter lasts a long time. Below is a list of some common items and how long they last in the outdoors!

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| Cigarette Butts..... | 1 to 5 years |
| Aluminum Cans..... | 80 to 100 years |
| Plastic Bags..... | 10 to 20 years |
| Plastic Bottles..... | Indefinitely |
| Glass Bottles..... | 1 million years |

Fisherman and boaters, please renew your efforts to practice the “Pack it in / Pack it out” code of outdoor ethics, so that we can all live that dream of seeing beautiful trout swimming in crystal clean waters.

Ronnie Day is the Visitor Information Specialist for the Divide Ranger District/Del Norte Field Office. On summer weekends, he is often found sleeping next to a lake with a fishing rod in his hand.