Marine Debris Brings Together Agencies, Businesses & Volunteers

–UH Sea Grant Photo

–Linda Schubert, Hawaii Wildlife Fund Photo

–UH Sea Grant Photo

■ What can five hours, 24 people, eight trucks and a winch get you? The answer is more than 7 tons of marine debris. On Saturday, November 19, volunteers participated in the first of four scheduled marine debris cleanups of the Big Island's South Point coastline. A second cleanup was held on Saturday, December 17, and results are pending. This marine debris project is coordinated by the Hawai'i Wildlife Fund and is one of five marine debris projects in Hawai'i funded by the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)** Marine Debris Program.

Both efforts were a huge success due in part to the help of local partners like the county of Hawai'i, Ka'u Calendar, Integrity Graphics, *HAWAII FISHING NEWS* and the University of Hawaii Sea Grant College Program, but without the help of community members and volunteers the cleanup would not have been possible.

On November 19, from as far away as Alaska and California, volunteers spread out along the 4 miles of coastline between Ka'alualu Bay and Green Sand Beach and were amazed by the amount of debris littering the coastline.

"I never thought this beach could be cleaned because there's just so much here, but in 2003 [the state, Hawai'i Wildlife Fund and the community] proved it could be done and that one person can make a difference. I had to get involved this year," said Michael Fairchild, who has been windsurfing off the South Point coast for more than 16 years.

The day-long cleanup resulted in more than 17,500 pieces of trash being removed from the coastline of which 81 percent was plastic. Sixty-five large masses of fishing net remain at the site but were pulled away from the water's edge onto cliff areas awaiting transport to the container loading site. Many of the fishing nets were too heavy to move by hand and required the use of a winch and truck to move. In total, more than 7 tons of trash were removed from the coastline that day. However, the effort did not end there.

To lessen the burden on Big Island landfills, most of the debris collected in these cleanups will be recycled. Beverage containers along with certain plastics will be recycled by the county of Hawai'i. Derelict fishing nets, which are a common sight along this coastline, will be recycled to create electricity. This energy-producing debris disposal effort is possible through the generosity of partners like Matson Navigation Co., Schnitzer Steel Hawai'i Corp. (formerly Hawai'i Metal Recycling Co.), and the city and county of Honolulu's H-Power waste-to-energy facility. Matson Navigation Co. is donating large containers for the fishing net debris, which they will ship to O'ahu. There, Schnitzer Steel Hawai'i Corp. will pick it up, take it to their facility, and chop the nets into smaller, more manageable pieces. Schnitzer Steel Hawai'i Corp. will then transport the chopped nets to the city and county of Honolulu's H-Power facility where the chopped debris will be burned to create electricity. All services are being provided free of charge.

"With its strong commitment to Hawai'i's communities and environment, as well as history of environmental causes, Matson is proud to be part of this larger cleanup effort," said Keahi Birch, manager for environmental affairs in Hawai'i for Matson Navigation Co. This marine debris cleanup is part of Matson Navigation Company's Ka Ipu 'Aina (Container for the Land) program, which awards participating groups $1,000 and the use of a container (trucking expenses included) in cleanup efforts. The program is designed to encourage and facilitate more non-profit groups to organize cleanup efforts throughout the state.

Though this section of the South Point coastline has been cleaned, much more still remains to be done. "The task at hand appears daunting at first, but you help because you know it'll be worth it at the end of the day. It's amazing what people can accomplish when they pull together for a great cause," commented Carey Morishige, marine debris outreach coordinator for the University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program.

Additional cleanups are scheduled for January 21, and for two days during President's Day weekend, February 18 and 19. If you are interested in volunteering, call project coordinator Linda Schubert on the Big Island at **(808) 756-1808**. Shuttles will be provided from Waiohinu Park at 8 a.m. (Please call ahead for a seat.) Any participants who are able to shuttle people are also asked for their *kokua*. Hats, sturdy footwear, sunscreen and a bag lunch are strongly recommended. Organizers will provide transportation, water, refreshments, shade, toilets and gloves.

For more information, call me, Carey Morishige, at **(808) 397-2651**, ext. 256, or E-mail <cmorishi@hawaii.edu>.

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