

OLD FISHING LINE IS A THREAT TO WILDLIFE

James A. Beemer, Fish & Wildlife Biologist

West Point anglers are well aware of the quality fishing that can be found at West Point. However, there is one action committed by a few anglers that has resulted in a dark side to the West Point fishing experience, especially for the wildlife around the lakes, ponds, and streams. This is the hazard for wildlife caused by anglers throwing old fishing line on the ground and in the bushes, instead of putting the old line in trash cans either on site or at home.

Let me illustrate how this is a problem. An angler is fishing when his/her line gets tangled up in a large bundle. The angler cannot untangle the mess and so just cuts the line and throws the tangled mess on the ground (or in a bush). After the angler leaves, an animal comes walking past where the angler had been. The animal can't see the line and so gets the line wrapped around a leg, a wing, its neck or body. The animal is unable to untangle itself so it just keeps moving, trailing part of the line behind it. The trailing line gets caught on other plants, rocks, garbage, etc. and the line tightens up, cutting in to the animal's skin or cutting off circulation. Sometimes the line tightens so much that the animal loses a foot or a leg. Or, the animal is strangled.

This situation is sometimes made worse when the discarded line still has a fishhook attached. If that is the case, the hook often becomes imbedded in the animal's leg, mouth, or body, causing even more damage.

Since 1992, many species of wildlife have been found by the Natural Resources Branch entangled in fishing line or with hooks imbedded in their skin. Many cases have been found around Round Pond, but it has been encountered at every West Point fishing area. The wildlife species found with tangled fishing line include turtles, frogs, ducks, chipmunks, wild turkeys, several songbird species, Canada geese, and deer. Other species likely got tangled but were never found.

Another problem involves throwing sinkers into the water or on the ground after being used. Birds have no teeth and so they swallow small stones to help grind food up in their stomachs. When the birds pick up sinkers, though, they get lead poisoning and die.

So how can West Point anglers stop this harm to wildlife?

First, NEVER throw your old fishing line on the ground. Use trash cans if they are present or stick the fishing line in a bag or your pocket and place it in the trash when you get home. Parents should teach their children to do the same. Many sporting goods stores also collect old fishing line for recycling, so that is also an option. Used fishing sinkers should only be placed in the trash and never thrown on the ground or into the water.

If every West Point angler placed old fishing line and sinkers in the trash where they belong, there would be more healthy animals around for the community to see and hear.

Questions may be directed to the USMA Fish & Wildlife Biologist at 938-3857.