

Conservation Corner

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Several weeks ago I asked the question, “Have you heard the geese go over?” I’m happy to report that several people experienced the sight and sound of “winter in their cry” as many V formations of geese passed over Pocahontas County on December 1st. In Colfax Township, my brother reported that 500 – 1,000 snow, blue, and Canada geese filled the sky before landing for a short time on the east cornfield while my husband watched and listened as large flocks flew over and around the windmill turbines.

Now that the geese have begun their journey, it’s time to begin another item on the Christmas to-do list – shopping. As American journalist Dave Barry writes, “Once again, we come to the Holiday Season, a deeply religious time that each of us observes, in his own way, by going to the mall of his choice.” While I’m sure many of you have already checked this item off, I confess our family is part of the 4.1 percent of Americans who wait until the last two weeks to start shopping.

Each year, beginning in early fall, we’re bombarded with sales and ads promoting Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday. Somehow, Christmas has become our biggest commercial holiday to the tune of \$3 trillion and 20% of the year’s total for the U.S. retail industry. In 2015, according to a Gallup poll, Americans plan to spend \$830 per person on Christmas cards and gifts as well as holiday decorations and parties.

Each year, after the gifts are opened, the cookies eaten, and the decorations packed or thrown away, there are several bags of garbage that end up in the landfill. Somehow, Christmas has also become a holiday that generates over 5 million tons of waste each year. Even more disturbing is the fact that most of that waste, 4 million tons, is just the wrapping paper and shopping bags that everything comes in. Somehow, excessive waste has become intertwined among the evergreen boughs, red ribbon, and good intentions of the holiday season.

And so this year I’m encouraging everyone to also include the 4 R’s in their Christmas preparations. If everyone will “reduce, reuse, recycle, or recover” just once during their holiday preparations, it will make a difference. Use common sense and a budget to reduce excess spending. Choose wrapping paper and shopping bags that can be recycled or reused. After the holidays, drop off your natural Christmas trees by the flagpole at Rosenberger Park to be recovered as fish habitat or mulch. In other words, go green and choose meaning over stuff. Enjoy a walk at Cooper’s Cove, Swan Lake, or Sunken Grove; snowshoe or ski along Three Rivers Trail; or take a family outing to an area nature center over Christmas break.

I’ll close with a favorite and timely Charles Dickens quote from *A Christmas Carol*. “I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.”

