# Scoop the Poop to Keep Nature Healthy and Beautiful

Many people escape to local forest preserves to enjoy nearby nature. What they don’t come for is the dog poop scattered along the trails.

Unfortunately, some people do not clean up after their pets and leave dog poop in parks and preserves. If you’ve come to appreciate the natural open space, poop on or nearby the trail does little to enhance your experience. Rather, dog poop may take away from your enjoyment of the outdoors if you have to watch where you step.

Pet waste left by dog owners in preserves and other natural places is gross and irresponsible. What’s bizarre is that sometimes dog walkers in preserves will bag their dog’s waste but then throw it into the preserve instead of into a trash can. Park rangers have even found used pet waste bags caught in trees, hanging from branches like ornaments!

Dog poop is not a natural part of the forest preserve. It's not the same as wildlife feces and doesn’t just decompose. In fact, the bacteria and nutrients in pet waste impact the health of the preserve and nearby streams. Did you know that a single gram of dog poop can contain 23 million bacteria? None of that bacteria belongs in our parks and streams.

Also, leaving pet waste on the ground may even pose a risk to our health. Children and adults recreating in your neighborhood, park, or preserve can be exposed to bacteria and parasites found in pet waste. Children playing outside are most at risk for infection.

To sum it up, pet waste spoils other’s enjoyment of the outdoors, pollutes the preserve, and can be a public health hazard.

If you are a dog owner, pick up your pet’s waste every time, everywhere. This sounds simple enough, but from the scattering of pet waste we see along trails, it’s a message worth spreading. When walking your dog around the neighborhood or in a forest preserve, come prepared with bags and always throw the waste into a garbage bin.

**Pick Up Your Pet’s Waste Every Time, Everywhere**

* Make remembering a bag easy! Keep bags by the door, in your car, or attach them to the leash.
* Always throw out used bags into a trash can.
* Note which parks and preserves have courtesy bags for pet waste. Consider asking your town to install a pet waste station at places where you enjoy walking your dog.

Dog owner or not, we are all responsible as trail users and community members to keep local natural places healthy and enjoyable for all. Littering our preserves with dog poop (or anything else!) won’t do if we want to maintain our parks and preserves in the best condition.

*The Conservation Foundation staffs four watershed groups that work to improve the health of rivers and streams. The Lower DuPage River Watershed Coalition and Lower Des Plaines Watershed Group launched a campaign to encourage pet owners to scoop the poop to protect clean water in rivers and streams. Thanks for your help in making our local waterways clean and healthy!*