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## AWC UPDATE:

A message from the Executive Director, Cherie Northon

What do you really think about trash?



**Garbage left where trash cans used to be  
(photos from the *San Francisco Chronicle*).**

In early November while visiting California, a front page article and photos in the *San Francisco Chronicle* caught my attention. Titled "[Will removing bins solve trash problems?](#)" (Nov. 7, 2015), the focus was on San Francisco's well-known Ocean Beach in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA). It is an experiment where people are supposed to pack out their trash from certain beaches. The move by the National Park Service (NPS) was to see if removing trash bins near the entry and exit stairs to the sandy shore would encourage people to take their garbage away with them. Although still a "trial" period, the reactions were mixed and inconclusive. Some people who spoke to the newspaper reporter were "shocked" to see significant trash lying around the sand although it is difficult to ascertain if there was more garbage now than before without some type of study. Nevertheless, nearby residents and frequent visitors were frustrated about piles of trash that were

accumulating in the spots where the former bins sat. Still others were optimistic that it might encourage those to carry their trash out to their car and dispose of it at home--but there's the rub. Who wants to carry a bunch of trash bags--often damp and sandy--in their car? What about the people who ride bikes or take public transportation there? Obviously no good or "one-size-fits-all" answer exists.

While some agreed that the intentions of the NPS had potential value, they may not be realistic. It really depends on who you talk to. The public affairs person for the GGNRA maintains that the program has been successful in just a short time. She sees a cleaner beach, while beach goers report the opposite.

Based on some of AWC's work around town--particularly in regard to pet waste stations and the location of trash cans along our trails and in dog parks--just how would we feel about fewer trash cans or their complete removal? As head of Anchorage's [Scoop the Poop program](#), questions we are often asked include "why do some pet owners not even bother to pick up poop?" or "why do pet owners clean up their dog's waste and then leave the bag along a trail or tied in a bush or tree?". Obviously we don't have the answers, and there are probably many different reasons. In the case of the abandoned poop bags, perhaps there is an intention to return and retrieve it for proper disposal later but the person forgot or maybe another route was taken on the way back or someone else picked it up. And, while we do have a lot of nice "Poop Fairies" in Anchorage who do clean up after others, hopefully there is not an assumption that someone else will do it. Because the answers remain elusive for now, it would be nice to know how others perceive the convenience of having adequate trash cans and whether or not it encourages proper disposal of pet waste and trash (or not). At the end of this discussion, there is a VERY SHORT survey for people to weigh in on this question, and the results will be put out in our next e-newsletter.

The thought of "packing trash out" reminded me of stories I'd read about how much garbage has accumulated on iconic locations such as Mt. Everest and Denali. In the case of Denali, a successfully enforced "pack-in-pack-out" policy began in the 70s. While this originally was aimed at garbage, it has been expanded to include proper removal of human waste. (There are some interesting articles on the National Park Service website about planning a trip to Denali--lots of great details, suggestions, and rules.) Besides the unsightliness of garbage, it became imperative that human waste was removed, because of the use of snow and ice for drinking water. Climbers were getting sick from using melted snow that was contaminated with human waste. While it is not my intent to explore this unpleasant topic in detail, suffice it to say that about 15 years ago a concerted effort began on Denali to use the Clean Mountain Can (CMC) to successfully remove human waste left by the many climbers. This was recently discussed by a PBS station in regard to Everest using Denali as an example, and you can read the entire story [here](#).

There is a point to all of this. AWC's mission is to protect the health of Anchorage's waterways and their users. Our creeks and lakes have been impacted by sewage and waste for decades--although the manner has varied (sometimes it's from leaking septic systems, incorrectly connected pipes, or people leaving pet waste in their yards, on the street, along trails, and other areas). Our creeks have also been the conveyances of sewage, waste, and trash for decades. As the city evolved, two separate systems were built to carry sewage (from buildings that are connected to the sanitary sewer system) and runoff from yards, streets, paved areas, roofs, parking lots, etc. into the stormwater drain system. Unfortunately, our stormwater runoff empties directly and untreated into our creeks before making its way out to Cook Inlet and beyond. Stormwater runoff picks up anything it can: fast food containers, plastic bottles, vehicle drips, pet waste, cigarette butts, and dumps it into our waterways and ultimately into our oceans. It has been estimated that 80% of the trash in the oceans' garbage patches begins in our watersheds (but that's a story for another day).

Let's talk about our trash. Those climbing on Denali are likely motivated to pack out their trash because of huge fines for not complying. What about us in our daily lives when we are just out visiting a local natural area? Are we willing to pack out our trash? Do we want the ease of having trash cans available at reasonably convenient locations? Do we expect someone else to clean up after us? Remember, someone has to empty them and that costs us (Anchorage taxpayers) money. And, remember too that there are fines for violations of leaving pet waste and for litter.

Also, unsecured trash becomes a target for bears, ravens, and other wildlife here in Anchorage. The issues are many. Personal responsibility seems to be at the core. As AWC works with pet owners about the health of our creeks--we stress that there is NO poop fairy except for the person who is in charge of their pet! Besides taking responsibility for your own trash, you need to do the same for your pet's waste. To the people of Anchorage--those living, working or visiting here--please respect our city and put trash in its place (which means NOT on the ground!) and pick up after your pets. These actions benefit our wildlife, fish, and ultimately us.

To take a short survey (about 1 minute) about trash, click [here](#). Thank you.

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## How can you help AWC maintain healthier creeks?

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### Some Disposal Options

Anchorage has many options for recycling and disposing of items besides our residential or business trash pickups.

- Click this [link](#) for information on recycling paper, glass, plastic, and other items (**ALPAR**)
- Click this [link](#) for information on recycling electronics, light bulbs, batteries, refrigerants, and other items (**Total Reclaim**)
- Click this [link](#) for information on recycling hazardous materials (**Solid Waste Services**)
- Click this [link](#) for information on reducing cigarette butt waste
- Click this [link](#) for information on the **Green Star** program
- Consider donating used items to the many thrift organizations in Anchorage for repurposing.

### Volunteer

There are many ways to help AWC as a volunteer. We have fantastic volunteers who donate hundreds of hours to monitor our creeks every month, hundreds of participants take to the creeks every May to pull tons of trash out during our Annual Creek Cleanup, many of you are "eyes on the creek"--reporting things that are disturbing--and we do our best to respond or help people find the right place to "complain". Or, consider becoming a board member! AWC is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit and memberships and donations (monetary or items) are tax deductible.

### AWC Membership--Renew or Join!

Being a member of AWC means that you care passionately about the well-being of your own environment. We work to keep the waterways clean, clear, and of value to all. From clean water and recreation to creating a general feeling of well-being, our waterways need protecting for our own benefit, as well as for the countless other species that rely on them. Adding your name to our membership means we can make a stronger stand when it comes to the issues that can affect us

all--use your vote and become a member today!

It's easy, you can go online at [www.anchoragecreeks.org](http://www.anchoragecreeks.org) and click the "**JOIN**" button, to join, renew or donate or click the "**Join Now**" button at the top of this email. We are now set up to do recurring payments as well! This can be as simple as \$5 or \$10 a month, but it adds up BIG for us. If you have a question about your membership and when it expires, please contact us at [awc@anchoragecreeks.org](mailto:awc@anchoragecreeks.org). If you know someone who wants to help support our great waterways, please forward this email to them, or if you want to provide a gift membership--contact us. Does your employer have a volunteer match program? Thanks to all for your continuing support and especially to our sponsors and volunteers who watch the waterways, monitor the creeks, and help this great organization--the **ONLY** one in Anchorage dedicated to protecting our creeks, wetlands, and watersheds.

... Reminder: Follow us on **Facebook** at "Anchorage Waterways Council" and "Scoop the Poop Anchorage"

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**Anchorage Waterways Council**

[awc@anchoragecreeks.org](mailto:awc@anchoragecreeks.org)

<http://www.anchoragecreeks.org>

**(907) 272-7335**