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## **St. Marys River Celebration nears a weighty milestone**

**By GORDON JACKSON**  
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KINGSLAND, Ga. - After commemorating its 10th anniversary a year ago, the St. Marys River Celebration is prepared to mark another milestone Saturday.

If the hundreds of volunteers from Florida and Georgia come close to the average of past collections from the river during the one-day event, they will have amassed a half-million pounds of trash since the cleanup was established in 1996.

"It's frustrating about the amount of trash dumped in the river each year," said Dean Woehrle, the event chairman. "It doesn't make any sense at all. I've never understood it."

Last year, an estimated 500 volunteers participated in the cleanup along the 130-mile blackwater river, removing more than 20 tons of bottles, cans and cigarette butts. They've also dragged bigger items such as tires, washing machines, refrigerators and stoves, couches, bowling balls, air conditioners and entire bags of trash from the river and surrounding areas during each cleanup.

In 2005, volunteers discovered one of the most unusual pieces of trash - a meth lab - on the river's banks in Nassau County. Volunteers immediately called authorities because they were afraid of a possible chemical explosion.

"We find about the same amount of trash in the same places each year," said Steve Nance, Charlton County manager. "It's frustrating, especially since we have free trash pickup. All they're [litterbugs] doing is messing their own nest."

Woehrle, who is also the Florida chairman for the St. Marys River Management Committee, said volunteers have found less trash at some of the 19 cleanup sites in Baker and Nassau counties in Florida and Camden and Charlton counties in Georgia. They now have the time to pick up trash at more remote locations, he said.

Public-awareness campaigns about keeping the river clean have some impact, but Woehrle said he'd like to see local law enforcement issue more littering tickets.

"If 10 people got tickets, it would probably stop 100 people from littering," he said. "But I realize law-enforcement officials probably have higher priorities."

Organizers are still seeking volunteers to participate. Those who don't have a boat will walk along the river's banks looking for trash, and boat owners will be assigned to different parts of the waterway.

Trash bags and Dumpsters will be provided, but volunteers are asked to take rakes and dip-nets, sunscreen and sunglasses, a hat and heavy gardening or dish-washing gloves.

Participants are invited to a post-cleanup party at White Oak Plantation from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., where they will get free T-shirts and a meal.

Charlene Sears, a Camden County commissioner and a new appointee to the St. Marys River Management Committee, urged people to volunteer for the event.

"All of us, in some way, are guilty about polluting our environment," she said. "The St. Marys River is one of our biggest assets. I think the cleanup is our chance for the community to give something back."