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Evaluating Plastic Litter Prevention Strategies on Lake Springfield, Illinois

Plastic is now ubiquitous to most bodies and water bodies. And yet, most scientific and media attention on freshwater plastics is focused on very large water bodies near densely populated urban centers and with emphasis on the quantity of plastic pollution transported from cities to oceans. As a result, many central Illinoisans identify aquatic plastic pollution as geographically distant and disconnected from their local and everyday behavior patterns. This presentation will highlight our interdisciplinary research and educational activities conducted in 2017-2020 by UIS faculty and students on/near Lake Springfield as a site representative of the inland freshwater systems typically excluded from marine debris research and prevention programs. Our research/outreach projects include implementing and evaluating localized plastic pollution prevention strategies for the three most common types of aquatic plastic litter in central Illinois waterways- cigarette litter, derelict fishing gear, and single-use food packaging. Importantly, this presentation will discuss the preliminary results of our study, detailing the extent of the problem and the cross-disciplinary methods used to evaluate their effectiveness.