

AN ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS MARINE DEBRIS IN THE WEST COAST: AN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WEST COAST GOVERNORS AGREEMENT ON OCEAN HEALTH

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Every year, marine debris injures and kills marine life, damages boats and fishing gear, impacts fishing, trade, and tourism, and poses a threat to human health and safety. Our oceans and waterways are constantly polluted with a wide variety of marine debris ranging from soda cans and plastic bags to derelict fishing gear and abandoned vessels.

California, Oregon, and Washington are impacted by marine debris, but in somewhat different ways. California, with its large population centers by the Pacific Ocean, deals with large quantities of land-based debris that washes out to the ocean through rivers and storm runoff, as well as debris generated by recreational beachgoers. Derelict fishing gear along California's coast and especially in its four National Marine Sanctuaries is being surveyed and removed. In Washington State, derelict fishing gear in the Puget Sound has been a main focus of marine debris removal, and cleanup of marine debris along the outer coast of the Olympic Peninsula, most of which is a National Park, has been conducted for years. Oregon has derelict fishing gear in the Columbia River and coastal estuaries, and marine debris accumulation along its pristine coastline. Marine debris, like most other ocean problems, recognizes no state boundaries, and is best addressed cooperatively, through ecosystem-based management. Can it be done in the West coast?

In September 2006, the Governors of Oregon, Washington and California signed the West Coast Governors' Agreement on Ocean Health. Under this agreement, the three states pledged to work together on bold actions to improve the health of our ocean and coastal resources. On July 29, 2008, the three states released a final action plan that outlines many activities on a range of issues, including marine debris. An Action Coordination Team (ACT), comprised of representatives from the three states and the federal government, NGO, and industry was established to draft a work plan to provide a framework to address marine debris collaboratively in California, Oregon, and Washington.

When approved, the work plan will identify entities in the three states working on land based and derelict fishing gear; will attempt to quantify the extent of marine debris along the West Coast; will collaborate on marine debris prevention and removal; and will initiate a coordinated outreach program focused on reduction of marine debris through behavioral changes. In addition, the ACT recommends the formation of a three-state

Marine Debris Alliance, bringing together government, non-profit, and industry sectors to continue the work of the Action Team beyond the scope of the existing work plan.

Generating a work plan is only the first step in addressing the problem of marine debris throughout the West Coast. In order to coordinate the implementation of marine debris activities in the future, the ACT will strive to assemble a work plan that bridges gaps in understanding while inspiring change throughout the West Coast. This presentation will focus on the progress the ACT has made in developing the final marine debris work plan for the states.

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