

# Marine Debris



NOAA Marine Debris Program | Office of Response and Restoration | NOAA National Ocean Service

## NOAA Marine Debris Program West Coast Region

The NOAA Marine Debris Program (MDP) supports national and international efforts to research, prevent, and reduce the impacts of marine debris. The MDP serves as a centralized capability within NOAA, coordinating and supporting activities within NOAA and with other federal agencies, as well as using partnerships to support projects carried out by state and local agencies, tribes, non-governmental organizations, academia, and industry. The MDP has headquarters in Silver Spring, MD and has regional staff members positioned around the country to support regional coordination efforts, track progress of projects, review performance and efficiency measures, and conduct regional marine debris outreach to local audiences. The Program has three staff based in Seattle, WA, one of whom is the program's West Coast Regional coordinator.



Doug Monk observes marine life entangled in recovered gillnet. Photo courtesy of Northwest Straits Initiative.

### Derelict Gear Removal in the Puget Sound

Lurking beneath the cold waters of the Puget Sound in Washington State are thousands of derelict fishing nets and crab pots. Of the two, nets are the most damaging: A remnant of a large-scale salmon fishery that is now nearly gone, the nets snare, entangle, and kill marine mammals, birds, crab, and fish, abrade the habitat they cover, and pose a safety risk to divers and boating. Since 2002, the Northwest Strait Initiative (NWSI) has been hard at work to

remove these nets, with strong and consistent support from NOAA.

#### Marine debris is

any persistent solid material that is manufactured or processed and directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, disposed of or abandoned into the marine environment or the Great Lakes.

To date, 3,850 derelict nets have been removed and 520 acres of marine habitat restored. Nearly 2,500 of the nets were removed thanks to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Recently a new and highly effective survey protocol to



Side-scan sonar image of derelict fishing gear items in Puget Sound. Photo courtesy of Northwest Straits Initiative.

detect derelict net location with side scan sonar contributed to a better, more accurate assessment of location and magnitude of remaining nets. It is now estimated that nearly 1,000 derelict nets still remain in Puget Sound, nets that NWSI and NOAA are determined to remove.

Derelict crab pots are another challenge. When lost in the Puget Sound, they continue to trap crab for years (called *ghostfishing*) and abrade sensitive habitat. Outreach efforts focusing on smart fishing and loss prevention, as well as use of escape cord on all traps have been on-going for year. Removal by divers and remotely operated vehicles has been conducted by NWSI and by the Stillaguamish tribe.

## Oregon Fishing Industry Partnership

NOAA continues to support the Oregon Fishing Industry Partnership to Restore Marine Habitat project. With all field operations now completed, the project removed nearly 3,000 derelict crab pots, as well as other debris such as lines and nets. None of the recovered gear went to a landfill. All usable crab pots were returned to their owners, and thanks to the Fishing for Energy partnership, bins were placed in Astoria, Garibaldi, and Newport, enabling fishermen to recycle the gear. All the mangled and unusable pots were recycled for metal and nets and lines were used for energy. Side scan sonar was conducted to assess crab pot density and removal efficacy both offshore near the entrance to the Columbia River and off Newport, OR. Collaborating with the U.S. Coast Guard, project personnel flew in Coast Guard helicopters over the entire Oregon coast to spot lost crab pots, and provide relay this information to removal vessels. Collaborating with the fishing industry, the project supported the removal of over 440 lost pots by volunteer fishers, and conducted outreach and education to the crabbing industry and the general public.

## Volunteer Coastal Cleanups

NOAA supported a multi-agency effort to develop guidelines for volunteers conducting annual cleanups along the Olympic Coast. NOAA also supported the creation of, and has entered into a partnership with, the Washington Clean Coast Alliance. The Alliance's highly successful program, Coast Savers, engages numerous entities and over 1,000 volunteers to remove more than 20 tons of debris annually from the entire outer coast of Washington State. The Coast Savers also conduct outreach and education to address marine debris along the Washington outer coast.

## California Watershed Project

In the San Francisco area, NOAA is supporting the Watershed Project to remove marine debris from creeks and shoreline around San Francisco Bay. In 2010, the project mobilized 568 volunteers and removed over 1,000 pounds of trash from 4.5 miles of creeks and shoreline around the bay. Approximately 610 students and youth were educated about marine debris prevention. In 2011, the project continued with cleanup operations, removing over 3,000 lbs of debris in eight cleanup events. Outreach was conducted to cleanup volunteers, some of which were high school students.

### Marine debris is

a problem we can solve together. Reduce, reuse, recycle, and participate in local beach or stream cleanups. If we each do a little, together we can make a big difference.

### For more information contact:

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