

The High 5 Initiative

FY24 Report

The High 5 Initiative, Inc. is a locally based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to practicing, promoting, and enabling the conservation of nature through sustainable practices. We believe in our collective ability as a species to not only identify but solve the biggest problems facing our planet today.



Public Education and Outreach

The High 5 Initiative employs diverse strategies to engage the community and foster responsible care of our local watersheds. We promote optimal practices that include minimizing resource consumption, reimagining waste management, fostering community involvement, and igniting inspiration. Our informational brochures, distributed during cleanup events, the Cecil County Wade-In, the St. Mary's Garden Market, the Unicorn Quest and the Port Deposit Pirate Takeover, encapsulate a wealth of knowledge. Furthermore, these materials direct individuals to our website for additional insights.

Our website features an extensive array of actionable steps, outlined on the "At Home Tips" page, that empower everyone to curtail pollution impacting our rivers. Active across Facebook and Instagram, the High 5 Initiative leverages these platforms to extend our message to individuals who might not have in-person interactions with us.

Our commitment to spreading awareness has led us to collaborate with various partners who have significantly amplified the reach of our educational and outreach endeavors.

<u>Awareness Campaign</u>	<u>Total Reach</u>
High 5 Website	2,261
High 5 Facebook	43,400
High 5 Instagram	4,800
Social Tags/Mentions	76,184
Cecil Whig	16,000
Unicorn Quest	2,500
Port Deposit Pirate Takeover	3,500
St. Mary Anne's Garden Market	5,300
Cecil County Wade-In	220
High 5 Cleanups	203
Total	154,368

Public Involvement and Participation

The High 5 Initiative meticulously arranges community cleanup events across several critical watersheds in Cecil County: The Northeast River, Octoraro Creek, Lower Susquehanna River, and Lower Elk River. Each of these locations yields a distinct array of litter. Throughout these cleanups, we engage participants in conversations about the origins of this "trash" and brainstorm preventive measures. Our findings reveal that litter results from various sources, including illegal dumping, discarding from vehicles, remnants left by recreational river users, and debris brought in by the tides.



Between July 2023 and June 2024, the TH5I successfully conducted six planned cleanups and one additional cleanup effort. An incredible 203 volunteers contributed their efforts to the cause, with 57 of them being under the age of 18. Many of these individuals have been coming back for years and letting others know about our events too. Most of these dedicated volunteers are from the local area, embodying the spirit of community involvement and environmental stewardship.

These community cleanup events collectively resulted in the removal of an amazing 7,690 pounds of trash from a span of 15 miles of Cecil County Rivers and their tributaries over the course of the year. Notably, the weights included the removal and proper disposal of 40 illegally dumped tires, which is less than the 54 tires from FY23.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event Name</u>	<u>Body of Water</u>	<u>Miles</u>	<u># of Volunteers</u>	<u># Under 18</u>	<u>lbs of Trash</u>	<u>Tire Count</u>
7/4/2023	Independence Day Cleanup	North East River	2	19	6	200	0
9/9/2023	End of Summer Cleanup	North East River	2	9	2	300	1
10/7/2023	Cecil Cares Cleanup	Susquehanna River	3	24	5	1460	24
3/1/2024	Adopt-A-Road	Rock Run	1	4	0	700	0
4/20/2024	Earth Day Kayak Cleanup	North East & Stoney Run	2	60	15	1550	7
5/11/2024	Northern Map Turtle Cleanup	Susquehanna River	3	61	21	3180	6
6/1/2024	National Trail Day Cleanup	Elk River	2	26	8	300	2
Totals			15	203	57	7690	40

This year, our volunteer count increased by 21. Our outreach efforts with local scout groups continue to yield awesome results, with youth participation currently at an all-time high. Moreover, our measurements tell the story of the positive environmental impacts that result from our work. The most obvious improvement is the dramatic decrease in illegal dumping, particularly along Rte. 222 near the Susquehanna. Since starting our biannual cleanups of the area in 2020 we have focused on clearing the area's multiple illegal roadside dumping sites in addition to our normal riparian and shoreline efforts. Consistently keeping the area clear deters further dumping, as preexisting trash often encourages more littering, such as leaving furniture and tires by the roadside. For the first time since 2020, we did not find any illegally dumped furniture this year. Additionally, the tire count has also went down, but show there is still work to be done on the proper disposal of them. However, the total amount of trash collected this year went up by over 600 pounds, indicating room for improvement in preventing littering, especially along the roadways.





After every cleanup, we are amazed at all the smiles after a day in the ditches. The community generally wants to help, and we are very honored to be able to provide this path.

In addition to these efforts, The High 5 Initiative is involved in many other things to help protect our local watersheds and ultimately, the Chesapeake Bay. TH5I does monthly water testing where Rock Run meets the Susquehanna River and submits the results to the Chesapeake Monitoring Cooperative. While educating the community at the St. Mary's Garden Market, we were able to get 500 native perennials into the hands of the attendees to help local pollinators and reduce stormwater runoff again this year. The High 5 Initiative is on the planning committee for a couple large events in the county that thousands of community members attend where we encourage environmentally friendly practices and help with the post cleanup. The High 5 Initiative helped with the painting of a mural at the Rice Tot Lot and Dog Park in Port Deposit promoting beautification of outdoor public spaces.

We are thankful for the relationships we have built and the support we have received. Thank you.