**We need to treat Vermilion River with more respect, care**

The Vermilion River has had a major role in Lafayette’s history.

In times gone by, it was a highway for the boats that brought people, food and other goods to the area. It has been used for recreation — fishing or hosting a floating get-together on a party boat like the Vermilion Queen, which plied the waterway in the 1980s. Treated water from the Vermilion is used as drinking water in some areas along the river. For some Lafayette residents, it serves as a backyard.

It is also a massive dumping ground for all the refuse that is not disposed of properly. And that is Acadiana’s shame.

Enough small garbage was pulled from the river in Lafayette Parish to fill 1,100 55-gallon drums during clean-up efforts last year. Besides that, there were also stoves, microwaves, refrigerators and cars, according to Charles Wyatt of the Bayou Vermilion Preservation Association, a nonprofit group.

Recently, about 40 55-gallon drums worth of trash was pulled out from under a South College Street bridge.

This image is not the one we want tourists who come to town to soak up local culture to take home with them. Nor is it the one we want our children and grandchildren to grow up with.

Most of the trash in the Vermilion was not dumped there directly, Wyatt said. And not all of it necessarily started within the parish. Anything that is tossed on the ground or from the window of a car and winds up in a storm drain floats to a coulee and eventually into the river.

About 75 percent of revenues from a property tax millage for the Bayou Vermilion District goes to cleaning up trash. And that is money that could be better spent, according to Jan Wyatt, also with the Bayou Vermilion Preservation Association, on projects such as placing riparian plants on bare spots along the river to help ease the problem of bank erosion. And that would make the water of the Vermilion less muddy and more pleasing to the eye.

The Wyatts were part of a recent symposium titled, “Bayou Vermilion Treasures Water Weekend,” focusing on the effects of pollution on this river that is such an important part of Lafayette’s culture and history. They and their group are also involved in the quest for solutions to the ongoing problem of paper and plastic, cars and household appliances finding their way into the Vermilion.

Cleaning up the river is a huge undertaking. But making sure it stays clean in the future is simple: If everyone in Acadiana stops throwing trash on the ground, it won’t find its way into a storm drain and eventually, into the river.

Small steps count. Don’t throw that candy wrapper on the ground — find a trash can or hold on to it until you get home. And teach children not to litter.

Disposing of large items is more challenging, but a few phone calls could be all it takes to learn how to dispose of them properly.

The Vermilion River should be treated with more respect. It’s in everyone’s backyard.

Let’s all do our part to keep it clean.