



Clean Land, Safe Water, Healthy Lives



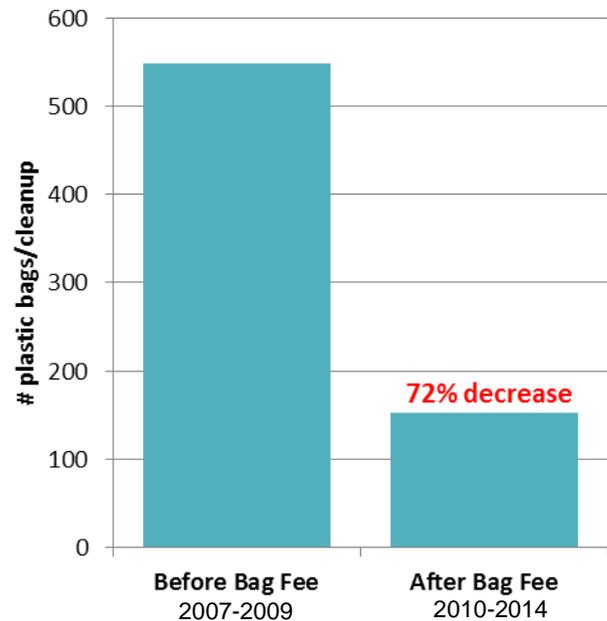
Bag Fees at Work: An Analysis of Reductions in Plastic Bags from Potomac River Watershed Cleanups 2007-2014

On January 1, 2010 the region's first five cent bag fee on single-use bags took effect in the District of Columbia. This bag fee affected both paper and plastic single-use bags used at businesses that sell food, such as grocery stores, convenience stores, and take-out. It was created to incentivize consumers to bring reusable bags and to reduce the number of bags that are littered. Not only did the Alice Ferguson Foundation (AFF) see a measurable reduction in the number of littered plastic bags found at cleanups in the District, it saw a 72% reduction based on what volunteers remove at cleanups.

For the last 27 years AFF has organized the [Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup](#) in collaboration with hundreds of partners throughout the region. Since its inception, 150,000 volunteers have removed more than 7 million pounds of litter from Potomac Watershed neighborhoods, parks, and waterways. Since 2007 AFF has asked volunteer site leaders to estimate the number of plastic bags removed during their cleanup.

The volunteer collected data provides important insight into the number of bags being found, but should be taken in context. They are estimates provided by volunteer site leaders, not exact numbers. There are also many environmental considerations that influence how many plastic bags are found at cleanups. For instance, an earlier spring means it can be harder to find and remove plastic bags tangled in vegetation. Heavy rains and snow melt carry plastic bags into storm drains, out into local streams, and ultimately to the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay. This can cause plastic bags to either be washed further downstream, out of DC, or if it is a dry year, cause the plastic bags to remain in our neighborhoods where there are less cleanups than found along streams in the District. Finally, the number of sites participating in AFF's Cleanup

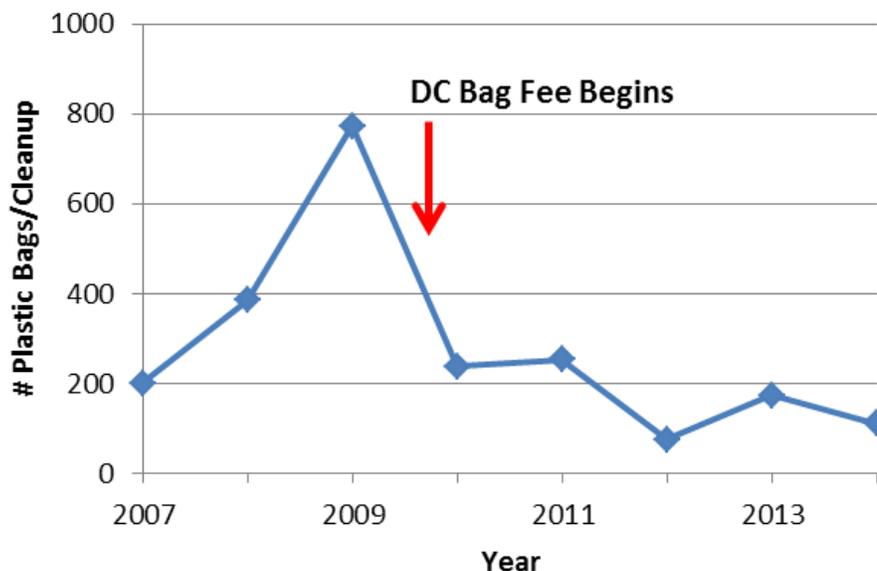
Plastic Bag Litter in DC Removed at Cleanups



has more than doubled since data on plastic bags started to be collected in 2007. A 72% reduction in the number of plastic bags is observed when averaging the total number of plastic bags by the number of cleanup sites.

Despite these factors, AFF’s volunteer data from the Potomac River Watershed Cleanup is the longest running and most comprehensive information on how the D.C. bag law has impacted plastic bag pollution. This data clearly shows a drastic reduction in the number of plastic bags found and removed at cleanups, and is evidence that the five cent bag fee is an effective tool for changing behavior and for having a real impact on the amount of litter found in the District of Columbia. For these reasons AFF’s **Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative** works to get bags fees and other similar policies in place to help change behavior and practices to see a lasting reduction in litter in the Potomac Watershed. To learn more about the Trash Initiative, please visit TrashFreePotomac.org.

**Number of Plastic Bags Per Cleanup
in the District of Columbia**



	Before Bag Fee 2007-2009	After Bag Fee 2010-2014
Total number of plastic bags removed	23,556	23,247
Number plastic bags removed per year	7,852	4,649
Number of cleanup sites reporting	43	152
Number of plastic bags removed per cleanup site	548	153
% Change a. Overall		- 41%
b. Averaged by number of cleanup sites reporting		- 72%