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# THE TIDINGS

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*"The Tidings" is a publication of the Lake Merritt Institute, and is neither funded by, nor does it represent the opinions of the City of Oakland.*



*4/16/26 – Thank you Redwood Day students!*

## Earth Month at Lake Merritt

*By Thoey Bou*

This April 2026, our community came together in a big way for Earth Month at Lake Merritt Institute. Together, more than 300 volunteers helped remove a record-breaking **9,870 gallons of trash** from the shoreline and water of Lake Merritt, the highest monthly total of the year so far.

We are incredibly grateful to every individual volunteer who showed up to protect and care for the Lake, along with the amazing groups who joined us throughout the month:

Hillcrest MS, Bishop O'Dowd HS, Achieve HS, Redwood Day, AVA Community Energy, Saint Leo, Cal ASRB, RWE, Alameda County IT & A-Team.

For the full article of *The Tidings* in color, visit <https://lakemerrittinstitute.org/tidings>

# EARTH DAY EVERY DAY

THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!



LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE  
- APRIL 2026 -  
9,870 GALLONS OF TRASH REMOVED  
317 VOLUNTEERS

Earth Month may be over, but the work continues year-round at LMI. Your support helps provide cleanup supplies, environmental education, and ongoing stewardship for Lake Merritt. Please consider making a **donation** at [www.LakeMerrittInstitute.org](http://www.LakeMerrittInstitute.org) to help keep Earth Month going all year long.

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# Spoons in the Lake, Spoons on the Brain

By Kathleen Nay

Last weekend, I volunteered at Lake Merritt. I didn't find anything particularly unusual. Mostly, the *accoutrements* of meals eaten on the go: chip bags, bottle caps, takeout containers. Oh, and plastic spoons.

Have you heard the news about plastic spoons? Turns out there are so many small, fragmented, even microscopic pieces of plastic in our environment that they've been accumulating in our bodies and *brains*. In a 2025 study published in *Nature Medicine*, scientists at the University of New Mexico found that in the last eight years, the rate of microplastic bioaccumulation in humans' livers, kidneys, and brains has risen by 50%. Brains in particular have absorbed enough plastic to match the weight of a *plastic spoon*.

It's worrisome news, and has introduced new questions about microplastics' downstream effects on human fertility, cancer rates, and neurological diseases. How does it get inside us in the first place?

Think back to your high school biology lessons on the food chain. (Or, if you're a middle schooler who has volunteered with LMI, think *forward* to your high school biology lessons!) At the deepest part of the ocean, marine snow drifts toward the sea floor. (When seen by the light of a deep-sea submersible, the cascade resembles a gentle snowfall.) This shower is food for bottom-dwellers, which in turn feed every creature in the chain above them. Much of the marine snow belongs there: bits of plankton, zooplankton, bacteria, and other organic debris.

But increasingly, much of it doesn't. Contaminants, heavy metals, and yes, plastics, all end up in the same ocean food chain — all of which starts somewhere on land. We tend to think of plastics as an ocean problem, but what about the food chains closer to home? Given how much plastic collects in our own Lake Merritt (which drains into the ocean via the San Francisco Bay), why wouldn't we also find it in rivers, ground water... land animals... livestock? Is it really any wonder that plastics also accumulate inside of us?

As we clean up the lake each week, it feels cathartic (and even a little self-righteous) to complain about nameless neighbors littering. But maybe it's worth considering that the ubiquity of plastic in our modern environment is also a culprit. On a societal level, we produce and consume a whole lot of plastic. From that perspective, corporate and regulatory responsibility are every bit as important as personal responsibility.



*1/8/26 food containers, plates, cups, and utensils floating in the water at Lake Merritt before LMI volunteers cleaned the area using nets.*

While challenging, systemic problems can be tackled with systemic solutions. The actions we take as individuals — like choosing a reusable water bottle, making food at home, or cleaning up trash in our neighborhoods — are part of the equation, but they don't address the system producing all this plastic in the first place. That's why we also need to look at actions we can take together.

Next month, we'll pick up the conversation with some of the solutions: from initiatives at a global scale, to science and policy happening right here in California. In the meantime, you might want to rethink your takeout — or at least, skip the plastic-wrapped plastic utensils. You have silverware at home.

*This article was inspired by [Saving Our Seas \(SOS\): Compounding Catastrophe, Parts 1 & 2](#), a 2025 video docuseries produced by the Monterey Bay Aquarium and KTLA. You can read about the UNM study here: [Brain tissue may contain higher amounts of microplastics than other organs: Study - ABC News \(link\)](#).*

## EVENTS AT LAKE MERRITT



### SPRING PUBLIC CLEANUPS

Join **Lake Merritt Institute** volunteers and honor our beautiful city with a lake cleanup.

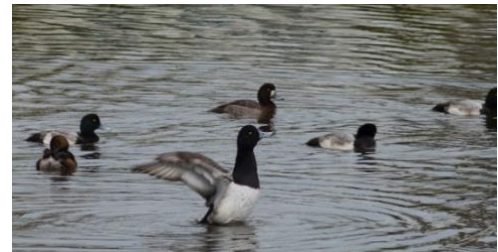
Register online at: [lakemerrittinstitute.org](http://lakemerrittinstitute.org)



### Bird Walks at the Lake

Join Hilary Powers any fourth Wednesday of the month for a bird walk at the lake.

Register at [goldengatebirdalliance.org](http://goldengatebirdalliance.org)



## THANK YOU TO OUR EARTH MONTH SPONSORS!



*Are you a local business or organization interested in partnering with us to support Oakland's Crown Jewel? Ask us about sponsorship opportunities in 2026 at [info@lakemerrittinstitute.org](mailto:info@lakemerrittinstitute.org)*

For questions and comments please email us at [info@lakemerrittinstitute.org](mailto:info@lakemerrittinstitute.org).

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