

Marine Conservation Alliance Foundation
431 N. Franklin St. Ste 305
Juneau, AK 99801
Telephone: 907-523-0731
Fax: 206-260-3639
Web: www.mcafoundation.org

Marine Debris in Alaska

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What do you do with all that Junk?

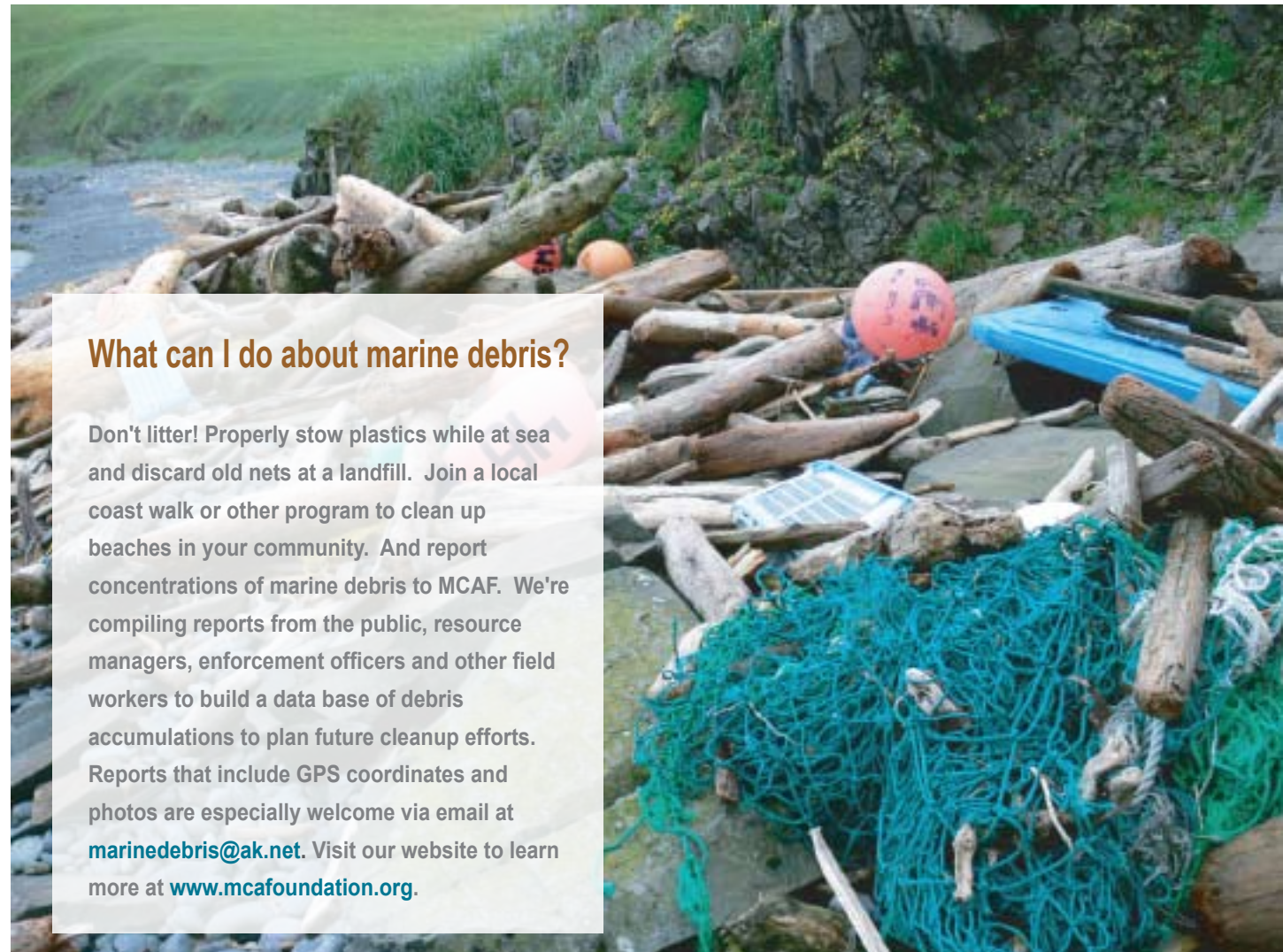
Most debris is disposed of locally but with landfill space at a premium in rural Alaska some has to be shipped away. We're working with recyclers in Washington and the Port of Seattle to accept old nets and line so the plastic resins can be reused. We've investigated waste-to-energy technology that may be feasible some day in the future. None of these options are cheap or easy but we're committed to finding cost effective options to dispose of marine debris.

An International problem

Not all debris is home grown. Plastic bottles found along Alaska shores bear labels from Japan, Korea, Russia, Taiwan, mainland China and even farther away. Many fishing floats and nets are of Asian origin. Some are very old - so-called "legacy nets" from foreign fisheries that operated in U.S. waters decades ago before washing ashore in Alaska. Ocean currents make marine debris truly a global problem.

And who or what is the MCA Foundation?

The MCAF is a non-profit foundation based in Juneau that supports the conservation and sustainable use of fishery resources in the North Pacific through cooperative research programs, public education, and the cleanup of marine debris. MCAF's members include most of the seafood processors that operate in Alaska, groundfish and crab vessel owners, fishing communities and members of the support industry. Marine Debris program funding is provided by NOAA.



What can I do about marine debris?

Don't litter! Properly stow plastics while at sea and discard old nets at a landfill. Join a local coast walk or other program to clean up beaches in your community. And report concentrations of marine debris to MCAF. We're compiling reports from the public, resource managers, enforcement officers and other field workers to build a data base of debris accumulations to plan future cleanup efforts. Reports that include GPS coordinates and photos are especially welcome via email at marinedebris@ak.net. Visit our website to learn more at www.mcafoundation.org.

Where does it come from?

Nationally, most marine debris comes from sources on land according to the Ocean Conservancy. Almost 60 percent comes from shoreside recreation activities and another 30 percent comes from smoking. Cigarette butts are the number one item picked off beaches nationwide. But in remote parts of Alaska, debris takes on a different character: mostly scraps of net and line, fishing floats and buoys, industrial packing bands and totes. That's not surprising for a region with a small population but a huge fishing industry that produces more than half the nation's seafood landings.

We're continuing cleanup work around the important fur sea rookeries on the Pribilof Islands of St. Paul and St. George, and in Prince William Sound, highly used by recreational boaters.



Our commercial fishing partners in Norton Sound removed over 100,000 pounds of nets, lines and buoys from St. Lawrence Island and hundreds of 55-gallon drums that washed ashore near Golovin.

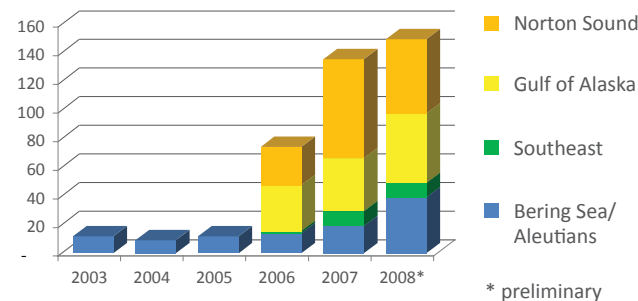
With help from Alaskan Brewing Co.'s Coastal CODE Fund, we joined surfers in cleaning beaches around Yakutat and paired with other Juneau non-profits to expand work on International Coastal Cleanup day. We've surveyed over 2,500 miles of shoreline in western Alaska, Shelikof Strait and Kodiak to find accumulation zones and plan future cleanups.

New programs in 2008 targeted beaches near Port Heiden that were fouled by an eroding landfill, and removed years of accumulated debris on remote beaches including Sitkinak Island near Kodiak and Unalga Island in the Aleutians.

We dispatched small boat crews to remove accumulations near Sitka and Shelikof Strait.

Many of these efforts will continue in 2009 and we're looking to conduct a baseline survey of debris in the Arctic Ocean.

MCAF Marine Debris Program
Debris Collected (Metric Tons)



What is MCAF doing about it?

Since it was formed six years ago, MCAF has removed over 1 million pounds of debris from the Alaska coastline.

The non-profit arm of the Marine Conservation Alliance, a trade association whose members are involved in Alaska's groundfish and crab fisheries, the MCAF uses funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, plus other public and private sources.

MCAF debris cleanup and assessment programs operate around the state – from the Southeast Panhandle to Norton Sound.

Our partners include commercial fishermen, recreation enthusiasts, tribal entities and others who share an interest in cleaner oceans and habitat.

What is marine debris?

Some may just think of it as litter but the volume of plastics and other debris that washes up along our shorelines poses a "serious threat to fishery resources, wildlife, and habitat, as well as human health and safety" according to the US Commission on Ocean Policy. Marine debris is now recognized as "one of the most pervasive problems plaguing the world's oceans and coastal areas," in the words of NOAA Administrator Conrad Lautenbacher.



It's not just ugly - it's a killer -

Trashing our beaches with plastic water and soda bottles, 6-pack rings, old nets, line and strapping bands is not just ugly, it can be lethal. Marine debris can entangle seals and other marine mammals. Lost fishing gear called "ghost nets" kill fish and other marine life. Seabirds and marine mammals mistake colored plastics as food and clog their digestive tracts with debris.