

# A Community Event to Float Your Boat

**B**atiquitos Lagoon is indisputably one of the jewels of Carlsbad and home to a diversity of native flora and fauna. You can walk your leashed dog or jog the trails on the northern side, test your luck fishing at the rock jetties at the mouth of the lagoon and, under the Interstate 5 bridge on the north, go birding, take a docent-led nature walk or explore the plant and animal specimens at the nature center. But you can't go boating.

That changes, however, for two days every year during the Batiquitos Lagoon Kayak Cleanup. The fifth annual event will take place this year Sept. 25-26.

"out of bounds" markers, a surf-casting fishing rig, a large glass-and-metal mirror, plastic bottles and a variety of balls. In past years the haul has included a bicycle, an old-fashioned washing machine and part of a sofa.

The cleanup has proven to be incredibly popular, with approximately 250 participants from all over San Diego County during the two-day period. Slots become available on the foundation's website ([www.batiquitosfoundation.org](http://www.batiquitosfoundation.org)) in mid-July and typically sell out within six weeks. "We get people from as far away as downtown San Diego," Robertson says. "They come from kayak



Photo: Kathy Dickey



Photo: Fred Sandquist

The Batiquitos Lagoon Foundation preserves, protects and enhances the lagoon's ecological reserve and watershed.

Fred Sandquist, president of the Batiquitos Lagoon Foundation, points out that volunteers spend a lot of time maintaining the trails and keeping the land free of trash, but until five years ago, cleaning the lagoon itself without damaging sensitive cordgrass that grows in the tidal mudflats posed a dilemma.

The kayak cleanup event emerged as an innovative solution. Dave Robertson, a former vice president of the foundation and an instigator of the event, explains, "We realized that a kayak can maneuver in 1 to 2 inches of water, so if we give people long poles and [trash] grabbing tools they can come in from the water and hurt nothing."

The foundation, a nonprofit volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the Batiquitos Lagoon Ecological Reserve and its watershed, contacted the California Department of Fish and Game about an exception to the boating ban, and the agency agreed to allow kayaking once a year for the purpose of cleaning the lagoon. The event is timed to fall during a higher-than-normal high tide and follows the end of the Least Tern nesting season so kayakers can use the nesting site for launching.

Kayakers contribute \$35 apiece to reserve a two-hour slot to collect as much trash as they can find. And what a motley collection of refuse they discover. "It's absolutely amazing," says Robertson of the variety of trash that gets hauled in.

Last year kayakers collected tires, fishing line, fish net floats, a fire extinguisher, glass bottles, plastic bottle holders, golf course

Kayakers set out on their trash-gathering mission.

clubs, and a lot of them have their own boats."

People without their own boats can also participate thanks to the generosity of two local vendors, REI and Hobie, who provide a fleet of boats, guides and all the safety gear. "The guides give a safety pitch at the beginning and keep an eye on people," Robertson says. "It's a substantial investment for them to bring four to five people out for 12 hours." Hobie also donates a kayak, which is given away to one lucky participant. Other prizes will be awarded, T-shirts will be for sale and environmental information will be available throughout the day.

Alison Wright, the outreach specialist from REI who coordinates the company's participation, says the lagoon cleanup "is a really good day that the staff and community look forward to." Robertson agrees.

"It's a lot of fun. Everybody enjoys it, including the vendors. They seem happy and they get to meet a lot of nice people. It's a four-way win and everybody comes out ahead. It's good for the environment, for the foundation, for the community and for the vendors. As they're pulling out, a lot of people ask, 'When is it going to be next year?'" ●