

# Environmental Tips and Awareness for Highland Creek Residents (and why you should care!)

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The following information is intended to increase the awareness of residents in regards to storm water, water ecology, and proper disposal of yard waste. Disregard for these issues presents challenges we as a Homeowners Association must address. By minimizing these challenges we hope to minimize the resulting future cost to the association and ultimately its owners and residents must bear.

What is storm water? Storm water is rainwater that does not soak into the ground. Storm water runs off our streets, yards, nature trails, and other hard surfaces into storm water basins or into specific drainage areas as originally designed by the developer's engineers. Storm water, if not managed correctly, can create problems with water quality via pollution and silt and water quantity by excessive flooding.

At Highland Creek, over the past several years, we have been working diligently to improve our watershed areas. A watershed is the area of land that contributes water runoff to a lake, river, stream, wetland or pond. Having clean, non-polluted, water is not only our local government's responsibility, but also the **responsibility of our community** and every individual within that community.

Most people do not realize that the # 1 pollutant in North Carolina is sediment caused by erosion. Sediment comes from improper erosion control measures, illegal dumping and loss of soil in our fields, creeks and streams. Best Management Practices or BMP's, are installed and utilized to treat, slow and reduce storm water runoff. BMP's can be structural, vegetative, or management practices used to protect and improve our surface and groundwater.

Throughout the years Highland Creek was developed, each developer was required to submit storm water and drainage plans to the Counties for approval. The engineers developed plans to move water throughout the neighborhood in a systematic and natural manner. Many of the homes in the community have drainage areas behind which move water to larger streams and creeks. The water is cleaned naturally, in this process, before it makes it to our ponds and rivers.

Our present situation is a bit more challenging than we would like. We have many drainage areas clogged and choked by litter and debris. Over the years, homeowners have used the common open space behind their homes as an area to dump their pruning clippings, tree removals, leaves and unfortunately their trash. Many of our storm water drainage areas are clogged up with trash, leaves and debris. As a result the water is not moving and cleaning itself properly.

Recently, the HOA Board initiated a program to start cleaning and repairing our drainage areas. Crews were sent into some of our non-maintained common open spaces to inspect and clean out choked areas. We found many areas where the water was moving properly and naturally. Other areas though, were filled with trash, debris, pruning's from adjacent property owners, and leaves

up to 3' deep! We have found items such as **plays sets and an old lawn mower dumped in the stream bed**. The dumped items (even leaves and twigs) are damming up the waterways which can cause numerous other problems, including flooding your neighbors yards!

The Board's # 1 objective is to educate the homeowners of our community as to why dumping litter and debris in the common open spaces is bad for the watershed and the environment. Chiefly, our top priority is clean water that flows and cleans itself naturally. Second, there are safety and liability concerns that should not be ignored. **Finally, there is a sizable cost for these areas to be cleaned** out that has to be borne by the HOA and ultimately the owners and residents of the community.

Many of these issues could easily be avoided with some good common sense approaches by our homeowners.

- 1. Do not dump anything in the common open spaces at Highland Creek**
- 2. Do not blow or dump leaves into the common open spaces.**
- 3. Pick up leaves and trash that might wash into catch basins, which will wash downstream.**
- 4. Control any sediment that might run into a catch basin or waterway.**
- 5. Treat our streams and ponds with respect and keep them clean**
- 6. Report anyone you see violating our policies to the Hawthorne Management Company.**

Here is a snippet from the **City of Charlotte's** guide lines for yard waste which can also be found on their website; <http://chameck.org/CITY/CHARLOTTE/SWS/CURBIT/YARDWASTE/Pages/Home.aspx>

### **Brush**

- Brush should be no longer than 5 feet in length.
- Separate brush into piles that are small enough for one individual to handle.

### **Grass clippings**

- Grass clippings must be placed in tied or untied plastic bags for collection or placed in uncovered containers less than 32 gallons.
- Containers or plastic bags should not weigh more than 75 pounds each.
- Grass clippings can be mixed with other yard waste such as leaves and trimmings.

### **Leaves**

- Leaves must be placed in untied plastic bags for collection or placed in uncovered trash cans.

### **Limbs**

- Limbs must be no longer than 5 feet in length and no larger than 4 inches in diameter.
- Limbs should be separated in piles small enough for one individual to handle.
- Limbs should not be tied.

### **Logs**

- Logs must be under 4 inches in diameter
- Stumps will not be collected.

The HOA Board is taking clean water in our community very seriously. We are working on better watershed programs to improve our overall water quality for the betterment of all of our residents. Our initial plan of actions includes:

- Education of Residents through e-notes, newsletters and mailers.
- Remediation and repair of challenge areas by HOA and proven violators.
- Look for and educate violators
- Fines for repeat offenders

Below are some examples of issues our crew came upon in the winter of 2012-2013.

