

Washington shores get 'spring cleaning' on April 18

by MICHAEL DASHIELL
 Sequim Gazette

Volunteers of all ages and abilities are invited to celebrate Earth Day by participating in the Washington Coast Cleanup on Saturday, April 18.

More than 1,000 volunteers are expected to join the effort to make Washington's Pacific beaches safer, healthier and more beautiful by collecting and removing plastic water bottles, lost fishing gear, spent fireworks and other debris.

The cleanup, organized by the Washington CoastSavers, spans the state's entire Pacific Coast.

"Marine debris is a serious threat to our coastal ecosystems," said Carol Bernthal, Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary superintendent. "The work and dedication of every volunteer CoastSaver makes a critical difference in preserving the health and beauty of our coast."

Volunteers are invited to help with a wide range of tasks, from picking up debris along beaches and carrying it back to roadside dumpsters, to using a 4-wheel drive vehicle to pick up filled bags at others.

At last year's ninth coast cleanup, more than 1,100 volunteers removed 22 tons of marine debris from Washington's Pacific beaches.

For John Bridge, former Sequim elementary school teacher, it was his second time out on the coast.

"I enjoy being out on the beach," Bridge said. "I enjoy doing something that really helps out. It looks a lot nicer when you get stuff off the beach."

"It's kind of exciting. A lot of the litter comes off the ships? you find all kinds of things," Bridge said, recalling a 30-pound plastic drum and ropes hundreds of feet long he found in 2008.

"You have to have some creative ways to get them off the beach."

Bridge said he plans to return for this year's event with friends Billy and Melissa Reamer, this time paddling by canoe in from Lake Ozette to a spot just south of Sand Point.

On the cleanup day, volunteers take every piece of unnatural debris that they can carry and report what's too heavy or entangled so it can be retrieved later. Then, after the full day of garbage collection, volunteers are treated to a beachside barbecue.

While cleaning up the garbage improves the look of the beaches, it also improves wildlife habitat.

Plastic marine debris affects at least 267 species worldwide, including 44 percent of all sea bird species and 43 percent of marine mammal species through entanglement or ingestion.

Most of the debris is not directly littered onto the beach. Instead, it washes up from the ocean where it may have been floating for weeks or years after being tossed, dropped, dumped, abandoned or washed in with street litter transported by storm drains.

"Almost 90 percent of floating marine debris is plastic; and due to its durability, buoyancy and ability to absorb and concentrate toxins present in the ocean, plastic is especially harmful to marine life," said David Lindau from the Northwest Interpretive Association.

"With plastic filling their stomachs, animals have a false feeling of being full and may die of starvation."

Nine years ago, Seattle's Jan Klippert started the program, gathering volunteers to clean up trash along the Olympic National Park coastlines. That group's initial efforts grew in popularity and the project's scope grew too: Now most coast access points have sign-in stations handing out collection bags to volunteers.

"Most of the stuff is not that heavy, but it's pretty bulky," Bridge said.

To sign up or get more information, visit the CoastSavers Web site at www.coastsavers.org/washington.

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Washington Coast Cleanup Day

What: A volunteer effort to remove trash and debris from the state's coastline

When: April 18

Where: Various sites along or near the coast, including Cape Alava, Hole-in-the-Wall, Sand Point, Rialto Beach, First Beach, Lake Ozette and Kalaloch campground

More information: See www.coastsavers.org/washington or call 206-220-4279

How to help

For those who want to help with the coast cleanup but can't pick up trash along on the beach, there are other ways to help:

- ! Manage volunteer check-in tables at each beach
- ! Transport collected debris to local dump sites
- ! Host after-clean-up barbecue celebrations
- ! Perform administrative tasks before and after each event

Low-impact living

The Washington CoastSavers alliance suggests several ways to reduce your impact:

- ! Don't litter anywhere
- ! Cut rings of six-pack holders
- ! Buy recycled products

- | Keep storm drains clean of litter
- | Keep cigarette butts in garbage
- | Educate others/volunteer to clean up

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