

Hooper Bay Beach Cleanup Nets Two Tons

By Lauren Sill, Program Coordinator

During the month of July, YRDFA sponsored a marine debris beach cleanup in Hooper Bay. With the help of the EPA IGAP coordinator in Hooper Bay and a dozen local residents, 2 tons of trash that had washed up on the shores of Hooper Bay and the Pacific Ocean were collected and disposed of.

Marine debris, basically trash or litter in the water, is one of the most pervasive pollution problems in the world's oceans and waterways. Marine debris originates on land or in the water; trash that is thrown overboard from a vessel, fishing gear that is lost, or overwhelmed landfills and waste water treatment plants all contribute to the debris that makes its way into the rivers and oceans. Even litter that starts hundreds of miles inland can end up in the ocean. Packaging from convenience foods, plastic beverage containers, food wrappers, and more float in huge conglomerations in the open ocean. Marine debris is a problem not only because it is unsightly, but also because it poses a risk to human health, can be a safety hazard, may damage ocean habitat, and can endanger marine wildlife. Fishing gear and plastic bags can wrap around boat propellers, medical waste can wash up on shore, and animals can ingest litter mistakenly as food.

Plastics in particular are problematic; plastic is durable and strong so it can last in the ocean for up to 400 years. Plastic banding and fishing gear have been the cause of significant entanglement of northern fur seals on the Pribilof Islands, contributing to increased mortality and the overall decline of the population. Seabirds can mistake plastic pellets for fish eggs; one study documented that 97.5 percent of Laysan albatross chicks in the North Pacific had plastic in their stomach. Around the world, up to 1 million seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals and turtles die each year due to plastic.

While marine debris is a problem everywhere, it is also one about which something can be done. Individual actions can keep much litter from finding its way to our waterways, and beach cleanups can help make sure that trash that washes ashore doesn't make its way back out. This is what just recently occurred in Hooper Bay.

With funding from the Marine Conservation Alliance Foundation (MCAF), 14 residents of Hooper Bay spent 10 days during the month of July cleaning the beaches around the community. During this time, more than 5,000 pounds of debris was removed from approximately 10 miles of beach. The type of trash picked up ran the gamut of common marine debris. There were trawl nets and gill nets and other fishing related debris, but the majority of the bulk came from other sources. Most prevalent were discarded plastics. Plastic bottles, both foreign and domestic, were found in abundance, as were other plastic containers and plastic banding. Tin cans and foam washed up on shore and a slew of 55 gallon drums were identified. All of the debris that could be collected was bagged and will be put on a barge to be disposed of or recycled in Anchorage or Seattle.

This is the second year that YRDFA has been involved in a marine debris cleanup. Last year, approximately 5 tons of debris were removed from the coastline around Kotlik and Alakanuk, also with

funding from MCAF. In future years, YRDFA hopes to continue working with coastal communities on the Yukon River delta to organize more beach cleanups. YRDFA would like to thank everyone in Hooper Bay who participated in this year's cleanup as well as MCAF for continuing to provide funding to make these cleanups possible.