

**Your Watershed  
by the Russian River Watershed Association**

**Care for Your Public Parks This Summer**

The summer season is well underway and outdoor recreation is heating up at parks throughout Mendocino and Sonoma Counties. With hundreds of parks to choose from in the region, there is no better time to get out and explore your public lands. In Sonoma County, lifeguard-supervised swimming is offered at both Healdsburg Veterans Memorial Beach and the Spring Lake swimming lagoon through September 9. Spring Lake also features boat rentals and a concession stand with refreshments on those warm summer days. For those who say “life’s a beach”, camping is available at a number of parks along our scenic coastline. Book now, as reservations go fast!

When visiting parks this summer, it is particularly important to care for the water quality of our lakes, rivers, and streams. Less rainfall this year has led to low river flows this summer, so every precaution should be taken to reduce contamination of our precious water supply. Here are a few simple ways to help preserve the vitality of our watershed while enjoying public parks this season.

- **Pack It In, Pack It Out.** This simple yet effective philosophy is a great reminder to dispose of trash appropriately. Trash receptacles may not be available at all parks and beaches, so bring a trash bag with you and encourage others to pack out their trash.
- **Give a Hoot, Don’t Pollute.** Dispose of all fluids and solid waste away from water sources. Even the smallest contamination can have profound effects.
  - **Keep it Away.** Bathing and dishwashing should happen away from water sources at designated areas. If these aren’t available, find an area at least 200 feet away from any water source, and dispose of rinse water in a 6-inch deep hole.
- **Keep on the Path.** Staying on designated trails prevents erosion and vegetation damage. It is especially important to tread lightly on stream banks to reduce sediment erosion into waterways.
- **Use the facilities.** Whenever possible, always use public restrooms. If none are available, dig a 6-inch hole at least 200 feet away from any water and trails.
- **Pick up after your pooch.** When bringing man’s best friend with you on your excursions, remember to pack doggie bags and use them to pick up your pet waste and prevent it from contaminating water supplies.

- **Leave it Clean.** Lost hooks and broken fishing lines are an inevitable part of fishing, but retrieving them can prevent injuries and save wildlife. Clean fish away from water bodies to prevent contamination. Also remember that September 22<sup>nd</sup> is a free fishing day in all of California, so even if you haven't purchased a license, you are entitled to fish. Rules and regulations apply.

By utilizing these simple principles of stewardship, we can help ensure safe and pleasurable water quality for all recreation users and wildlife. Enjoy exploring your public parks this summer season and thank you for protecting the health of our watershed.

*The Russian River Watershed Association ([www.rrwatershed.org](http://www.rrwatershed.org)) is an association of nine cities, counties and special districts in the watershed that are working together on programs for clean water, fisheries restoration and watershed enhancement. This article was authored by Robert Jensen, Stormwater Coordinator for Sonoma County Regional Parks*