PLANT LIFE COLUMN

RECYCLING OLD FISHING LINE

The draw down has started and water levels are dropping in preparation for the spring cleanup and muck removal project on Lake Tohopekaliga in downtown Kissimmee. As we focus on cleaning up the organic matter that has accumulated, the low water will expose litter and debris that has found its way into our waterways.

Monofilament fishing line is one of the items that will be found entangled in the plants and muck being removed. This is a good time to consider the hazards of monofilament in the environment and make plans to keep it from becoming a problem in the future.

Fishing line is important for catching lunker bass and bream and specs but loose line is a hazard to birds, wildlife and boat motors. Most fishing line is monofilament. In addition to being strong, it is long lasting, and reportedly can last up to 600 years. Since it is usually clear or light colored, it is difficult for birds and mammals to see so they can easily become entangled. Once entangled, the animals usually strangle or starve to death.

According to the monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program, 1 in 5 manatees rescued from 1980 to 1999 had been entangled in monofilament. In one study, 38% of green turtles that washed up in Florida had eaten monofilament line. Thousands of seabirds are rescued due to hook and line entanglement annually. Researchers have documented over 60 species of fish that have swallowed or become entangled in marine debris including fishing line.

Sometimes, a big fish breaks the line and swims off with hook and line dangling. Sometimes, fishermen respool their reels with new line and do not properly dispose of the discarded line. Sometimes fishing line makes its way to the garbage and still results in entanglement by birds and wildlife feeding in the garbage can, dumpster or landfill.

The Pure Fishing Company, also known as Berkley to fishermen, has taken an active role in helping anglers understand the problem and has become part of the solution. They are working with tackle shops and recycling organizations on public awareness and have established a system for recycling recovered line. Of course the best option is to avoid fishing line becoming a litter problem, but having a way of turning the problem line into useful products is a way of closing the recycling loop.

Single strand fishing line can be recycled, but wire leaders and wire core line cannot be recycled. When line has been in the water so long it becomes encrusted with barnacles in saltwater or heavy plant debris in freshwater, it cannot be recycled. It cannot be recycled through regular plastic recycling programs such as curbside pickup or local drop off sites.

Berkley provides tackle shops and marinas with indoor containers for recycling fishing line. Used fishing line is shipped back to Berkley Pure Fishing Company in Iowa where it is melted and formed into plastic pellets that are reformed into other plastic products. Common items include tackle boxes, spools for line, fish habitats and toys. It is not reformulated back into fishing line.

When you throw away used line, cut in pieces less than 12 inches long. Make an easy to use bin for collecting your used line by cutting an X in the lid of a potato chip tube or tennis ball canister. Be aware of the age of your line and wear that might allow it to break while fishing. Remove leader and hooks before recycling. Whenever possible, recover line you find while out on the water. If you miscast, try to recover all of the line that becomes entangled in weeds or trees. Buy recycled plastic products to show support for the program. The gift giving season is here.

If you encounter an entangled animal, contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission or
1-888-404-3922. Our web site also links to helpful hints at www.fishinglinerecycling.com/

I am looking for volunteers to help install and monitor outdoor bins at popular fishing spots around the county. This would be a great project for a fishing club, an ecology club or youth group. Sponsors are needed to help fund the construction of the bins and public education information. If you want to participate in a local program to recycle fishing line, contact me at efoe@osceola.org, or call our new phone number at 321-697-3000.

Osceola County Extension is offering a Rain Barrel Workshop on Thursday, November 21st at 6:30 PM at the new County Extension Office at Osceola Heritage Park off Bill Beck Boulevard and Highway 192. Collect free water for irrigation and keep water away from your house foundation. Call 321-697-3000 for details. A $20 donation due by November 19 covers the cost of materials so you can take one home.

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