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Michael Mulder tries to keep his footing as he collects trash from Jordan Lake near the Robeson Creek boat ramp.  
Staff Photo by Jason Arthurs

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## Volunteers tackle trash reservoir

### Jordan Lake at end of river-borne stream of garbage

**JOHN MURAWSKI, Staff Writer**

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This is where your plastic cup ends up. Where toys, bottles, lighters and shoes arrive at their final destination: B. Everett Jordan Lake.

Over several chilly hours Saturday, about 70 volunteers descended on this chemical-leaching scrapbook armed with garbage bags. By lunchtime, the volunteers had collected enough rubbish to fill two dump trucks and one industrial trash bin. They vowed to return this spring to repeat the Sisyphean task. As avid fishers, boaters and hikers, they know that their beloved waterways are nature's conveyor belt, forever dumping trash at this site.

In a shaded cove made for egrets and 'coons, our detritus has been accumulating over a quarter-century, some floating to this spot for 100 miles along the otherwise pristine Haw River from as far away as Reidsville, Greensboro and Mebane. The decaying artifacts originated from roadsides, sewers, drain culverts and creeks, washed down by the rains. Junior's whiffle ball, dad's anti-freeze jug, grandma's prescription bottle - they're all here now in this time capsule.

"People are finding beer cans with logos we haven't seen in decades," said Elaine Chiosso, director of the Haw River Assembly. "No one's ever cleaned up this much trash."

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which manages the site, lacks the manpower to attack the problem. So the waste has just festered here, layer upon layer, since the creation of Jordan Lake in the early 1980s. Trash not only turns natural habitats into de facto landfills, but this debris is marinating in the drinking water source for Cary and Apex.

The remote spot is accessible by water only, requiring boats to haul away bulging trash bags. Organizers repeated safety reminders about this nook that's booby-trapped with barbed wire, crushed glass and rusty fish hooks.

"Disgust" was Katie Bright's reaction when the N.C. State University junior arrived at 8:30 a.m. and beheld the task before her.

Brad Carey, an N.C. State grad student studying fisheries and wildlife, took a break from cleaning

and displayed an artifact he found here: a wooden fishing bobber that resembled a genie bottle.

"Anything that floats is going to be right here on the shoreline," he said. "People just aren't aware where their trash is going."

Every volunteer had a story to tell. One found a car headlight and a traffic cone. Another discovered a message in a bottle, containing a picture of a girl and several pebbles, still sealed.

It would take at least 20 more cleanups to get rid of it all, organizers estimate, and then more would float back downstream. The place is strewn with several hundred tires still attached to rims. Much of the trash is presumed to be concealed by a layer of compost.

"It's depressing how much there is," said Bill Dungan of Cary. "I can't fill enough bags to make a difference."

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## **BY THE NUMBERS**

70: Number of volunteers

3,500: Number of garbage bags filled

14: Tons of trash picked up, estimated

5: Hours spent on the effort

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