

Fishing line recycle bins help reduce injuries to wildlife

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BY NATE THOMPSON

nthompson@grandhaventribune.com

At first thought, unused fishing line wouldn't seem like a potential danger to a number of different species of wildlife in the area.

Fishermen and other nature lovers should take a second thought, according to Grand Haven's Pamm Tarchinski.

Tarchinski, a member of the local wildlife preservation group Defenders of Urban Wildlife, said discarded plastic monofilament can pose a serious threat to water fowl, sea gulls and certain kinds of fish that venture close to West Michigan shorelines.

"Most people don't realize the serious problem it poses," she said. "It's the No. 1 case of injury to aquatic animals that frequent the shoreline.



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"In most cases, it's completely invisible to wildlife and it can easily wrap around their ankle. When that happens, these birds think it's a trap, they yank away, and it causes an instant injury. It can also wrap around their feet and cause cuts. For mallards or geese, their feet act as their breaks every time they land on the water, and it's hard to repair those injuries."

Worse yet, if birds ingest the line, it can prevent them from feeding or it can tangle their beaks, eventually causing death.

When Tarchinski noticed a number of used strands of line near a pond near her home, she began to wonder if injured wildlife was a serious problem in her own backyard, and what could be done to prevent the issue.

After some research on the Internet, Tarchinski found her answers: Yes, it was a serious problem in several states — especially in coastal states such as Florida, where it affected dolphin, manatee and even sea otters — and many communities have turned to recycling bins to avert the issue.

The bins are simple to construct. Simply made of PVC piping and connected onto any standard post by thread adapters and plugs, the bins have begun multiplying in rapid numbers.

"There's hundreds, probably even close to a thousand of them around Florida," Tarchinski said.

Florida's state Web site offers step-by-step instructions on how to build the recycling tubes, how to print signs informing anglers its use, and how to get connected to line-recycling companies. The state of Maryland quickly followed suit, as it located funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Foundation and bought 52 recycling tubes and posted them in 26 state parks.

Tarchinski hopes Michigan and its Department of Natural Resources joins in the movement. Defenders of Urban Wildlife got the ball rolling, as it spent \$75 on a bin purchased from Florida that they hoped they could install in either Grand Haven or Spring Lake.

At last month's Spring Lake Village meeting, members of the group discussed the potential danger to wildlife and their proposed solution. The council approved the installation of the bin at Mill Point Park this week.

"It never really dawned on me on the potential problem until I took a walk near Mill Point and noticed how much fishing string was tossed down," Spring Lake Village President Bill Filber said. "It's a great idea that people in our community are making an effort to recycle it."

Tarchinski and the Defenders of Urban Wildlife hope to raise \$600 more to construct at least a dozen more of the bins, which they hope will pop up at popular fishing spots such as Grand Haven's Harbor Island and south pier. Filber said he'd eventually like to see at least three other bins placed around Spring Lake as well.

Tarchinski said Cindy Fricano and Sue Rhem of Defenders of Urban Wildlife have volunteered to empty the bin and monitor any cases of vandalism at Mill Point Park. The bins will likely be removed during the winter to reduce any long-term wear and tear.

"With the bins in Florida, they've reported that they haven't had many problems with trash or vandalism," Tarchinski said. "Volunteers visit them at least every 12 days, and that seems to work."

Once the line is collected, it will be mailed in prepaid cardboard shipping boxes to a fishing products manufacturing company in Idaho, which recycles the line into various products free of charge.

"We feel it's a great way to encourage people to clean up the environment," Tarchinski said.