

# Unclogging the Drain: New project encourages local citizens to help keep trash out of the oceans

Some of the best benevolent ideas can come from unlikely and unexpected places. A few years ago, Bonnie Combs, marketing director for Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, was crossing a city intersection that was covered with litter. She took note of the quote stenciled on it: “Keep it Clean, Protect Your Water” and took a picture she used as a conversation starter to address issues with littered waterways and the Plastic Ocean. This chance encounter with a littered storm drain led to the Adopt a Storm Drain project, in which local citizens can take responsibility for keeping a storm drain in their neighborhood clean of debris.



“Pollutants — including litter — are carried by storm water in the drains and are then deposited directly into nearby wetlands, streams, lakes, ponds, estuaries and bays, which then enter our oceans,” Combs says while discussing the importance of keeping storm drains clean. “I felt there needed to be an awareness campaign to make a better connection between where litter goes when it makes its way into a storm drain.”

This awareness campaign has been recognized by both Rhode Island and Massachusetts, with both states issuing Gubernatorial Proclamations that declared May Storm Drain Awareness Month.

Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council has been combining arts and the environment with their project.

“We have created seven murals along the Woonasquatucket River Greenway, and are painting three additional murals at Riverside Park,” education director Sara Canuel says. “As well as adding art to the area, the murals depict important environmental themes such as creatures that live in the river, or impacts of trash.” The completed murals sit at the corner of Promenade and Rathbone St and on



Delaine St in Providence

Every citizen can adopt a storm drain of their own, even without the assistance of outside organizations. Combs is bringing awareness to the issue with the hopes that the community steps up to keep storm drains clear of debris, which will in turn prevent further pollution to our water.

“Simply monitor it on a regular basis, whether you take a regular walk there or drive by,” Combs suggests. “Keep some gloves and trash bags with you and collect anything you find and dispose of it properly.”

Safety is an important part of keeping storm drains clean. “Always be mindful of your surroundings,” Combs warns. “Watch for traffic, stay on the sidewalk or roadside. Wear gloves if you’re not using a litter picker and avoid needles. When removing debris, work slowly and carefully so that nothing falls in.”

Though Adopt a Drain is starting small, Combs is proud of the individuals doing their part to make this world a better place.

“We all play a part in the health of our planet and it’s small actions like this, when multiplied by many, that create change. And that’s what I’m all about: creating change.”

*For more information about the Adopt a Drain project, contact Bonnie Combs, Marketing Director of Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.*