



# 2021 Raritan Headwaters' Stream Cleanup Report

At our 30th annual Stream Cleanup on April 17, volunteers removed 15 tons of trash from 70 sites in Hunterdon, Somerset and Morris counties.

July 21, 2021

After a one-year hiatus due to Covid-19 concerns, Raritan Headwaters Association's annual Stream Cleanup event was back in full force in 2021.

More than 1,250 volunteers picked up over 15 tons of trash and recyclables at 72 sites in Hunterdon, Somerset, and Morris counties. The gargantuan effort beautified 112 miles of rivers and streams, improving water quality and removing hazards to wildlife.

In just one morning, we logged more than 3,600 volunteer hours! In addition to picking up trash and recyclables, volunteers kept careful records of the types and numbers of items found.

As in the past, plastic in its many forms was the most commonly found litter. Volunteers picked up 7,644 plastic bottles, 3,849 plastic bags, 7,844 plastic wrappers and 2,092 plastic bottle caps. In addition, they removed 2,368 drink cups, 836 straws, 115 car and truck tires, 5,553 aluminum cans, 4,143 glass bottles, and 140 deflated balloons.

Nearly 700 balls were found – golf balls, tennis balls, baseballs, and others – as well as 6,819 cigarette butts. And in a likely sign of the pandemic, volunteers picked up 665 face masks and 313 disposable gloves.

Unusual items found in and around streams included a flagpole, chairs, a hockey net, traffic cones, fishing poles, golf clubs, car parts, a television, paint cans, a computer, construction materials, flowerpots, a refrigerator, a grill, and a bed frame.

This important event improves water quality downstream, all the way to where the Raritan River flows into the Atlantic Ocean. The river is a source of drinking water for over 1.5 million New Jersey homes and businesses. Every piece of trash and litter removed helps keep that water cleaner and safer.

Removing litter also makes rivers, streams, and the ocean a healthier place for the creatures who live in and around them. Plastics in the environment is a serious problem for fish and marine mammals that often mistake plastic litter for food and can die from ingesting them.

Plastics exposed to the elements don't decompose; they just break down into smaller and smaller pieces. Eventually they

become tiny bits known as “microplastics” – an emerging threat to both wildlife and human health. Smaller than a poppy seed, microplastics have been found in air and water samples and even in food.

An RHA pilot study – in which fine-mesh nets were used to sample water at 10 sites along the South Branch – found microplastics at every site. A large percentage of the microplastics in this study originated as larger plastic items such as bags, water bottles and other single-use plastics. We’re so grateful to our Stream Cleanup volunteers, they helped prevent so many plastics from becoming harmful litter.

Cleanup volunteers included individuals, families, scout troops, churches, businesses, civic groups, schools, and environmental commissions.

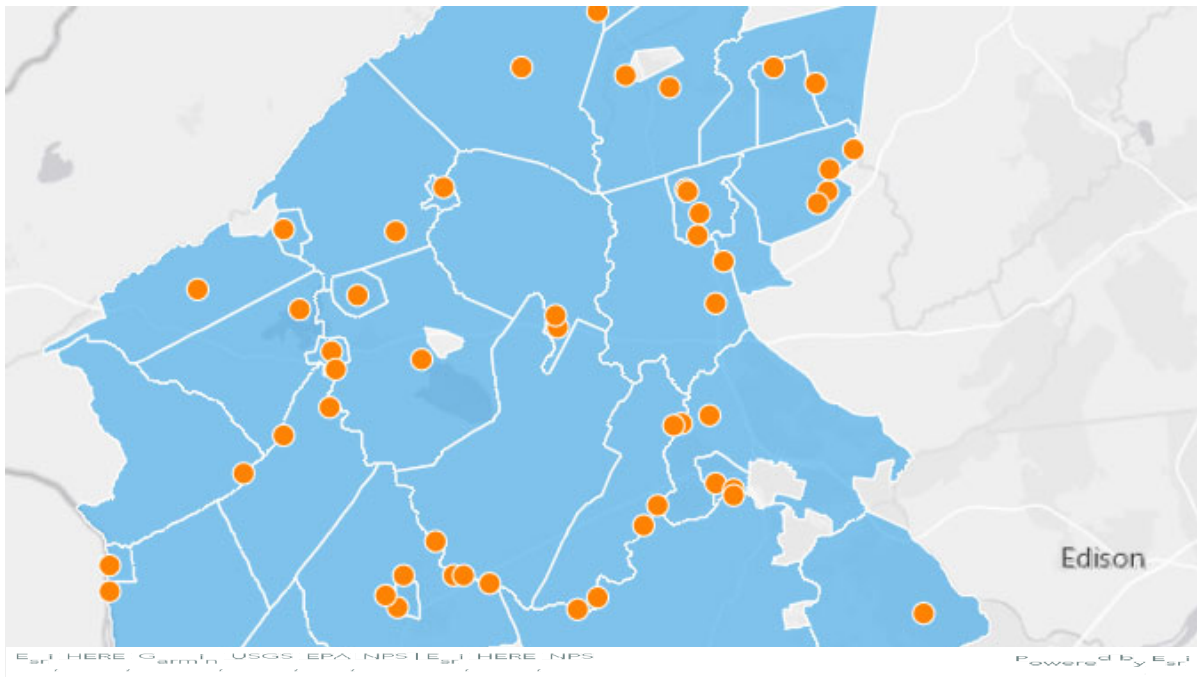
In Hunterdon County, the cleanup included sites in Alexandria, Bethlehem, Califon, Clinton Township, the Town of Clinton, Delaware Township, Frenchtown, Glen Gardner, Flemington, High Bridge, Kingwood, Lebanon Township, Raritan Township, Readington, Tewksbury and Union Township.

In Somerset County, volunteers cleaned up sites in Bedminster, Bernardsville, Branchburg, Bridgewater, Far Hills, Franklin Township, Hillsborough, and Peapack-Gladstone.

In Morris County, the cleanup effort included sites in Chester Borough, Chester Township, Mendham Borough, Mendham Township, Mine Hill, Mount Olive, Roxbury, and Washington Township.

## **Map of Stream Sites & Participating Towns**

Click on a town or site below to view summary details.



Each volunteer was asked to collect data on types of trash picked up. Summaries are based on estimates and if the volunteer reported their trash.

## How you can help

Join us for our April 2022 event, Registration opens in February.

Make a contribution to help cover the costs of equipment and materials.

Raritan Headwaters Stream Cleanup

[Donate Today!](#)

## Do you have a stream site that needs to be cleaned up?

We are always looking for new sites for our event. Your help is appreciated!

[Submit a Site](#)

**Thank you to all our volunteers who  
helped out this year!**

**Raritan Headwaters Association**

Clean safe water for all.

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