

Valley Angler

How Green Are We?

By Bill Thompson

I had one of those “NPR Moments” the other day. NPR is of course National Public Radio and is without doubt one of the best news sources available. Every so often they cover some little event that never seems to find its way into the national media. The “Moment” that caught my attention was a piece on China banning free plastic bags.

As of June 1st cheap plastic bags will be banned from all shops and super markets in China. Instead customers will be charged for a sturdier bag when they check out. Consumers are being urged to carry home their purchases in reusable cloth bags. Companies who break the new law face fines and forfeiture of goods.

The Chinese use up to three billion plastic shopping bags a day. The ban will result in huge savings in oil consumption and cut down on litter. China is not alone on this stand and in fact Uganda and South Africa have already done so. The country of Bangladesh banned plastic bags four years ago when they discovered that the things were clogging drains and contributing to flooding.

The Sierra Club estimates that the United States, by comparison with less than one quarter of the population of China, uses almost 100 billion plastic bags each year. The Sierra Club estimated that if every one of New York’s eight million residents used one less grocery bag per year it would reduce waste by about 5 million pounds.

In the United States last year San Francisco banned non-recyclable plastic bags made from petroleum. A small town in Manitoba, Leaf Rapids, also banned plastic bags. Ireland and Taiwan have placed taxes on the bags in order to discourage use.

Would the town fathers of Conway be so bold to enact similar regulations in our fair valley?

For over a year, ending with last week’s primary, we have been listening to presidential hopefuls from both parties. I don’t recall, in all the rhetoric, any specific ideas from any of the candidates on making improvements in the environment or reducing oil consumption. Lets face it any effort to pass legislation banning plastic bags would be met with howls from the bag industry and no politician wants to anger a potential donor.

The other evening as I walked into one of the supermarkets in town a woman was walking out pushing her shopping cart. All of her purchases were neatly placed in cloth bags. I vowed on the spot that I would make a personal effort to make the change to reusable cloth bags. When I mentioned this to Jan she readily agreed, of course now all we have to do is remember to bring the bags with us the next time we go food shopping. In addition we will discontinue the use plastic bags at the North Country Angler.

If you are a fisherman and you are still reading this there is a point here. As an angler how green are you?

A couple of years ago I went to New York's Salmon River to fish for steelhead. A friend advised that I should carry a large sharp hunting knife in my vest. I inquired if this was for defense from bears? He said no it was to cut yourself from discarded monofilament left along the river. He wasn't kidding. Although I never had to use the knife the amount of tangled mono in the trees and along the stream was disgusting.

How many times do we anglers come across empty worm containers and leader packages left along the stream? I fished, what I thought was a fairly remote part of the Ellis last fall and was amazed at the number of discarded worm boxes. I picked them up naturally but what possesses the fools that leave them to behave so badly.

The state of New Hampshire has banned the use of lead sinkers, but I wager that there are still quite a few out there still using them and will continue until the last one is lost. Even if you have stopped using them how many took the time to properly dispose of them?

I know that these are small things, but in the long run it all mounts up. I seriously doubt that our politicians have the back bone to take the initiative to really do much about reducing oil consumption. Next time you pick up a bottled water take a good look at the label. New Hampshire is the only state in New England without a bottle bill. Think about how much oil could be saved if plastic bottles were banned. It is a lot easier to ban plastic bags in a dictatorship than it is in a democracy. Please be assured that I am not advocating we change our form of government. The fact the initiative will have to come from us. If we refuse to carry home our groceries in plastic bags or get our water from the tap rather than purchase a fancy bottled water of dubious value, we can make a difference. Maybe we could partition our town fathers to ban plastic bags or use bio fuels in town plows or stop building mountains of snow infused with salt and oil next to our Saco River. One thing for certain, no matter how many times they use the word you can bet your bottom dollar that no matter who gets elected next November change will have to come from us.

See you on the river.