

Shame on Texomaland Litterers:
Per Year:
County Taxpayer Cost \$470,804
Federal Taxpayer Cost \$475,963,510

Every time I visit a Lake Texoma beach, I find campsites surrounded by litter in the areas that do not charge an entry fee such as Fobb Bottom NWR and other out-of-the-way beaches. Years ago, I realized that if the remote places that I visit experience that big of a littering problem, then the more populated areas must accumulate a much heavier load of litter.

Before I became disabled, I took trash bags with me to these areas, walked around picking up trash, carted it out, and either put it in my garbage cans or asked a nearby business if I could use their dumpsters for it. Now, if I am not in too much pain, I pile up the most offensive litter in one area and pray that someone else will carry on the torch.

On the beach, glass container fragments are the most dangerous and obnoxious litter followed by dirty diapers. It makes me sick to see our land violated in this manner, yet these offenses go on year-round with more accumulations of litter in the warm months.

I ran into a group of young men on the OU Bio Station property last Saturday afternoon. They had parked all over the roads blocking other visitors, so I stopped to talk while they moved their trucks, and one of them asked, "What can we do about the litter? It's terrible". I told them not to leave any trash behind and take more out than what you brought in because we cannot legislate morality. On Tuesday, I found they had left a bunch of bones and trash in their campfire pit.

An article on other serious Texomaland ecological violations—water pollution, illegal sewage pumping, and boaters who litter—coming soon.

Profiles of Criminal Litterers and Illegal Trash Dumpers

The United States Environmental Protection Agency developed a [profile of the typical illegal dumper](#). [Characteristics of offenders](#) include local residents, construction and landscaping contractors, waste removers, scrap yard operators, and automobile and tire repair shops.

- Young people are more likely to litter when they are in a group.
- Older people are more likely to litter when alone.
- Men litter more than women.
- Women use bins more than men.

- In a group of ten people in a public place, three will litter and seven will do the right thing.
- More smokers will litter their butts than use a bin.
- People are more likely to litter in an already littered or unkempt location.
- The most common reasons for littering are "too lazy" (24%), "no ashtray" (23%) or "no bin" (21%).
- Less than one-third of older people who were seen littering admitted their behavior when questioned.

Kathy Whaley on Litter Management at Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge

I spoke with Kathy Whaley at Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge (HNWR). When Kathy went to work at Hagerman ten years ago, littering was a much bigger problem than it is today. HNWR does not have a serious illegal dumping problem with only one or two incidents a year. Drivers continue to throw out beer and soda cans, junk food wrappers, and fast food bags and containers along Hagerman's roadways.

Kathy knows that litter attracts litter, so HNWR staff members and volunteers work diligently to keep the litter off the ground. After HNWR installed trashcans at the more popular spots in the refuge, the amount of litter decreased 75 to 80 percent, but there is still an expensive cost to taxpayers on the federal level.

From workamper.com, volunteers arrive in parks all over the U.S. to help maintain park properties. HNWR's workamper program supplies camping volunteers with trucks, gas, trash bags, water, electricity, and sewage in exchange for a few months of labor. Workampers work thirty-two hours a week in order to enjoy living in HNWR.

U.S. Army Corp of Engineers Environmental Specialist, James Vincent, on Litter/Trash Management

The impact of littering and illegal dumping on federal government property results in degradation of the quality of experiences for park visitors and health hazards that range from a minimal candy wrapper to serious in the case of the illegal disposal of hazardous materials. On the more than 200,000 acres with 75 recreational areas on Lake Texoma managed by the Corp of Engineers, the staff in this office finds everything from roadside trash to household waste to tires/appliances/furniture to hazardous waste.

The cost to a littering offender or illegal dumper for disposing waste legally is a fraction of the cost to the U.S. Corp of Engineers in terms of manpower, contract labor, volunteers, and workampers exclusively for trash pickup and hazardous waste disposal. This federal entity employs a thinly stretched budget. Cleaning up trash takes away from badly needed resources in other areas of land management.

When rangers discover an illegal dumping site hidden in the woods, they work to find information about the criminal who left the refuse. If found, the case results in fines and even court hearings. Did the rangers find the dumpsite right away, or has vegetation grown up around it which leads to a higher use of resources?

The U.S. Corp of Engineers in Texomaland relies on volunteers. Mr. Vincent said that his office relies on a core group of regular volunteers for trash removal much more heavily than they should. This office also utilizes workampers who take advantage of a great place to work and live for a short while. These volunteers police the roadways and edges of over 200,000 acres.

Other volunteers donate the use of their tractors, and contract labor releases and picks up the rest of the trashy burdens found in the woods. There is no absolute dollar and cents figure on how much trash and litter debris actually costs this office, and it would take deep digging to figure it out. But it constitutes part of the 11.5 billion dollars that American federal taxpayers spend yearly on trash clean up in the U.S.

Statistics on the Impact of Litter and Illegal Dumpsites in Texomaland

Yearly county taxpayer's trash cleanup cost for the five counties surrounding Lake Texoma: \$470,804

Estimated yearly federal taxpayer's trash cleanup cost on federal land in Texoma: \$475,963,510

Yearly federal taxpayer's trash cleanup estimated cost per acre of federal land: \$2,222

Federal Statistics here are an unreliable figure. I took the 11.5 billion dollars spent on U.S. trash pickup per year and divided it by the 18 million acres owned by the the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge System and came out with the figure of \$2,222 per acre. But, this is not including the millions of miles of highways in the U.S. and illegal dump sites. Still, this figure cannot be too far off the real mark, but there are too many moving parts to arrive at an exact cost.

Just for the combined acres of Corp property surrounding Lake Texoma, Hagerman NWR, and Fobb Bottom NWR which equals 214,205 acres at a cost of \$2,222 for trash clean up per acre, puts the yearly federal taxpayer cost at \$475,963,510 (almost 476 million taxpayer dollars).

A report from earth911.com estimates that private businesses in the U.S. spend 9.1 billion dollars yearly on litter cleanup, but this is an underestimate because this cost does not include staff pay, maintenance, and other departmental budgets.

From the Oklahoma Department of Transportation

Each year, ODOT sponsors "TRASH-OFF," when volunteers, including Adopt-A-Highway groups, pick up litter statewide on one Saturday in April.

- Oklahoma has more than 2,400 illegal dumps.
- County commissioners estimate the one-time cleanup cost for illegal dumps is \$4,000,000 (4 million).
- That cost averages out per the counties of Marshall, Love, and Bryan to \$51,948 each per year.
- The volunteers provide the labor, but the cost of supplies and equipment fall back on the taxpayer.

From Don't Mess With Texas

- More than \$40,000,000 (forty million) taxpayer dollars are spent on trash cleanup in Texas each year.
- That cost averages out for the counties of Cooke and Grayson to \$157,480 each per year.

More Litter/Trash Facts

- Sixty percent of litter is deliberate.
- A primary source of litter on state highways is the result of uncovered loads in pickups, flatbeds, and dump trucks.
- Roughly 55 percent of all littering occurs along rural and urban highways.
- Tire debris is the second largest component of litter.
- 71% of litter consists of microlitter that is not easily seen on roadways, such as cigarette butts, straws, and gum wrappers.
- Cigarette butts comprise 38 percent of all items littered on the highways, streets, parks, and playgrounds.
- 53 percent of all litter is attributable to motorists.
- Trash creates a bad impression, and it presents a health hazard for motorists and pedestrians.
- Roadside trash not only hampers tourism but also adversely impacts economic growth.
- Illegal dumps present a poor image to visitors and potential investors as well as residents.

- Pedestrians, primarily younger than 25, account for greater than 76 percent of all littering in parks, roadside parks, or recreational areas.

All Creatures: Human, Bird, Animal, Fish, and Insect Are Adversely Affected by Litter Bugs

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