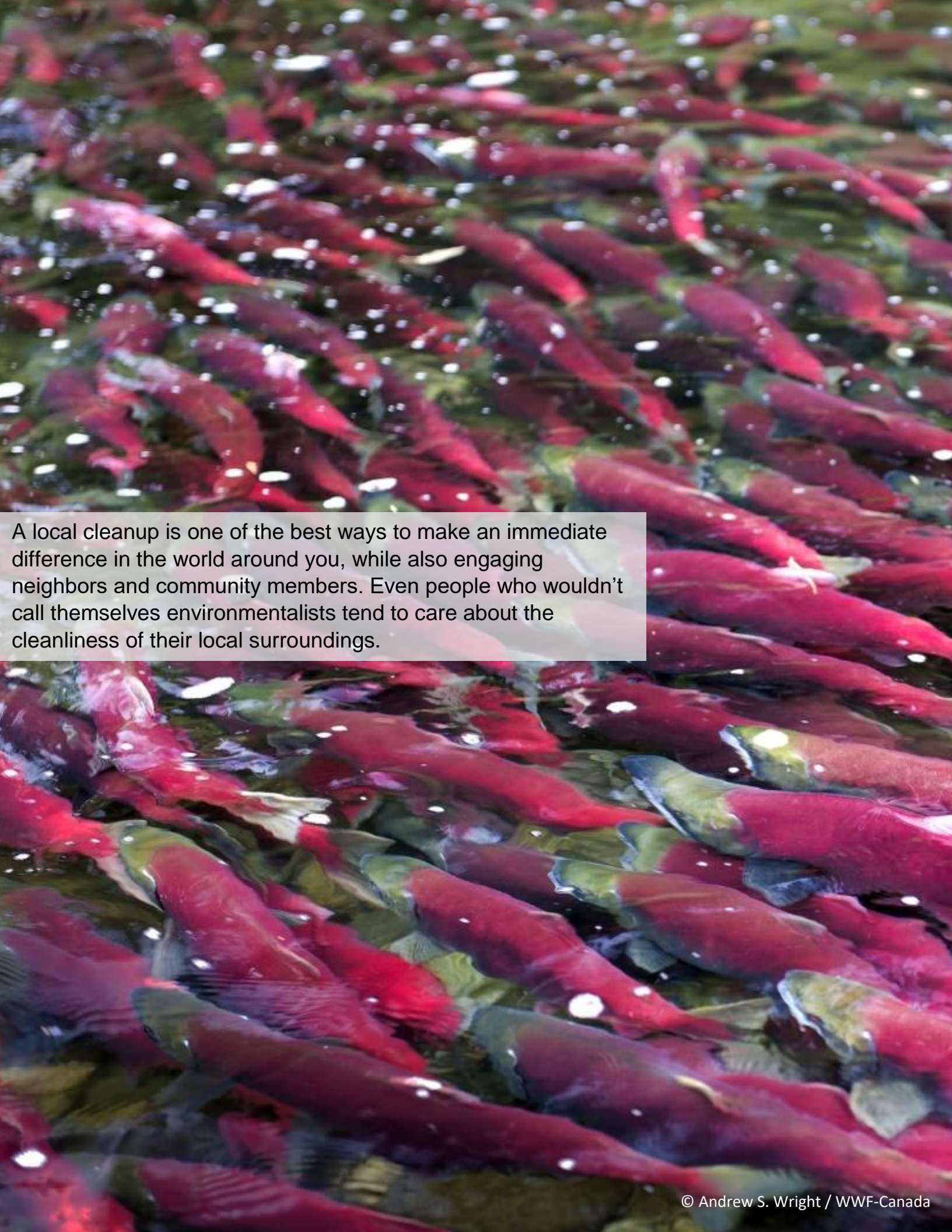




How to

ORGANIZE A CLEANUP

Panda Ambassadors



A local cleanup is one of the best ways to make an immediate difference in the world around you, while also engaging neighbors and community members. Even people who wouldn't call themselves environmentalists tend to care about the cleanliness of their local surroundings.

Step 1. Choose the right spot and the right date

Cleanups anywhere are beneficial to the environment, but the ideal spot will come with additional benefits. Consider these:

- **Areas near rivers, streams, and oceans.** If you're concerned about trash and plastic in the waterways, pick a site close to riverbanks or shorelines and keep the trash from getting into the water in the first place.
- **Neighborhoods, schools, and other community sites.** If you want to engage a specific set of people, choose a site with meaning for that community. This can be a place where people live, go to school, or work.
- **Places that are safe.** Choose a cleanup site that's safe for people to wander around in. Avoid industrial sites or areas near highways and interstates unless you're working with a professional crew. You'll also want to stay off private property unless you obtain written permission beforehand.

Choose a date far enough in advance to give you plenty of time to get the word out. If this is your first cleanup, pick a date that's at least a month out. Figure out who is most likely to attend your cleanup and pick a day that will work well for them. For college students, an afternoon during the week might be best. For working professionals, you'll want to stick to weekends.

Step 2. Contact the appropriate authorities

Your chosen cleanup site probably falls under someone's jurisdiction, and you'll want to let them know ahead of time that you are organizing a cleanup so you can obtain any permissions or permits required. It could be the local parks department, a neighborhood association, or a school board. If you're stumped about who to call, contact your local city council member or area representative; they should be able to help you find the right authorities.

Even if your clean up is on public land, it's a good idea to give the people in charge a heads up. They can let you know about any conflicting events that might interfere, and whether there are dumpsters you can use. They might even be able to help promote the event.

Step 3. Come up with a plan

Rain or shine

Decide in advance what you will do in case of bad weather.

Supplies

At a bare minimum you'll need industrial strength trash bags and gloves. Will you be supplying these or asking volunteers to bring their own? If you're short on cash, you can always call local businesses and ask them to sponsor your cleanup (\$100 is enough for around 30 pairs of leather gloves and 100 industrial strength trash bags at a chain hardware store). You may also want to provide trash grippers or pickers and rain ponchos.

Trash

What will you do with all that trash? Never just leave full sacks of trash at your cleanup site, and never use any dumpster you don't have explicit permission to use. If there aren't trash facilities close by that you can use, you'll have to arrange transportation to the dump. Time to call your friend with a pickup truck! You can also hire someone to dispose of the trash for you. Get quotes before you advertise your event, to make sure it's within your budget.

Hazardous materials

Know what to do in case you encounter hazardous materials or dead animals. Don't try to dispose of needles or other hazardous materials on your own. Instead, report these to the proper authorities. Do some research ahead of time so you have the right numbers to call on the day of the cleanup.

Step 4. Advertise your event

Get the word out as far and wide as possible! Getting people to show up is the most difficult part of the project. Assume that your actual turnout will be about 50% of those who RSVP. Make sure you have at least two or three dedicated friends who are guaranteed to help you out on the day of. Even if you end up with a small group, you can still make a difference.

Advertising checklist

- ✓ Create a Facebook event.
- ✓ Contact local environmental and civic groups and ask them to share the event.
- ✓ Contact local newspapers and ask them to add the event to their calendars.
- ✓ Create fliers and post them on community/campus notice boards.
- ✓ Contact local sports leagues, membership associations, and clubs to see if their members would like to help out.
- ✓ Post your event to community listservs and forums such as Nextdoor.
- ✓ Contact local businesses and ask them to share the event with their employees.

Step 5. Make it fun!

There are lots of ways to make a cleanup feel like a fun day outside instead of a chore.

- **Snacks.** Coffee and donuts are a must for early morning cleanups.
- **Music.** A Bluetooth speaker and the perfect playlist can do wonders for motivation.
- **Challenges.** If you have enough people, split into teams and see which team can collect the most trash.
- **Games.** If it's a nice day, encourage people to stick around after the cleanup to play frisbee, fly kites, or have a dance party.
- **Enjoy the weird stuff.** Ask people to set aside any truly weird objects they find and share them with the whole group. You never know what kind of totally random stuff you'll come across!

Step 6. Keep your attendees engaged for future projects

Come prepared with a sign-up sheet and ask all your volunteers to fill in their contact info so you can let them know about future events. If you have enough people, you might want to start a Facebook group or an email newsletter to keep everyone up to date with your latest projects and environmental news.

Step 7. Make it a habit

Host another cleanup, and another, and another! Pick a regular, reliable date—maybe once a month or once a quarter—and keep organizing cleanups. You can keep going to the same site or pick a different site every time. The more regularly you host cleanups, the more people will attend out of habit.

Step 8. Share your experience

Once you've hosted your cleanup, log on to the Panda Ambassador Facebook group and share your experience. What worked? What didn't? What will you do differently next time?