

**Senator Jesse Bjorkman**  
*Alaska State Legislature*

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**SJR 20 Clean Up Marine Debris**  
**Sponsor Statement**  
**Version N**

Alaska's culture revolves around a healthy ocean and ecosystem, the ocean provides us with food, jobs, and tradition. Alaskans use the ocean to provide for themselves every single day.

Foreign trash floating through Federal water collects in remote areas where it pollutes beaches and kills wildlife. Distance, expense, and rugged conditions make cleanup a challenge. Allowing marine debris to continue to collect around the state's shorelines is detrimental to our way of life.

Since 2006, NOAA has directly funded projects in Alaska that have removed over two million pounds of debris. Federal agencies like NOAA and the EPA can continue to help Alaska get on track to clean up the state's waters. The state of Alaska has an estimated 44,000 miles of shoreline, almost as much as the entirety of the United States combined. Based on the estimate of shoreline, only around 6% of the coastline in Alaska has been cleaned since efforts begun.

It is extremely difficult to properly dispose of marine debris after removal, leaving communities with messes they did not create. SJR 20 urges the Alaska Congressional Delegation to advocate for increased federal funding to support marine debris cleanup, backhaul, prevention, and education.

We urge members support of SJR 20. This Foreign debris must not trash Alaska any longer!

**SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 20**

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY SENATOR BJORKMAN

Introduced: 4/14/25

Referred: Resources

**A RESOLUTION**

1 **Supporting federal, state, and local efforts to clean up and remove marine debris from**  
2 **the state; urging the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the**  
3 **Environmental Protection Agency to provide additional funding for those efforts and to**  
4 **remove barriers faced by tribes and rural communities in accessing those funds; and**  
5 **urging the Alaska Congressional delegation to advocate for increased federal funding**  
6 **and support for marine debris prevention, clean up, removal, backhaul, and education.**

7 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

8 **WHEREAS** Alaskans depend on a clean and healthy ocean and shoreline for  
9 sustainable economies, communities, and ways of life; and

10 **WHEREAS** the state has more than 30,000 miles of shoreline and an estimated tidal  
11 shoreline of almost 50,000 miles, which is more than the rest of the United States combined;  
12 and

13 **WHEREAS** the state's shoreline faces the North Pacific Ocean, the Gulf of Alaska,  
14 and the Bering, Beaufort, and Chukchi seas; and

1           **WHEREAS** marine debris causes many adverse effects, including entanglement of  
2 and ingestion by birds, fish, and other animals, exposure to toxic chemicals, habitat  
3 destruction, and interference with vessel transit and operations; and

4           **WHEREAS** these adverse effects can interfere with subsistence, commercial, and  
5 recreational fishing, tourism, recreation, and other important aspects of life in the state, even  
6 though the affected communities and residents of the state largely did not cause the problem;  
7 and

8           **WHEREAS** the marine debris problem is particularly acute in the state because of the  
9 state's rugged shoreline, ocean currents that concentrate debris in remote locations, and ocean-  
10 dependent coastal communities; and

11           **WHEREAS** coastal communities in the state lack the needed resources to transport  
12 debris for recycling or disposal even after the debris is removed from beaches; and

13           **WHEREAS** the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has, since 2006,  
14 worked with partners to conduct debris research, removal, and prevention and has directly  
15 funded projects in the state that have removed nearly 2,000,000 pounds of debris; and

16           **WHEREAS**, as of 2014, individual tribes, communities, organizations like Ocean  
17 Conservancy, and other partners around the state have removed more than 3,000,000 pounds  
18 of debris in documented cleanups; and

19           **WHEREAS** the health of the state's fisheries, ocean, and shoreline is foundational to  
20 the state's economy;

21           **BE IT RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature supports federal, state, and local  
22 efforts to prevent marine debris from reaching the state's shorelines and to promote the clean  
23 up and removal of marine debris from the state's shorelines; and be it

24           **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the National  
25 Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other  
26 federal agencies to dedicate additional funding, and to remove barriers faced by tribes and  
27 rural communities in accessing those funds, to support efforts to clean up and remove marine  
28 debris from the state; and be it

29           **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature supports the work of the  
30 Alaska Congressional delegation to advocate for increased federal funding and support for  
31 marine debris prevention, clean up, removal, backhaul, and education; and be it

1           **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature urges the state to work  
2 with coastal communities, tribes, nonprofit organizations, municipal departments, and the  
3 private sector to the greatest extent possible to address the challenges of marine debris as it  
4 affects the state's shorelines.

5           **COPIES** of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Lisa Murkowski and the  
6 Honorable Dan Sullivan, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Nicholas Begich, U.S.  
7 Representative, members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.

# Fiscal Note

State of Alaska  
2026 Legislative Session

Bill Version: SJR 20  
Fiscal Note Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
( ) Publish Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Identifier: SJR20-LEG-SESS-03-30-2026  
Title: CLEAN UP MARINE DEBRIS  
Sponsor: BJORKMAN  
Requester: (S) RESOURCES

Department:  
Appropriation:  
Allocation:  
OMB Component Number: 0

**Expenditures/Revenues**

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below. (Thousands of Dollars)

	FY2027	Included in	Out-Year Cost Estimates				
	Appropriation Requested	Governor's FY2027 Request	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031	FY 2032
<b>OPERATING EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>FY 2027</b>	<b>FY 2027</b>					
Personal Services							
Travel							
Services							
Commodities							
Capital Outlay							
Grants & Benefits							
Miscellaneous							
<b>Total Operating</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

**Fund Source (Operating Only)**

None							
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

**Positions**

Full-time							
Part-time							
Temporary							

**Change in Revenues**

None							
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

**Estimated SUPPLEMENTAL (FY2026) cost:** 0.0 *(separate supplemental appropriation required)*

**Estimated CAPITAL (FY2027) cost:** 0.0 *(separate capital appropriation required)*

**Does the bill create or modify a new fund or account?** No  
*(Supplemental/Capital/New Fund - discuss reasons and fund source(s) in analysis section)*

**ASSOCIATED REGULATIONS**

Does the bill direct, or will the bill result in, regulation changes adopted by your agency? No  
If yes, by what date are the regulations to be adopted, amended or repealed?

**Why this fiscal note differs from previous version/comments:**

Not applicable, initial version. One page, zero note.
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Participants in the 38th Annual International Coastal Cleanup carry a fishnet to a boat on a coast near Sitka in August. (Ryan Morse / Sitka Conservation Society)

CAPITAL CITY WEEKLY

# Resilient Peoples and Place: Coastal cleanup removes 1,400 lbs. of trash from Sitka's beaches

Effort by wide range of groups part of global project that has collected 350 million lbs. of waste.

By Lisa Teas Conaway

Thursday, September 21, 2023 5:01pm | NEWS CAPITAL CITY WEEKLY ENVIRONMENT

The boat pulls right up to the black sand beach dotted with driftwood and volcanic pumice stones, and our large fellowship disembarks. Our boots sink into the sand as we line up to receive our gear for the day: gloves, repurposed gear, backpacks, small knives and bear spray.

We stand in the shadow of L'ux, a stratovolcano also known as Mt. Edgecumbe. Kruzof Island, the land of the Kiks.ádi since time immemorial, is a remote island approximately 14 miles from Sheet'ká or Sitka where we started from. There are over 40 of us from many different backgrounds, united by a common goal of trying to make the world a cleaner and healthier place. I latch my knife to my belt, pull on my gloves and follow the group along the shore, we start to spread out in our search for garbage.



More than 40 volunteers from a range of organizations including congressional members, tribal governments, environmental organizations, visiting social media influencers and more worked side-by-side removing 1,400 pounds of trash from coasts near Sitka in August. (Ryan Morse / Sitka Conservation Society)

Slowly I walk through beach grass so tall it tickles my ribs while peering between the fronds in search of anything unnatural. Fishing net, bottles, an old glass ball, perhaps; I find a broken piece of styrofoam, pick it up and put it in my grain sack. Again and again, more styrofoam, bits of plastic, a lone shoe, tangled fishing line. This remote and beautiful place is revealing its heavy burden to us, and our bags grow heavier and heavier. I pick up a small plastic arm fallen from a toy soldier and call out to the person next to me, with the Clean Swell app pulled up on their phone: “What category would this fall




We track everything gathered on this app that provides important data to help scientists and advocates tackling our global plastics problem. According to a study by the World Economic Forum, a dump truck load of garbage finds its way into our oceans every minute through city runoff, cargo losses, tsunami events, lost fishing gear and other avenues. After what I saw on this beach, I believe them.

I pass people pulling rope out from under logs, finding styrofoam half-covered with moss, even a group of five working diligently, knives in hand, dividing a massive piece of trawl net so it can be carried back to our pickup sight. It's hard not to be discouraged by the sheer amount of trash we found, but watching such a diverse group of people from congressional members, tribal governments, environmental organizations, visiting social media influencers, and volunteers working side by side gives a feeling of camaraderie.





He  ske from the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies hauls a tangled web of fishing gear and plastic debris across volcanic rocks. (Ryan Morse / Sitka Conservation Society)

This is the kickstart to the 38th annual International Coastal Cleanup, co-hosted by the Ocean Conservancy and Sitka Sound Science Center. The Ocean Conservancy started organizing these cleanups across 150 different countries and, since its inception in 1986, over 350 million pounds of trash have been collected. The Sitka Sound Science Center has its own marine debris program, spearheaded by Zofia Danielson, which has helped to eliminate over 1.7 million pounds of debris from remote beaches across Alaska since 2008 — that's equivalent to three Boeing 747 airplanes.

The group of participants represented an impressive diversity of people and partners including U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan's office, the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Seacoast Indigenous Guardians Network, Sustainable Southeast Partnership, Marine Debris-Center for Alaskans, Sitka Tribe of Alaska, Takshanuk Watershed Council, Alaska Sea Grant, Sitka Conservation Society, Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association, City of Sitka, Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association, Sitka Trail Works, University of Alaska Southeast, Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies, Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, NOAA Marine Debris Program, United States Coast Guard, and volunteers, as well as popular influencers Caulin Donaldson (@TrashCaulin) and Heather Kootink Douville (@Akmoosie).

We are working together to not only clean up the beaches, but also educate people and, encourage others to make a difference in their own communities by cleaning up and saying no to single-use plastics

In Sheet'ká, we stand on Lingít Aaní – Lingít land. Heather Kootink Douville of the Lingít Shank'weidi wolf clan and regional resource coordinator with Seacoast Indigenous Guardians Network heaves a bag full of debris over her shoulder and a wide smile spreads across her face.





The kickoff of the 38th Annual International Coastal Cleanup began on the volcanic beaches at the base of L'ux, a stratovolcano also known as Mt. Edgecumbe on Kruzof Island, 14 miles from Sitka in August. (Ryan Morse / Sitka Conservation Society)

“We are committed to preserving our homelands for all living beings, including animals, birds, and marine life. These lands hold a sacred significance, and as stewards, we all share the responsibility of their care. Even in less frequented places, our duty to safeguard them remains unwavering,” she said.

Heather is part of the recently formed Seacoast Indigenous Guardians Network (SIGN) which has been under development for the past few years originating through a partnership between Tlingit and Haida Native Lands and Resources Division and the USDA Forest Service in recognition of the tribal government’s inherent sovereignty. SIGN has many goals and a growing list of community partners ([www.SeacoastIGN.org](http://www.SeacoastIGN.org)).

Not only do they aim to help Southeast Alaska tribes strengthen their communities through youth programs and job opportunities, but also with Indigenous-led stewardship of natural resources — because taking care of the lands and oceans is taking care of the people.



Ralph Góos'k' Wolfe of the Eagle Frog Kooskadee clan is the Director of Indigenous Stewardship Programs with SIGN. He pauses in his efforts to extract trawl net that has become entangled in the bank: “It’s good to see people taking care of the land, that’s what we always talk about, and it’s good to get out here and remind ourselves why we do what we do and why we’re trying to build up this network of people to collaborate together and do things like this more often; take care of our resources, take care of our lands.”



Chuck Daanaxh.ils'eikh Miller, cultural and community liaison for Sitka Tribe of Alaska, and Heather Kootink Douville, regional resource coordinator for Seacoast Indigenous Guardians Network, work together to dislodge a tangle of fishing line from beach logs. (Ryan Morse / Sitka Conservation Society)

Rain washes the sweat from our brows as our time at the base of L'ux comes to an end, but no one is complaining, there is nothing but smiling faces all around. We cleared 800 to 900 pounds of man-made debris from this one stretch of coastline and have left it slightly better than when we came. The deep feeling of a job well done washes over the group after all the debris has been packed, bag by bag, on and off of the boat, up the gangway, and into waiting trucks before heading to Sitka's waste management facility.

Something Chuck Daanaxh.ils'eikh Miller of the Raven Coho Clan, cultural and community liaison for Sitka Tribe of Alaska told the group earlier is running



through my mind: “Khaa yáa awuné means respect, respect for yourself, people around you, the environment, and things like that, so that’s what we’re doing, we’re showing respect today.”

Our group mobilized the very next day again bright and early down at the docks to find our next beach to clean. Though fewer in number, we held just as much spirit and excitement as the day before. Bundled up and packed up, we boarded our boats and sped across the eastern channel, south of Sheet’ká towards Watsíxh, or Biorka Island, home to the Kiks.ádi Raven Frog clan.

The wind whipped our hair and stung our cheeks as Watsíxh came into sight. Like Kruzof, Biorka sits right on the edge of the gulf and is hit with a torrent of waves laced with marine debris daily. After offloading and gearing up, we hike a quarter mile through undergrowth and muskeg before reaching Back Beach. We descend onto the log and boulder beach, our mission to extract as much garbage as we can. People pulled at nets and ropes and cut them out of log jams. Our bags grew heavy and our hearts light as we dug deeper into the tangle of netting on the plastic-encrusted bank.



Zofia Danielson, marine debris coordinator with Sitka Sound Science Center, works alongside Michael LaVine, senior director of Alaska programs with Ocean Conservancy, to portion up a large piece of trawl net carried back to the pickup site. (Ryan Morse / Sitka Conservation Society)



I worked alongside Tracy Wirak-Cassidy from the Takshanuk Watershed Council to free a massive tangle of ropes from the logs. For nearly an hour we shift logs and cut at the line, our knives actively dulling with each swipe. Finally, it's free. It takes both of us to carry and drag it to the pickup location, looking as though we were wrestling some kind of strange pale blue python across the granite boulders. Davey Lubin, captain of the Esther G Sea Taxi, one of our boat escorts for the trip, met us on Back Beach and deployed rubber rafts to help load debris straight to his boat, saving us from the prospect of hiking back across the island with it all. We collect too much for his boat to carry, what we can't pack back with us we resolve to leave in a large super sack above the high tide line to be retrieved another day.

It's devastating to see the amount of small pieces of plastics littering even our remote coastlines. As I pull out a plastic bottle half-buried in sand all I see are small angular pieces of brightly colored plastics with sand fleas or beach hoppers jumping about. We could not collect all the debris off this one beach in the time allotted, but we did collect 600 to 700 pounds, making our grand total for the two days over 1,400 pounds of trash taken off the beaches.

Events like these are hugely important in shedding light on this global issue.

"It's hard to do cleanups here, and it's hard to get to the beaches that need the most help, because those beaches are often the ones that are the most exposed," explains Kristina Tirman, Arctic marine debris program coordinator for Ocean Conservancy. "So you can imagine that the reason that they're covered in driftwood and garbage is because there are waves that are crashing, and all these other factors that...lead to marine debris being there also lead to those beaches being difficult to access."

After seeing the overwhelming amounts of plastics littering beaches miles away from the nearest town, I know I will think twice when encountering it in my future. Our planet's ecosystem is suffering under the weight of our plastics problem, left unchecked our global plastic production is projected to reach 1.6 billion tons per annum by 2050 according to "Modeling plastics use and waste in a CGE: Methodology and baseline projections to 2060" by the Global Trade Analysis Project in 2022.



There are many roads to a solution for our global plastic problem from the individual level all the way to the national and global; if we pursue them collectively we can work towards improving the delicate balance of our global ecosystem. Simple things like opting out of single-use plastics, by carrying water bottles and reusable shopping bags can greatly reduce the amount of trash entering our oceans. Within our cities we can research better waste management and recycling options. Individuals are also welcome to contact the Sitka Sound Science Center to get involved and volunteer at one of our many organized marine debris cleanups or plan your own. Anyone can download the Clean Swells app to record marine debris data in their area. Nationally our government recently signed the Ocean Climate Action Plan which includes items aimed at reducing aquatic pollution such as modernizing wastewater and stormwater systems that can directly reduce pollution runoff and the resulting damage. To find more ways to get involved visit [OceanConservancy.org](https://www.oceanconservancy.org).

*• Lisa Teas Conaway is a lifelong Sitkan with many childhood memories of hiking mountains and boating along the endless miles of coastlines in the area. She studied visual arts and English at the University of Alaska Southeast, Sitka campus. In 2023 she joined the Sitka Sound Science Center team as their communications coordinator developing stories and managing the nonprofit's online platforms. Lisa spends her free time painting and drawing when not out exploring with her husband and two young sons. Resilient Peoples & Place appears monthly in the Capital City Weekly.*

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## Savaya Bieber

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**From:** Michael LeVine <mlevine@oceanconservancy.org>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 12, 2025 8:36 AM  
**To:** Joe Hayes; IntiMayo Harbison  
**Cc:** Ephraim Froehlich; Savaya Bieber  
**Subject:** Follow-up from marine debris hearing

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Hi Inti and Joe,

During the Resources Committee hearing on SJR20 in May, we agreed to provide some follow-up information to Senators Kawasaki and Geissel related to marine debris cleanup efforts from the Fukushima disaster and to efforts at the Arctic Council. With apologies for the delay, here is the relevant information we were able to compile.

If helpful, we'd be happy to talk and/or provide additional contacts or information.

We look forward to continuing to work on this and other issues with you,

Mike

### **Japan Tsunami / Fukushima Funding & Marine Debris Efforts (Sen. Kawasaki)**

Alaska experienced a significant pulse of marine debris after the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami struck Fukushima. NOAA worked with partners at the state, federal, and local level to respond to what it called a “Severe Marine Debris Event” for Japan Tsunami Marine Debris (JTMD). In 2012, Gov. Sean Parnell designated DEC as the lead SOA agency for coordinating with NOAA to address tsunami marine debris in Alaska. The Government of Japan contributed \$5 million to clean-up efforts on the West Coast of the US, which was administered by NOAA. NOAA published [a report](#) in 2013 documenting response & clean-up progress in West Coast states, including Alaska. Annual JTMD reports for 2012-2016 published by DEC are available [here](#), and provide a more detailed look at state-level impacts and response efforts. (Relatedly, DEC has also been involved in coordination and communication around [perceived risks to Alaska seafood from Fukushima radiation](#).) Among the outcomes of this work was a series of aerial surveys of the coastline from Cape Muzon to Tugidak Island and Bristol Bay, which resulted in coastline segments being classified according to debris impact: <https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=8ac40a055c5349b19e20cf84fdbeacf0>. As far as we are aware, these surveys are the most recent conducted.

### **UNCLOS Pollution Regulation / Arctic Council – PAME Marine Debris Efforts (Sen. Giessel)**

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) includes specific measures to prevent and regulate pollution in the marine environment. These provisions, which are applicable to plastic pollution and other forms of marine litter, build on earlier efforts to regulate marine pollution globally, specifically the [London Convention + Protocol](#). They also provide the general framework for more specific marine pollution regulations through [MARPOL](#). UNCLOS does not contain any specific provisions targeting marine debris or plastic pollution in the oceans. The legal analysts that have considered how UNCLOS can be used to address marine debris and plastic pollution generally describe the current international legal framework as a patchwork. It is not clear that a viable path exists to use these tools to address debris from international sources arriving on Alaska shores.

At the Arctic Council, the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) Working Group regularly focuses on “strategic plans, programs, assessments, and guidelines” for Arctic marine pollution. Recently, PAME has developed and published a [Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter in the Arctic](#). The Plan aims to enable Arctic Council member states to take collective and independent action to address marine litter (including both terrestrial and marine sources) and associated impacts in the Arctic. Like all recommendations and guidelines developed by PAME and the Arctic Council, the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter in the Arctic is nonbinding.

Michael LeVine  
Senior Director, Alaska Programs  
Ocean Conservancy  
Juneau, Alaska  
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# MARINE DEBRIS IN ALASKA:

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR  
COASTS CLEAN AND HEALTHY

# THE MARINE DEBRIS PROBLEM

**Plastic pollution is now found in all corners of the world, from the sea surface to the seafloor and in the most distant reaches of the Arctic.**

In Alaska, marine debris accumulates in remote places, where it fouls beaches, harms wildlife, and affects community well-being. Rural people are left with the impacts, expense, and logistical challenges of cleaning up and disposing of this debris.

Through support for community and Tribal initiatives, data collection, education, and funding, we can work together to keep Alaskan coasts and communities healthy and clean from marine debris.



***“We see marine debris every day on our beaches. Fishing line, nets, and other gear impact the seals and birds that have been with us for generations. We value the commitment and willingness to support our marine debris cleanups that Ocean Conservancy has shown as a partner.”***

**Paviilax “Paul” Melovidov**  
Island Sentinel Coordinator for Aleut Community of St. Paul Island

Photo: Michele and Tom Grimm / Alamy



Since 1986,  
**18 MILLION PEOPLE**  
around the world have rallied in  
their local communities to clean  
up beaches and waterways, Arctic  
regions included, through  
the International Coastal  
Cleanup.



Ocean Conservancy has nearly 40 years of experience in marine debris removal through the **International Coastal Cleanup®** (ICC). The ICC is a network model that is mobilizing hundreds of thousands of volunteers each year to clean beaches and waterways around the world. While doing so, they collect data and report findings to Ocean Conservancy's online, open database, TIDES, the largest global database on marine debris.

The vast coastline and distance between communities in Alaska make it uniquely challenging to address marine debris. Durable partnerships among communities, Tribes, NGOs, federal agencies, industry, and others are necessary.

Ocean Conservancy has sought to build equitable, strong collaborations across Alaska and the Arctic region to advance shared conservation goals. We are integrating the expertise of both the ICC and the Arctic Program in our work on marine debris issues in Alaska. Together, we are working to raise awareness of the issue and amplify our collective impact.

## #SEATHECHANGE

Ocean Conservancy is working with partners in Alaska and throughout the Arctic to build a collaborative approach to addressing the marine debris problem.



# ALASKA'S COASTS

## MARINE DEBRIS

A healthy ocean is central to life in Alaska. Coastal communities depend on the ocean for food, economic opportunity, cultural continuity, and other aspects of daily life.

Tribes have stewarded ocean resources in Alaska for millennia and continue to do so today. These ocean waters provide vital feeding and breeding habit for thousands of species of whales, birds, fish, and other iconic wildlife.

In Alaska, marine debris accumulates in vast quantities along remote beaches. It comes from a number of sources, including mismanaged waste, abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear (also referred to as 'ghost gear'), and extreme weather events such as tsunamis and floods. Most of the debris that washes up on Alaskan shorelines is plastic.

Photo: Johnner Images / Alamy



Photo: Caitlin Blaisdell



Approximately  
**11 MILLION TONS**  
of plastic waste enter the  
ocean each year.



That will nearly triple to  
almost  
**30 MILLION TONS/YEAR**  
by 2040 if trends persist.

*“Coastal Alaska lives off what the ocean can provide. Whether that is commercial salmon, subsistence clams, recreational halibut, marine mammals, or tourism brought in by the natural beauty of this state, Alaskan communities depend on ocean resources. Marine debris on our coasts and in our waters, as it affects each of these and many more resources, deeply impacts lives across the entire state.”*



**Henry Reiske**  
Marine Debris Coordinator,  
Center for Alaskan Coastal  
Studies, Homer, AK

More than  
**3 MILLION POUNDS  
OF DEBRIS**

— mostly plastic —

were removed during documented  
cleanup efforts in Alaska between  
2005–2014

**Removing marine debris  
from beaches in Alaska can  
be expensive, difficult, and  
dangerous.**

Vast distances, expense, and extreme  
conditions make removing debris  
particularly challenging in Alaska. Even when  
it can be removed from beaches, proper  
disposal can be expensive and difficult, and  
communities can be left with  
messes they did not create.

The below map depicts the  
generalized Gulf of Alaska storm  
track and prevailing ocean  
surface currents that transport  
and drive marine debris onto  
Alaska's shores.

Alaska has more than  
**44,000 MILES OF  
SHORELINE**

most of which is not connected  
to the road system and only  
accessible by boat,  
plane, or helicopter.



# WORKING TOGETHER

## PARTNERSHIPS

**Addressing marine debris in Alaska takes strong partnerships among communities, Tribes, local governments, nongovernmental organizations, industry, and others.**

Ocean Conservancy's support for community and Tribal-led cleanups is growing throughout Alaska and the Arctic region. Since 2021, together with our partners, we have supported over 100 cleanups in the region, involving 2,250 staff and volunteers who have removed more than 300,000 lbs of debris from beaches and waterways. These efforts are initiated and led by local partners, often with technical, funding, or other support from Ocean Conservancy.

## RESEARCH

Better understanding the scope and impacts of marine debris is necessary to craft solutions. Ocean Conservancy prioritizes the collection, maintenance, and evaluation of data from cleanups in Alaska and around the world. Our TIDES database includes information from nearly 40 years of cleanups. We also participate in and support scientific research, including investigating the prevalence of microplastics in the marine environment and food sources.



Photo: Bonnie Hamilton

## POLICY

Ultimately, we need to stop debris from reaching beaches. Doing so will require policy change efforts beyond Alaska. Ocean Conservancy is working with state and federal governments and in international forums to advance collaborative solutions. Our policy work focuses on reducing the most common single-use plastics that end up as marine debris and holding producers of plastics and packaging financially accountable for paying for the end-of-life of their products to build out better infrastructure and incentivize less wasteful packaging.

***“We are grateful for this partnership; through marine debris cleanup and education about prevention, we are working towards our mission to restore balance to the coastal communities and biodiverse ecosystems of Southeast Alaska. Every action taken today ensures that the ocean is protected for generations to come.”***

**Heather Kootink Douville**  
Senior Project Coordinator,  
Seacoast Indigenous Guardians Network



Photo: Whited

## BACKHAUL

**One of the unique challenges in Alaska is disposing of debris once it is removed from beaches.**

Often, collected marine debris ends up sitting in communities because there is no viable way to dispose of or recycle it locally; nor is there funding available to transport debris to landfills or recycling centers.

Ocean Conservancy is working with partners to develop and fund a program to remove, transport, and recycle collected marine debris. A state-wide backhaul program can help rural communities and prevent collected debris from remaining on beaches, accumulating in landfills, or being burned.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Ocean Conservancy is excited to be supporting the development of a network of entities that collaborate to share information, support each other in cleanup efforts, and work to raise awareness and funding. Connecting communities – and creating opportunities for them to share resources, insights, and best practices – is a critical part of addressing the marine debris challenge in Alaska.





*“Alaska and the circumpolar Arctic are places of majesty, inhabited by Indigenous people for millennia, and home to congregations of fish, birds, and marine wildlife seen nowhere else on earth. Sustaining these healthy ecosystems and supporting the communities that depend on them in the face of rapid climate change and other threats is paramount. Removing and disposing of marine debris is one vital component of this work. I’m proud of our collaborations and am excited to be on the ground again supporting these efforts.”*

**Janis Searles Jones**  
CEO - Ocean Conservancy



*Ocean Conservancy envisions a healthier ocean protected by a more just world. We are working to protect the ocean from today’s greatest global challenges and, together with our partners, we create evidence-based solutions for a healthy ocean and the wildlife and communities that depend on it.*


## GET INVOLVED


- Visit our website to learn more:  
<https://oceanconservancy.org/arctic-marine-debris>
- Contact our cleanup team to find a cleanup near you:  
[cleanup@oceanconservancy.org](mailto:cleanup@oceanconservancy.org)
- Want to plan your own cleanup? Download the **Arctic Cleanup Toolkit and Data Card** to get started!



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Scan the QR code to learn more about our Alaska and Arctic marine debris work.



Table 28. Summary of marine debris cleanup projects.

	Region	Pounds Collected	Miles Cleaned	Number of Projects	Pounds per 100 Yards	
					General	Detailed
1	Southeast Alaska Outside	167,334	137.7	18	69	71
2	Southeast Alaska Inside	315,310	79.0	13	224	40
3	Yakutat	114,692	125.5	8	49	57
4	Prince William Sound	399,874	609.2	13	30	4
5	Central Gulf of Alaska	562,592	499.7	24	54	78
6	Cook Inlet	18,459	146.5	19	7	
7	Aleutians	68,720	8.0	6	163	
8	Bristol Bay	329,317	269.0	9	69	56
9	Pribilof Islands	305,040	63.7	19	213	172
10	Central Bering Coast	25,955	61.8	3	24	24
11	Norton Sound	490,486	210.0	9	116	84
12	St Lawrence Island	156,373	150.6	4	59	59
13	Northern Bering Coast	76,556	173.4	4	25	25
14	Arctic	450	15.0	1	2	
Total		3,031,158	2,549.1	150		

The greatest density of debris in both the general and detailed assessments was in the Pribilof Islands, with 172 lbs. per 100 yards for the detailed estimate (Figure 22). The detailed estimate is the best estimate.

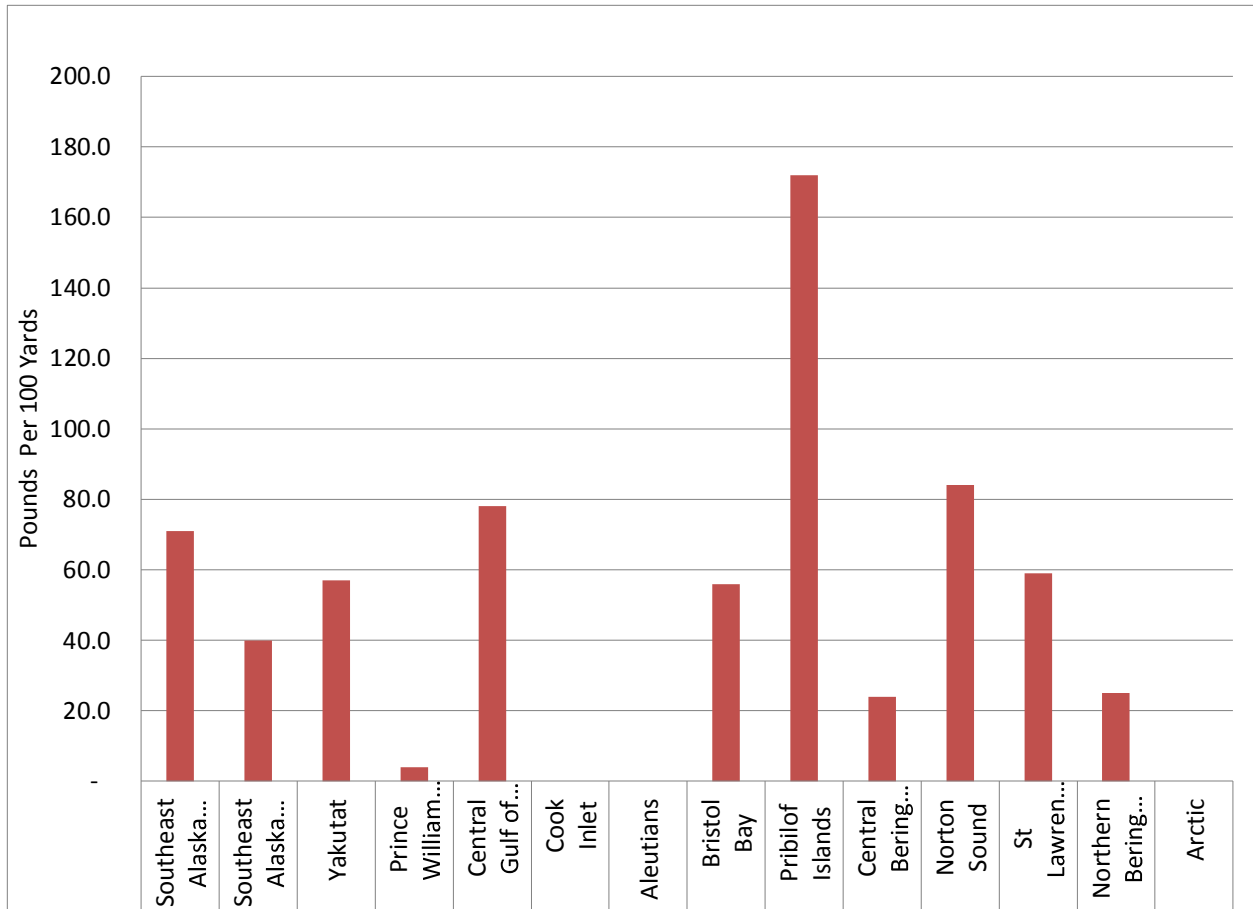


Figure 22. Rates of debris deposition (pounds per 100 yards) by region.

The type of debris does vary between the different regions Table (29). Trawl, cargo and seine net and all line or rope dominate the composition in the Gulf of Alaska regions (except for Region 2, Southeast Alaska Inside) and Regions 8 and 9 (Bristol Bay and Pribilof Islands). The other Bering Sea regions (10 through 13) are comprised of other fishing related and other non-vessel related debris.

Table 29. Debris composition by region.

Region	Trawl, Seine, Cargo Net	All Line or Rope	Domestic Gill Net	High Seas Drift Net	Floats	Other Fishing Related	Banding	Plastic Beverage Bottles	Other Plastic, Non-Beverage	Metal	Foam	Other NonVessel Related	Pounds per 100 yards
1	24%	25%	0%	1%	7%	4%	1%	5%	11%	2%	9%	11%	71
2	7%	11%	1%	5%	5%	12%	1%	4%	13%	6%	13%	22%	40
3	8%	4%	0%	1%	29%	3%	0%	8%	15%	7%	16%	7%	57
4	23%	16%	1%	1%	6%	5%	2%	4%	5%	1%	18%	18%	4
5	28%	16%	1%	3%	12%	5%	1%	7%	10%	2%	8%	8%	78
6													
7													
8	9%	29%	9%	0%	5%	4%	0%	3%	6%	17%	1%	17%	56
9	13%	40%	1%	0%	5%	17%	0%	1%	7%	3%	0%	13%	172
10	1%	0%	14%	0%	0%	38%	2%	1%	7%	1%	1%	33%	24
11	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	8%	1%	87%	84
12	10%	3%	1%	0%	2%	32%	0%	2%	17%	8%	1%	23%	59
13	2%	2%	0%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	4%	16%	3%	67%	25
14													

### Discussion

Despite the small human population in Alaska, marine debris is a significant problem. The first recorded marine debris work in Alaska was conducted by NOAA on Amchitka Island in the early 1970s. NOAA documented the presence of plastic marine debris, primarily from the fishing industry and largely of non US origin. Plastics had just recently come into widespread common use and were particularly well suited to use in the harsh and wet conditions of the fishing industry.

A total of 3.043 million lbs. debris were documented to have been removed from Alaska's coastline in this report. Undoubtedly there are many undocumented cleanups that have occurred with many more pounds of debris being removed. A number of different sources of funding have been responsible for the work, but the primary source has been NOAA. The Marine Debris Reduction Act of 2006 was to provide up to \$10 million per year in funding for marine debris cleanups, however, it has not received full funding.

The Alaska coastline is perhaps the most challenging place there is to conduct marine debris cleanups. Working on remote beaches, difficulty of access, limited workforce and the weather