

Summit County Citizens Voice

[Summit County: A dirty little secret](#)

Posted on October 29, 2011 by Bob Berwyn

Opinion: Let's show more respect to the land that gives so much



It's unbelievable to me that people can treat a place like this with so little respect.

By Bob Berwyn

SUMMIT COUNTY — Many mornings in the past couple of years I've headed down to my favorite spot along the shore of Dillon Reservoir early in the morning, right after dropping my son off at school. It's not far — less than a mile from our house in Frisco — the dogs can run safely and the views are great. I always come back with a good photo or three and I've shared many of them with Summit Voice readers. [Click here](#) to see the photos from Friday morning.



A red-shafted flicker died after entangling itself in a stray piece of fishing line.

The thing that I haven't shared in photos or words about this place is really a dirty little secret. That stretch of shoreline that produces so many good photos is essentially an open-air dump. In the past couple of months, I've hauled away several over-sized bags of garbage, including countless fast food wrappers and bags, old clothes, discarded cans and bottles, makeshift camping gear and, sadly, probably a few hundred feet of fishing line, often with hooks, lures and lead weights still attached.

I usually don't mess with the human waste that's piled up in the aspen groves and pine stands, but I do pick up after our dogs.

I headed down there again Friday morning, eager to take pictures of the mists hanging over the water. After a few minutes of shooting pictures, I noticed that one of the dogs was trying to chew on a dead bird. I shooed him away and saw that the bird had a tangle of fishing line wrapped around its wing. The other end of the line was snagged on a log.

It didn't look like the red-shafted flicker had swallowed the hook or anything like that. That wouldn't be a normal source of food for a member of the woodpecker family, anyway. They eat bugs like mountain pine beetles and we need all the allies we can find in that battle. It looked like the poor bird simply got snagged and then perhaps succumbed to the cold weather at ground level when it couldn't find shelter in a thick clump of branches.

I realize that this happens all the time. Birds fly into windmills and they get hit by cars and sucked into jet engine intakes, but it's still frustrating when it's so avoidable, and especially after having picked up so much discarded fishing line along that shoreline.

The image of the tangled bird stayed with me all day, especially while doing some particularly mindless work in the afternoon, when I started to think about the bigger picture of that littered beach.

I realized first and foremost that this is a personal behavior issue. Each of us is fully responsible for our own actions, and there's simply no excuse for leaving your trash, or taking a dump in the woods within 20 feet of Denver's water supply.

But there are some other factors at play. I've talked to several people during the last couple of years who said they used to fish over at the Heaton Bay day use area, less than a mile away. But several years ago, the U.S. Forest Service gave the concessionaire who operates Heaton Bay campground the authority to charge day use fees, with the reasoning that it would give the company, Thousand Trails, an incentive to maintain the facilities at the day-use area.

Based on casual but consistent observations of the general area, it seems clear that, since the day-use fees were imposed, the adjacent beaches, where there is no charge, have become busier. Of course, there are no sanitary facilities at the free beaches.

There's a chance that the free beaches are simply busier because of more visitors to the county in general, but it seems more likely to me that the economy could be a factor. Everybody's trying to save a few bucks wherever they can these days, and not many people are willing to spend \$5 or \$10 just to go fishing for a few hours.

I can't help but wonder whether this type of impact was discussed, evaluated or disclosed when the Forest Service decided to start letting their private concessionaires charge for day-use. I understand that sanitation can be an issue even in areas that are managed directly by the Forest Service, as was the case at Green Mountain Reservoir a few years ago, but I guess I'm still just bothered by the fact that the agency was so cavalier about taking an area that was a popular lunch picnicking spot for locals and trying to turn it into a revenue center.

I'm not blaming the Forest Service for the litter at the little Frisco beaches. As I said before, we're all responsible for our actions, and the situation won't change until the casual angling community starts to police itself.

But there's definitely a chance that the unintended consequences of charging for day use contribute to resource pressure on adjacent lands, and that should be part of the calculations as the Forest Service, and other land managers, try to figure how they will manage recreation and other land uses during tough budget times.

In the meantime, let's help them out and clean up after ourselves.