

Taking on The Task of Tracking The Trash

By Ben Lomeli,
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Immediately after the last meeting of the Nogales/Santa Cruz County Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs Committee, Mr. Paul Hathaway asked if FOSCR would be able to do something about trash entering the Santa Cruz River from the first western tributary canyon north of the International Border with Mexico. Mr. Hathaway indicated that the problem has grown increasingly worse in the last five years, and that flow events during this summer's monsoon rains further exacerbated the problem; although sediments have recently buried many of the previously accumulated discards.

FOSCR has conducted river cleanups for several years, so this sounded like an opportunity to research one of the upstream sources of the type of trash that on many occasions volunteers have filled countless trash bags with. It also sounded like an opportunity to coordinate environmental work with officials and citizens groups on AMBOS sides of the border.

So, a few days later, in the company of Mr. Jose Sosa, Mr. Hathaway and I were examining and photographing some of the evidence in the field. We had not been there very long when we were detected and approached by the U.S. Border Patrol. After explaining the purpose of our presence, Mr. Hathaway quickly capitalized on the opportunity and asked if the Border Patrol could provide us with GPS coordinates of the site where the canyon enters the United States. Patrolman McPherson graciously agreed and told us the canyon is known as Oso Wash to the Border Patrol.

A day or two later Mr. Hathaway visited my office and gave me a diskette containing the digital photographs of the trash we had examined. Mr. Hathaway said he would be following up with the Border Patrol about GPS coordinates, and exploring the possibility of having them provide security when we schedule a cleanup. That same day, I left a message for Mr. Juan Pablo Guzman, Director of Public Affairs for the Nogales Arizona Mayors' Office. He returned my call later that week and we began setting the groundwork for coordination with the Nogales Sonora Mayors' office. Positive relationships already established between the two mayors should facilitate identifying the source and mitigating the impacts.

Thanks to ARIZONA CLEAN AND BEAUTIFUL, FOSCR still has several boxes of trash bags, tally cards, and other related cleanup items. Judge Mary Helen Maley and I will coordinate with the MEXICAYOTAL ACADEMY to formulate an environmental project for the students and to schedule cleanups. Thanks to Director Balti Garcia, the MEXICAYOTAL ACADEMY has been a reliable and efficient group of river cleanup volunteers for several years.

As a member of the International Boundary and Water Commission's (IBWC) Southeast Arizona Citizen's Forum, I intend to notify the IBWC of the contamination problem, and ask to make this issue an agenda item for our next meeting, which will be scheduled for this fall in Nogales. The IBWC meetings are open the Public, and are held quarterly; alternating locations between Cochise and Santa Cruz Counties. I encourage anyone interested in international water issues to attend. Meetings are advertised in the news media.

Much work lies ahead, and much help will be needed. This effort will require collectors, haulers, drivers, photographers, first-aid, orientation, coordinators, etc. Any groups or individuals wishing to participate in this community-based volunteer binational environmental cleanup, please contact me (at 281-8878) or Mary Helen Maley (281-5758).