

Prince William Sound/Gore Point 2008 Marine Debris Remediation Project

Prince William Sound

The Prince William Sound phase of the Gulf of Alaska Keeper 2008 Marine Debris Remediation Project focused on the shorelines of Green, Smith, and northern Montague Islands. Primarily because of debris density, but also because of problems with weather and surf conditions, only Green Island was completely cleaned. All but a small portion of Smith Island was cleaned. All but less than a mile of heavily fouled Zaikof Bay on northern Montague Island was also cleaned.

Again, 100 volunteers joined GoAK for 3 days in May, 2008, donating 3000 hours to help clean Green and Smith Island. Volunteers gathered 240 large bags (600 ALPAR bag equivalents) of MD on Green Island and 70 large bags on Smith Island, plus other debris too large for bagging. Over 8 tons of MD were collected during the 3-day volunteer cleanup. The bags and large debris were stashed for later pickup by GoAK.

The 7-man GoAK crew then continued cleaning Smith and Green Island, and Zaikof Bay for 30 additional days. During the 8 days the GoAK crew worked on Green Island, another 150 large bags and 5 tons of debris were removed in addition to that collected by volunteers. During the 22 days of work in Zaikof Bay, GoAK collected 560 large bags of MD plus an enormous amount of debris too large to bag, much of it fishing nets. In total, including the MD collected by volunteers, 2 tons of MD was taken from Smith Island, 13 tons from Green Island and 25 tons from Zaikof Bay. Altogether, approximately 61 miles of shoreline were cleaned.

GoAK primarily used larger bags in 2008, each equivalent to about 2.5 ALPAR garbage bags. In total, 1020 large bags were collected, equivalent to 2550 ALPAR bags. That works out to 46.45 of the standard size ALPAR bags of debris collected per mile, not including the larger debris. This density of trash per mile cleaned is approximately twice that of shorelines cleaned in 2007 and reflects the fact that the 2008 cleanup was located nearer the debris-rich currents of the Gulf of Alaska.

GoAK, with 6 volunteers using two power vessels over 5 days, also re-cleaned 12 MD-monitoring sites scattered throughout PWS. Over 300 volunteer hours were spent on the monitoring project. Comprehensive data from each site is recorded. Unfortunately, there is a significant amount of MD annually piling upon our beaches. It is too early to state for certain, but it appears from 3 years of monitoring data that the composition of newly arriving debris is changing from predominantly commercial fishing debris to a mixture with more common household and industrial plastic debris. Much, if not most, of the newly arriving MD in PWS is from western Pacific countries and is not locally-generated debris.

All the PWS marine debris was hauled to Whittier, transferred to construction dumpsters and then shipped to the Municipality of Anchorage landfill. GoAK crews sorted out all useable floats, buoys, fish totes, baskets, buckets and other intact gear. The gear was then given to anybody that could use it. In that way, approximately 5% of the total collected PWS marine debris was recycled. Recycling marine debris in Alaska continues to be a difficult and expensive problem.

Gore Point Region

The Gore Point Region phase of the 2008 marine debris cleanup project started June 22 and continued until August 20. The GoAK crew cleaned 19 miles of beaches from Petrof Point in Nuka Passage south to Gore Point and then cleaned 23 miles of beaches west of Gore Point in Picnic Harbor, Rocky Bay and Windy Bay. GoAK also re-cleaned the East, West and North Gore Point beaches, collecting data regarding the composition and accumulation rate of marine debris deposited in the past year. That data is included in a separate document submitted with this report.

In 2008, 900 large bags and other large MD were removed from 42 miles of the Gore Point region coast. Over 40 tons of debris was picked up, which is about 1 ton of marine debris per mile of beach, about 50% more tonnage per mile than the beaches cleaned in PWS. However, this entire region directly abuts the Gulf of Alaska and is heavily fouled with commercial fishing debris, particularly heavy nets. Approximately 80% of the debris by weight and volume is commercial gear such as nets, lines, floats, buoys and fish totes. The collected MD was hauled to Seward and Homer for disposal in the Kenai Peninsula Borough landfill. The GoAK crew sorted this debris and recycled useable floats, buoys, fenders, and other gear. In this way, approximately 10% of the total volume of marine debris was recycled by giving it to local artists, commercial fishermen and others that had uses for it.

In addition to NOAA funding for this project, the Marine Conservation Alliance Foundation, Nordic Viking LLC, Princess Tours, BP, Alyeska Pipeline Company, and dozens of private individuals donated funds to the Gore Point project. In addition, the Kenai Peninsula Borough, the City of Whittier, Homer and Seward all facilitated the cleanup. The Kenai Borough waived landfill fees. Seward, Homer, and Whittier donated harbor facilities and waived fees. Through the course of the summer, over 100 volunteers donated over 3300 hours of labor. In addition, 12 charter and private vessels were donated to transport volunteers, assist in monitoring projects and haul marine debris.