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ALASKA MARINE DEBRIS DATABASE UNVEILED BY MCAF Google Earth-based platform shows cleanups, surveys, reports

Information on marine debris cleanup efforts in Alaska – past and present – has been compiled by the MCA Foundation into a Google Earth based database that is now accessible over the internet. The database identifies areas cleaned and surveyed with links to photos with reports of the volume removed and other statistics.

“Since MCAF joined the fight against marine debris in 2003, we’ve removed over 1 million pounds of marine debris from Alaska’s shoreline, but much more work remains to be done,” said MCAF executive director David Benton. “This database will help future planning by showing locations where debris accumulations have been identified through surveys, and where cleanups have taken place. It also provides historical data on efforts to identify and remove accumulations of marine debris.”

Marine debris is any persistent, solid, manufactured material such as plastics that is directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, disposed of or abandoned into the marine environment. In Alaska, much of the debris is derelict fishing gear such as nets, crab line and buoys. While some of it is sought by beachcombers, the volume of plastic debris that washes up along Alaska’s shoreline degrades habitat and presents a threat of entanglement and ingestion that can be fatal to fish, marine mammals and seabirds.

Designed by MCAF staffer Diane Scoboria, the database was unveiled to the public during a session on debris at the annual Alaska Forum on the Environment in Anchorage. The database can be viewed at www.mcafoundation.org. Soon others will be allowed to input additional data into the database. The inclusion of data from community based cleanup efforts will help make the debris database more complete.

Formed in 2003 to tackle the marine debris problem in Alaska and coordinate cooperative research efforts between fishermen and scientists, the MCA Foundation is the non-profit arm of the Juneau-based Marine Conservation Alliance, an industry association that includes fishermen, vessel owners, seafood processors and communities involved in the groundfish and crab fisheries in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. Funding for MCAF debris cleanup and research efforts comes largely through a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association.