

Lake Ouachita Grab-A-Bag Partnership is Anything but Rubbish

by Amy Shultz

Island camping is a popular pastime on Lake Ouachita in Royal, Arkansas. With more than 200 islands, nature enthusiasts swarm to this lake managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to claim ideal island spots for the summer weekends to enjoy the secluded natural island beaches, beautiful sunsets, and star gazing on cool, clear nights. While most visitors do not litter, some leave their trash behind.



Litter can easily wash into the water, and can be detrimental to the wildlife who ingest it, to boat propellers that get tangled or damaged by it, and to the visitors who swim in the contaminated water. Two local groups, Lake Ouachita Citizen's Focus Committee (LOCFC) and their non profit counterpart Friends of Lake Ouachita (FOLO), started seeking methods to reduce the litter problem on the islands to maintain Lake Ouachita's pristine status.

In the past, LOCFC/ FOLO have hosted large "trash bash" yearly events and sponsored an Adopt-A-Shoreline program similar to the Adopt-A-Highway program. While these programs helped remove litter, more needed to be done to keep Lake Ouachita beautiful. LOCFC/FOLO proposed a plan to construct trash bag dispensers from PVC pipe and place them at all major boat ramps and marinas so

visitors can take a bag before they begin their trip on the water. Lake staff agreed to install the sign posts and distribute trash bags to the marinas. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, and several marinas also partnered with LOCFC/FOLO and lake staff by installing trash bag dispensers.

Several LOCFC members contributed to this project. They include Phillip Carr, who came up with the idea, Tom Butler, who led the project and manufactured the bag dispensers, Rex Regan, who donated approximately \$880 worth of materials and labor, and Jerry Shields, who designed the sign graphics. The entire project consists of 17 dispensers and signs, at a total cost of \$765 (\$45 per dispenser.) Lake staff are hopeful visitors will take advantage of the program as they become familiar with the location of the dispensers.



Bag dispenser located at the Spillway Recreation Area boat ramp

With the support of LOCFC and FOLO, the "Grab-A-Bag" program will provide trash bags for recreation users for years to come, and hopefully enhance environmental stewardship of the lake's lands and waters.



Boater taking advantage of "Grab-A-Bag" program