

NOAA, CDQ Groups Back Bering Sea Beach Clean Ups

Tuesday, 20 August 2013

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

Almost a half-million dollars will be heading into five Bering Sea villages to assist in cleaning marine debris from their beaches. The Alaska Marine Stewardship Foundation has received a \$210,000 grant from NOAA's Restoration and Marine Debris Program, and has secured the same amount in matching funds from area CDQ groups. Dave Gaudet, the director of the foundation in Auke Bay, said his group has been working with villages on beach clean ups for 10 years.

"Four of these five communities we've already done marine debris clean ups in the area, so we know they are capable of doing that. The second reason that we picked them is they are all members of Community Development Quota groups, and it is the Community Development Quota groups that is putting up the matching funds, so that was one of the important points in picking some of these villages."

The villages where the clean ups will occur are Port Heiden, Nelson Lagoon, Nikolski, Saint George and Savoonga. Gaudet estimated that up to 55 tons of marine debris will be collected in the five communities, and that the intent is more than just to make the beaches look nicer.

"Marine debris is ugly. You don't want it on your beach, but it can also be dangerous. Particularly to wildlife. We see pictures all the time of wildlife that's entangled, caught in loops of net or loops of line. It can also float back into the water and cause problems with boats, get it in your propeller, things like that. So it's more than an annoyance. We know from experience that there's a lot of debris in some of these areas. Particularly where we worked in Nelson Lagoon and Port Heiden, there's just a tremendous amount of debris that's along those beaches."

On the beaches along the north side of the Alaska Peninsula, Gaudet says a lot of lost fishing gear, particularly crab line and crab buoys, are found, but there is also a lot of plastic water bottles from Russia and Asia. What has not been found yet, however, is debris that could be traced back to the 2011 Japanese Tsunami.

"We have seen a lot of that in the Pacific, but we haven't seen very much of it in the Bering Sea yet. We actually have a project ongoing at Port Heiden right now, and when I questioned them about that, they said no, they weren't really seeing anything that indicated to them that it was tsunami debris. We're going to have a project that's also going to start also in Nelson Lagoon soon, and they've been down looking at their beach and they haven't reported either. We completed a project on Saint Paul Island this year, earlier this year, and when I questioned them about it, they had not seen anything that to them was clearly debris from the tsunami."

Gaudet said the Foundation works directly with locals to conduct the clean ups.

"They are by far and away the best and most effective way to work in these areas. They know the area, they have the equipment and you just

can't bring people in to work in these areas. Just the expense of bringing them in and trying to put them up would be overwhelming. So in each of the areas there's either a tribal government or a local government that gets together and hires these people, goes out and cleans the beaches according to our protocols."

Gaudet said there's a chance a couple of the projects could get started this fall, but all five are expected to be finished by the end of 2014.