

## The Nature of Things



### **Polk Needs More Monofilament Recycling**

By Tom Palmer

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More than a year ago I wrote about a serious environmental and recycling problem in Polk County - the total absence of recycling bins for used monofilament fishing line at boat ramps and fishing piers in Polk County.

This is an environmental problem because this material is responsible for many wildlife deaths. Also, like any other form of litter, it is an eyesore.

I'm happy to report that there has been some improvement.

The number of bins has increased. We have 15, all of them at Tenoroc Fish Management Area. Hats off to the folks there.

I frankly expected more. After I wrote the piece last year, some of my acquaintances in the angling world congratulated me on the piece, and one even said he might push for some action to get recycling bins installed locally.

Local recycling and lake-protection groups also promised to get involved.

I'm still waiting.

Let me give you an idea of how behind the curve we are here, based on data compiled by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The number of monofilament line recycling bins in other Central Florida counties that have more active programs than Polk are:

Brevard County, 70; Pinellas County, 51; Manatee County, 44; Volusia County, 43; Hillsborough County, 41; Osceola County, 29; Sarasota County, 27; Highlands County, 21; Indian River County, 19.

In looking over the listings, I've noticed a couple of things.

One is that some of the counties have a significant number of indoor recycling bins, usually logically located at bait and tackle shops. For instance, 33 of Brevard County's 70

recycling locations are indoors.

The other is that popular fishing spots in some counties have more than one bin.

However, as bad as Polk's record is on this score, we're not the worst.

Alachua, DeSoto, Hardee, Lake and Marion counties have no listed monofilament line recycling locations. Orange and Charlotte counties have only two each.

One of the ironies of the listing is that Leon County, where the state capital and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's headquarters are located, has only one recycling site and it's in the marine fisheries office.

I mentioned earlier that improperly disposed monofilament fishing line is a wildlife threat.

Here are some specifics. I have seen carcasses of line-entangled fish-eating birds, such as anhingas, hanging from the branch of a tree along a lake.

The line kills more than birds.

Sea turtles and even some whales have been found entangled offshore or when their bodies washed up onto shore.

Certainly many more wildlife deaths caused by monofilament line entanglement occur, but they're either unnoticed or unreported.

Some people may be reading this and thinking it would be great to set up a system of recycling sites, but that it would involve a lot of work.

They're right.

Once you install the recycling centers, someone has to visit them and empty the bins and probably separate the line from anything else people have thrown in there.

However, there is a potential payoff for this effort.

Polk County is trying to promote itself as an outdoor tourism destination.

Having environmentally responsible policies, such as the promotion of the proper disposal of fishing line, could certainly be something tourism promoters could advertise.

Seeing live wildlife of all types is one of the attractions of going outdoors for many people. Seeing dead birds where you expect to see live ones isn't a very good advertisement for the area.

Even though some people don't view it this way, environmental quality and economic prosperity are in the long run complementary, not competing, values.

More people should recognize this fact.

Also, starting a recycling program is not mysterious. There's plenty of free information. To learn more about the monofilament fishing line recycling programs, go to:  
<http://myfwc.com/mrrp/index.asp>.

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