Summer Clean Up Hauls in 100 Tons of Beach Debris

Wednesday, 06 November 2013

{audio}/images/stories/mp3/131106.marine_debris_update.mp3{/audio}

Jay Barrett/KMXT

Up to 100 tons of marine debris was removed from remote Alaska beaches this summer, but doing something with it after collection is becoming increasingly difficult.

Dave Gaudet, the director of the Alaska Marine Stewardship Foundation, said this summer’s clean-up projects included eight areas from Southeast to Southwest Alaska: Craig, Sitka, Yakutat, Cape Suckling, Afognak, Kodiak, Nelson Lagoon, Port Heiden and St. Paul.

The area with the biggest haul was at Cape Suckling between Cordova and Yakutat, where 55,000 pounds was removed from the beach. However, Gaudet says the pristine condition didn’t last long, as a fall storm brought a surprising amount of new debris, largely from Japan.

Overall though, reports of debris from the 2011 Japanese tsunami were down, but there has been some concerns in the public about radioactivity from the damaged Fukushima Nuclear power plant reaching Alaska as contaminated debris. Gaudet, however, said he’s not worried, as the reactor meltdown happened well after the tsunami washed items out to sea.

A new problem in the clean up continuum is the scaling back of Chinese recyclers willing to buy American debris. Gaudet says that placing debris in commercial landfills will be costly, and future projects may see more of the limited clean up funds go toward shipping debris to Eastern Washington for disposal, and away from the actual clean up.

Funding for this year’s projects came from the State of Alaska’s Impact Assessment Program.