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EBMUD conducts extensive illegal trash dumping cleanup near Upper San Leandro Reservoir

By Vera Kochan



A crane stands at the edge of the ravine while pulling up tons of trash from the watershed.

Photo Vera Kochan

When it comes to the fairly remote area of Canyon, the drive from Moraga to Oakland via Pinehurst Road sports some amazing views of Upper San Leandro Reservoir. There are even a few turnouts for people to pull over and enjoy the beauty of nature. However, for years some nefarious individuals have taken advantage of the secluded surroundings and steep valleys to turn the area into an illegal dumping ground.

The East Bay Municipal Utility District, which owns the land in question, has spent more than \$280,000 since July 2021 to clean up the trash along the East Bay watershed which eventually runs into the USLR. According to an EBMUD press release, "Cleaning trash is costly and dangerous. Rate payer dollars that should go toward water service are instead spent on cleaning garbage. Crews who clean these sites risk their safety to reach the trash that falls down the steep embankments."

EBMUD points out that garbage on the watershed - an area of land that drains or 'sheds' water into a specific water body - can have a negative impact on the quality of drinking water as well as the environment. The trash can release various types of hazardous materials into the water and land thereby killing fish, birds and other animals, in addition to damaging trees, native grasses and other natural East Bay features.

"It takes several months to coordinate this type of project," EBMUD Public Information Representative Nelsy Rodriguez explained. "There's the danger of fire threat, and we have to coordinate with the East Bay Regional Park District's rangers, who are already short on personnel."

A cleanup in July yielded eight vehicles which were discovered in one section of the watershed. The most recent Aug. 16 cleanup, in another section, exposed an additional three vehicles, one of which was determined by crews to have been a blue Volkswagen Karmann Ghia built between 1955-1975. The Karmann Ghia was pulled up from the depths nearly hidden by trees using tow truck cables, arriving to the top in two pieces, with one section having a tree growing out of the wreckage.

EBMUD estimates that this month's cleanup will produce more than 10 tons (20,000 pounds) of trash that will be pulled up in nets by a crane from 12 dump sites on watershed land. Anything from mattresses to construction debris, a bag full of firearms and old furniture has been uncovered. "The rangers always patrol the watersheds looking for dump sites," said Rodriguez. "If they find vehicles, we call in law enforcement to investigate in case there's a body inside or the vehicle was involved in criminal activity or stolen. We've put up signs and fences to dissuade people from dumping, and we're looking into putting up barricades down the hills to catch the garbage before it reaches the watersheds. If we can prevent this [the dumping], it would be ideal."

Rodriguez asks homeowners to hire a reputable disposal company that will go through the proper channels to dispose of junk. "Pay the company half of what you owe them, and give them the second half when they come back with a receipt."

EBMUD Senior Public Information Representative Andrea Pook asks citizens to "report illegal dumping and any identifying information to local law enforcement non-emergency [number]. In Contra Costa County report at 1-800-No-Dumping or (925) 646-2441. In Alameda County report at (510) 670-5480 or by using the Mobile Citizen app."

Pook added, "Lamorinda residents are some of the biggest users of this road, so we're hoping they spot dumping and report it."

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