

Volunteers clean up waterway

Monthly efforts help North Fork

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Two at a time, volunteers boarded a dozen canoes and paddled along the New River on Saturday morning, stopping along the way to pick up tires, trash cans, stuffed animals and a sofa.

The 30 volunteers came out as part of the Adopt-a-Waterway's fifth anniversary celebration. The program was organized by Florida Atlantic University, Broward County, the South Florida Water Management District, the Sistrunk Historical Society and the Wildlife Research Team, according to John Rude, executive director of the Broward Urban River Trails, also a sponsor.

"It's looking very bad today," Rude said of the North Fork of the river.

For three hours, the teams paddled up and down the waterway and filled large garbage bags with trash that through the years has transformed the river's natural beauty near the Delevoe Park in Fort Lauderdale into a murky, junk-strewn body of water.

The urban waterway is about a 4-mile stretch of the 25-mile New River and the only part of the river remaining in its natural state, according to Rude.

"It's sad," said volunteer Somina Francillon, 23, an urban and regional planning student at FAU. "I don't think the people of this neighborhood know all that's in the river."

The Adopt-a-Waterway Program meets every other month to clean the North Fork, but some volunteers, such as Francillon's boyfriend, Jimmy Acci-

us, think it's not enough.

"From the streets, you don't think there's water and you don't see any trash," said Accius, 26, who volunteered for the first time on Saturday. "It's going to take more than just once a month to clean this up."

In the 1930s and 1940s, the North Fork was a recreational haven for African-Americans in Broward County, who often swam, boated and fished in the river, according to Burnadette Norris-Weeks, a member of the Sistrunk Historical Nature Preservation Society.

But from 1962 to 1983, the city of Fort Lauderdale pumped sewage into the river, leaving the neglected area plenty of clean-up work for the future. Groups like Adopt-a-Waterway have helped clean the river through their grassroots efforts, Rude said.

"It used to be the old mindset — what we put in the water the tide will take away," Rude said. "Now we're seeing that all the wildlife is returning and the river is responding, so we need to keep cleaning."

Rude added: "We see this as being a renaissance for this historic black neighborhood."

After the canoe cleanup, Christina Brito, 21, and Megan Campion, 19, sat on a boat ramp while white ibises, turkey vultures and herons flew nearby. "It shocked me that there was so much trash in the river," said Brito, a management and marketing student at FAU. "I'll definitely do this again."

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