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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – photos included

Drawn Down, Cleaned Up

Volunteers remove 28,000 pounds of debris from Lake Hopatcong during lake-wide community cleanup.

LAKE HOPATCONG, N.J. (November 10, 2023) —The five-foot drawdown of Lake Hopatcong, which happens every five years, enables a grand assembly of stalwart volunteers to remove an astonishing amount of litter from its temporarily bared banks. On Saturday, Nov. 4, nearly 600 volunteers combed the lake's shoreline removing an estimated 28,000 pounds of debris, including 900 tires during the Lake-Wide Community Cleanup organized by the Lake Hopatcong Foundation (LHF) and the Lake Hopatcong Commission (LHC).

"It's an impressive feat to be able to recruit hundreds of volunteers for an effort as demanding as this," said Kyle Richter, LHF executive director. "Seeing *that* many people step up for the lake makes me proud to be part of this organization."

Since 1982, the lake has been lowered 60 inches once every five years to allow for repairs to lakeshore structures and inspection of the Lake Hopatcong dam. Following the launch of the LHF in 2012, unprecedented cleanups were organized in partnership with the LHC in 2013, 2018, as well as on the morning of Nov. 4, 2023.

As with previous cleanups, this year's effort was coordinated by LHF Grants and Program Director Donna Macalle-Holly. She began by partnering with municipal departments in Jefferson, Mount Arlington, Hopatcong and Roxbury, and other organizations, to help recruit volunteers and coordinate removal of trash. Then, she reached out to the community to enlist crew leaders and teams.

"This year, initially, recruitment of volunteers was slower than in the past, but in the end, we surpassed our goal of recruiting 500 volunteers," said Macalle-Holly, who noted the weather was much better than in 2018 when there was a significant amount of pre-event rainfall.

"Still, even without the rain, it was very mucky around the lake," she added, "but we persevered and pulled out thousands and thousands of pounds of debris."

Mount Arlington's Joe Newkirk was among the first to pull on his boots, that day, and pick his way along the rocks of the newly exposed shoreline at Woodport. He was in one of the more than 50 volunteer cleanup crews that reported to various points along Lake Hopatcong's 45 miles of shoreline.

Pat Hoskins, who has lived in Jefferson nearly 40 years, watched Newkirk from her Alpine Drive yard as he took a cautious step toward a partially submerged tire. His boot sank nearly a foot into the lakebed as he reached for the heavy rubber ring, one of hundreds retrieved lake-wide that morning.

"Finding tires in the lake is understandable because they fall off the sides of the docks," said Hoskins, referring to their common use as bumpers to protect boats. "What's upsetting is when you find all the trash people have just tossed off their boats. We've loved this lake and know the importance of keeping it clean."

In Hopatcong, Stephanie Dimock and husband Spencer were among a hearty half-dozen volunteers who piled up lake litter next to the dumpster in the parking lot at Johnny's Marina. The collection included numerous beer bottles and countless cigarette butts, along with an anchor, sunglasses and a cell phone.

"I wonder how much [litter] is intentional and how much is accidental," said Dimock, a three-year resident. "Either way, it feels good to have an opportunity like this to clean it up. It's a really nice event that's focused on the environment and we've wanted to become more involved in the community."

Back in Jefferson, Jessica Williams and Katherine Benfante were overseeing a contingent proudly representing Girl Scout Troop 98437. A handful of 7- and 8-year-old Brownies and their friends, wearing a rainbow of jackets, searched the shoreline for litter and maybe a treasure or two.

"The girls love the outdoors so we're always trying to find opportunities like this to help our community," said Williams, a Troop co-leader with Benfante, who listed pipes, a life vest, tires, chunks of Styrofoam and a spoon among the girls' finds.

Boy Scouts, ranging in age from 12 to 16, were also part of the project, plucking junk from the exposed lakebed along Yacht Club Drive in Jefferson. Seven boys and a half-dozen adults, representing Lincoln Park's Troop 76, were led by Kenny Smith, whose sister, Patty Babb, has lived lakeside in Jefferson for 18 years.

"I've been in Scouting 13 years and this is our third lake cleanup," said Smith, officially, as one of his Scouts playfully squirted lake water from a Capri Sun juice pouch he'd pulled from the mud. "If it's for the lake and the environment, we like to help out whenever we can."

As noon approached and tires and trash bags were piled high on roads around the lake for later pickup, weary volunteers began to gather for cider and socializing at LHF headquarters in the historic former Lake Hopatcong Station in Landing.

Among the minglers was Succasunna's Michele O'Halloran who was recruited to join the cleanup by Kellie Ann Keyes, the Township's Clean Communities coordinator.

"It was the first time I'd done this... *and what a haul we cleaned up*," beamed O'Halloran, who was in a crew at the southernmost tip of Lake Hopatcong. "We were working in an area that was like quicksand, so we couldn't get out very far, but we still found an incredible amount of junk."

In the days that followed, municipal crews from each of the four towns around the lake (Hopatcong, Jefferson, Mt. Arlington, Roxbury) picked up the trash piles for disposal and hauled the tires to Hopatcong State Park where the Roxbury Fire Department hosed them off so they could be recycled.

Truly a community-wide effort, assistance was also provided by Morris and Sussex Counties' Clean Communities, New Jersey State Police, Morris County Sheriff's Office, Morris County Mosquito Control, and the Morris County Park Commission.

"We deeply appreciate everyone, every single person, who came out, or contributed in any way, to make this project a success," said Richter. "It's so good to know that so many people want to be good stewards of our shared environment."

The Lake Hopatcong Foundation is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to protecting the lake environment and enhancing the lake experience by bringing together public and private resources to encourage a culture of sustainability and stewardship on and around New Jersey's largest lake, for this and future generations. To learn more, visit lakehopatcongfoundation.org.

The Lake Hopatcong Commission is an independent state agency created in, but not of, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. The Commission is responsible for fulfilling the obligations of the Lake Hopatcong Protection Act, to safeguard Lake Hopatcong as a natural, scenic, and recreational resource. To learn more, visit lakehopatcongcommission.org.

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Volunteers pull debris from Lake Hopatcong during the Lake-Wide Community Cleanup on Nov. 4.



Pulling debris from Lake Hopatcong during the Lake-Wide Community Cleanup on Nov. 4.



Students from Mount Arlington Public School remove tires from Lake Hopatcong at Lee's County Park Marina during the Lake-Wide Community Cleanup.



Approximately 900 tires were removed from the lakebed during the Lake-Wide Community Cleanup on Nov. 4.