

Coast Walk This Weekend

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Dozens of people will hit the beaches in Kodiak this weekend, but sunbathing, swimming or recreation probably won't be on their mind. Instead, folks will take part in the first ever Coast Walk. The two day event is hosted by Kodiak Island Trails Network and sends volunteers out onto Kodiak's 81 road system beaches to clean up marine debris.

Since 2007 ITN has been diligently cleaning up Kodiak's beaches, primarily with the help of local volunteers. In 2009, the organization began coordinating with set-netters along the western and southern shores of the island and implemented an incentive program for collecting marine debris. During the summer, fishermen working at set net sites are encouraged to clean up nearby beaches, and ITN offers per pound compensation. The program has been a success, and is one example of Kodiak's entire community collectively tackling the marine debris problem.

A few weeks ago ITN Director Andy Schroeder met with Alaska Senator Mark Begich. Schroeder spoke highly of local clean up efforts, but suggested a new approach to the issue — eco tourism.

"The community people, it's easy to get a day. It's harder to get a week from somebody locally. Because they want to spend their vacation time doing something else. Now, Alaska is a destination. So if you can kind of market this volunteer vacation kind of thing, so we get the longer commitment, more remote stuff with visitors. So tourism through debris. The volunteer vacation. You hear that? We need to have that as part of our tourism package. Travel to Alaska, see the world, and oh by the way, help us clean up the ocean. Feel good about your vacation. I like it."

While eco tourism has grown worldwide, it's a relatively untapped industry in Kodiak, and Alaska. Schroeder said it's worth discussing, and could prove to be a successful endeavor.

But until the flocks of do-good tourists arrive, ITN will have to rely on Kodiak's bountiful crop of local Samaritans.

Coast Walk 2013 kicks off on Saturday. ITN is asking that those hoping to participate register for beaches online so there's no overlap in clean ups. Registration is available on islandtrails.org. You can also find more information about where to pick up bags and what to do with collected debris.