

# SHORE STEWARDS NEWS

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*This issue of Shore Stewards News was prepared by Scott Chase, Shore Stewards Coordinator, Island County.*

## Beach Debris and How to Get Rid of It

Those people who own shoreline property get used to cleaning up debris that washes up onto their beach. Sometimes that debris is small and easy to pick up: soda bottles, fishing tackle, plastic bags, and small pieces of Styrofoam being some of the more common items that come ashore. On occasion you may find larger items that are a bit more difficult to remove, such as large chunks of Styrofoam, automobile tires, and rubber mooring buoys. On occasion, though, something washes up that you really don't know how to deal with, due to size, complexity or weight. Dealing with beach debris in all forms is the focus in this month's newsletter.



## Who Owns This Land, Anyway?

When something large washes up on your beach, or near your beach, the first thing you need to know is who owns the land it is on. Private property owners are responsible for whatever washes up on their beach, assuming they own the tidelands. So in most instances, if it's on your property, it's up to you to remove it. Beach property ownership can be tricky, however, and you may or may not own the land that the debris is located on. Approximately 1,700 miles of our state's saltwater tidelands are in state ownership. About 300 miles are managed by the State Parks and Recreation Commission and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The remaining 1,400 miles of tidelands are managed by Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR). And if the large item that washed up on the beach is a distance from the upper shoreline, it may possibly be on state managed property. When the State Constitution was adopted in 1889, the State of Washington asserted its ownership of the beds and shores of navigable waters up to and including the line of ordinary high water, otherwise known as mean high water. Between 1889 and 1969, approximately 60 percent of state managed tidelands were sold to the public. So the extent of public or private ownership on any particular piece of tidelands varies depending upon the date the uplands were patented (transferred from government to private ownership.)

For tidelands where the uplands were patented prior to statehood in 1889, the private upland ownership extends to the mean high water line *or* to the meander line, whichever is further seaward. Uplands patented after that date extend to the line of mean high water. The *meander line* is the original surveyed shoreline, and in instances where erosion has occurred since 1889, this line may be well out into the Sound. This means that what looks like tidelands could actually be privately owned uplands. Mean high water is the average of the elevations reached by all of the high tides for a particular area over a long period of time. A complete cycle of high tides takes 18.6 years. In most cases, the mean high water line falls just seaward of the line of old drift logs in the upper tideland area. Since the meander line is a surveyed line rather than a constant elevation line, it may be very difficult in areas where patents existed before statehood to determine the exact location of the boundary between public tidelands and private uplands. It is important to know this distinction, however, in determining whether the large item that washes up on your beach is on your land or on state managed land.

If the item washes up on state land managed by Department of Natural Resources (DNR), they would most likely first look at the potential environmental impact, and try to find funding to deal with it. If the item is a derelict vessel, DNR has a program to deal with that, which is discussed in the next section.

The Army Corps of Engineers states in their Navigation Website, “Our section supports navigation by maintaining channels and other structural features for safe navigation in the Puget Sound region and on the Washington coast. Maintaining channels requires keeping them at serviceable and reliable depths and widths by dredging and other means. Maintaining also means removing navigation hazards and underwater obstructions.” Information about their programs can be found on their Navigation Website at <http://www.nws.usace.army.mil/PublicMenu/Menu.cfm?sitename=NAV&pagename=home> On the left side of the page for that website, click on Floating Plant Unit, which describes their five vessels, and when they can be used for removal of wrecks and obstructions, snagging and clearing for navigation, and drift and debris removal. If you feel that what you see is a potential navigational hazard, they suggest you first contact your fire or police department, if that department has rescue boats. The Corps usually cannot send out a vessel immediately, as they go around the Sound on a set schedule, so they often rely on fire or police departments to tie off large floating debris items to a dock or pier until they are able to come by and retrieve the item. The Navigation Section Staff link on the left side of their webpage gives you the contact information on who to report the navigational hazard to: Stephen “Skip” Green, Captain, Puget Motor Vessel, at (206) 399-0358. Or Joe Gustafson, Chief, Floating Plant Unit, at (206) 498-8795.

## Derelict Vessel Removal



On occasion, derelict boats wash ashore, and determining why they are there, who they belong to, and how to deal with them can be a bit of a puzzle. Sometimes, boats come loose from their moorings, particularly after a storm. Other times, an owner may not be able to afford moorage in this tight economy, and may decide to just remove identification on the vessel and cast it adrift. In any event, it can be a real problem to remove. Your first action should be to notify the police department. If you’re in luck, they may already be on the lookout for a missing boat. Otherwise, they may contact the Coast Guard or state agencies to try to determine who the owner is, and if they can get the owner to remove it. Washington State Department of Natural Resources also has a derelict vessel removal program. They have a prioritization process for vessels to be removed based on the boat’s potential damage to the environment. If a sailboat with no fuel on board washes

ashore, and is not causing an environmental hazard, it will be assigned a low priority. A fishing vessel that is full of fuel, that is sinking over a kelp bed and has an easily identified owner, would probably move to the top of the list. For more information on this program, which is funded by a fee added to your annual boat registration, see: [http://www.dnr.wa.gov/RecreationEducation/Topics/DerelictVessels/Pages/aqr\\_derelict\\_vessel\\_removal\\_program.aspx](http://www.dnr.wa.gov/RecreationEducation/Topics/DerelictVessels/Pages/aqr_derelict_vessel_removal_program.aspx)

This website page also includes links to Derelict Vessel Removal Program Guidelines, as well as the Derelict Vessel Reporting Form.

## Other Marine Debris Disposal

When you encounter an injured or dead marine mammal on your beach, do not touch it, and be sure to keep your dogs and any children at a distance. And never pick up, touch, or remove a seal pup from the beach; the mother may be nearby, having a meal before coming back to tend to her pup. There are Marine Mammal Stranding Networks around Puget Sound that you can call to report a marine mammal on your beach. A map showing who to contact in your area can be found at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/Marine-Mammals/Stranding-Maps.cfm> In Island County, you would call the Central Puget Sound Marine Mammal Stranding Network at 1-866-ORCANET, or 360-678-3765. Or you can check their website for additional information at: <http://www.orcanetwork.org/strandings.html>

Puget Soundkeepers Alliance, based in Seattle, can be helpful when you have something that you are concerned may be toxic and you'd like to have taken care of. Chris Wilke, Executive Director, states: "Mostly we deal with liquid (wastewater, stormwater, and spills) or fine debris (dust, etc.) pollution sources. For these I'd say you can actually report anything at all." He added that his top suggestions would be anything that causes cloudy water, or anything that might be toxic. Or, for that matter, any spill.

His top suggestions for solid materials they can respond to include:

- Anything large and difficult to remove (requiring heavy equipment, for example)
- Anything that looks like it could be the result of deliberate dumping at a specific site, like construction debris
- Anything where the source is known
- Anything that might result in a spill (abandoned or slowly sinking vessel)
- Any area where you would like to organize a volunteer cleanup

## What About the Small Debris I Find on the Beach?

Whether you regularly walk the beach in your community and pick up litter, would like to volunteer to pick up litter in our State and County parks in Island County, would like to organize a beach litter cleanup in your community association, or just have some larger debris items you'd like to dispose of, a program funded by the Washington State Department of Ecology has a solution that can take care of your needs! For more information on any of the programs below, please contact Scott Chase at [schase@wsu.edu](mailto:schase@wsu.edu), or call 360-387-3443, ext. 258

Purple Card Program: if you pick up litter whenever you walk along the beach, and the quantities are more than you want to deal with by putting it in your own household trash, you can apply for a laminated "Purple Card" that will let you dispose of beach litter at your local Island County transfer station for free! This is for beach litter only, and cannot include household trash. Special thick plastic bags are available for free to use when walking the beach.

Community Beach Litter Cleanup Event: if you'd like to arrange a litter pickup event in your community association, and have enough members to join in, we can provide you with plastic bags and arrange for free disposal when you take it to the transfer station.

One Time Litter Disposal: One or more large items washed up on your beach, or maybe they've been there awhile. You and friends or neighbors can load into a truck, but you'd like to dispose of it for free. If you contact us beforehand, we can help out.

Adopt a Beach: Your organization would like to "adopt" a nearby beach and clean it up on a regular basis (monthly, quarterly, yearly, or just "on occasion".) We can help arrange for free disposal.

**Volunteer:** A beach in your part of the island is likely to need beach litter pickup in the near future. You'd like to volunteer to do so, but would enjoy joining a few other people for a couple of hours of walking along the beach, rather than going alone. Contact us to be notified when and where beach cleanup events will be happening in your area. (Note: most of these events take place on Whidbey, due to more beaches and a larger volume of litter.)

## Events

### **Harvest the Rain: Learn How to Build a Rain Barrel Saturday, Oct. 8, 11 am – noon.**

Learn all about how to build a rain barrel for future use in your garden. A presentation by Stacy Aleksich of Snohomish Conservation District and hands-on demonstration by Scott Chase, Shore Stewards Coordinator, will show you all you need to know in building your own rain barrel. No registration required; clinic will be at Skagit Farmers Supply, 8815 271<sup>st</sup> St NW, Stanwood.



*This product is funded by the Island County Marine Resources Committee and the Northwest Straits Commission. You can view the Marine Resources Committee website at [www.islandcountymrc.org](http://www.islandcountymrc.org). The website for the Northwest Straits Commission can be seen at <http://www.nwstraits.org/>*



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*If you would like to download or view previous Shore Steward newsletters, please visit [www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter](http://www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter). Your Shore Stewards Coordinator is Scott Chase, (360) 387-3443, ext 258, or email at [shorestewards@wsu.edu](mailto:shorestewards@wsu.edu).*

