



Florida Keys “Got Your Bags?” Program Big Pine Key Campaign

Who We Are: Beginning in the summer of 2012 in Big Pine Key, a coalition of environmentally conscious and concerned citizens and organizations created the Florida Keys “Got Your Bags?!” campaign.

Our mission: “to support the reduction and voluntary elimination of single-use plastic bags in the Florida Keys.”

Why? Most people today use plastic bags without a second thought. Becoming litter, in nature they are responsible for millions of deaths to fish, birds, and mammals annually. Even as trash bags, they inevitably end up in landfills where they take between 500 and 1000 years to disintegrate. Like other plastics, even “bio-degradable” bags only break down to toxic particles. Ingested by small birds, mammals and fish, they work their way up the food chain introducing neurotoxins into the human diet.

It takes 12 million barrels of oil every year to produce them, and it is economically unfeasible to them. On average, each person in the U.S. uses 500 plastic bags every year. Expensive to make and ship, paper bags are not much better.

Reusable bags are the only true sustainable answer, as grass roots efforts around the globe demonstrate: Europe’s campaign has yielded an 80% to 90% reduction in plastic bag use. China has no plastic shopping bags. The islands of Hawaii are bag clean. Los Angeles, San Francisco, Santa Monica, and Seattle have banned the use of plastic bags.

Why Big Pine Key? The environmentally sensitive natural resources of Florida Keys are also the foundation of our economy. The State of Florida has mandated that no city, municipality, or county shall restrict ban the use of plastic shopping bags. Successful elimination of this threat to our well-being therefore requires voluntary action on everyone’s part.

The island of Big Pine Key is mostly a National Wildlife Refuge. Residents move here and visitors are drawn here largely for that reason. Big Pine is also a tight geographic cropping of retail businesses, run by environmentally conscious people. The campaign is a way for us all to support commerce through promotion of green tourism.

Enlisting Business Participation! Managers of local businesses are on the front line: at the point of purchase. Some ways to be involved: enact policies that promote reusable bags and offer your own logo reusable bags (better to see those in the community than the plastic ones hanging from tree branches. As a reminder, put a “Got Your Bags?” sticker on your front door and a stencil in your parking lot. Train your staff to ask “Got your Bags?” before offering an alternative. Eventually, eliminate the expense and dispense no plastic bags. (When the population shops with their own bags, after time this retail cost goes down). Donate your support for a residential campaign this winter – we’ll provide education and reusable totes, and feature you as an environmentally conscious business sponsor!



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