

ITN to Present at Alaska Forum on the Environment

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

The Alaska Forum on the Environment is coming up in February and will feature presenters from all over the state, including Kodiak. Tom Pogson is the director of marine programs and outreach for the Kodiak Island Trails Network and will be presenting at this year's forum. He said the meetings typically draw more than 4,000 people and focus on topics ranging from toxicology to marine debris.

ITN spent a lot of time collecting and monitoring marine debris last year, so it's no surprise that it will be the focus of Pogson's presentation at the conference.

"We did four different marine debris projects last year with funding from the Alaska Marine Stewardship Foundation through the state of Alaska. The legislative appropriation for Japanese tsunami debris clean up and also we did the first year of a two year community marine debris removal from Tugidak Island. And those were four very busy projects."

Pogson said ITN collected more than 65 tons of marine debris in 2013, which was more than any other year combined. While that amount is certainly impressive, it came at a time when dealing with the debris is increasingly more difficult for the organization.

"And so we have so much marine debris in a year in which our recycling options ended. And we had to try and find solutions. One solution that we found sort of after the fact is that there is an organization in Vancouver, British Columbia called the Plastic Bank that's partnering organizations like ours with manufacturers to create a 10 percent marine debris, plastic essentially source. And we've sent some debris to them and we're not sure how that's going to work long term but we're in a partnership with them."

While that partnership is positive, Pogson said ITN has still outgrown its storage and sorting facility at Gibson Cove.

"The National Marine Fisheries Service Enforcement Center had allowed us to be there and we collected so much debris we really were forced to go somewhere else. We have developed a relationship with the local Coast Guard base and they have given us a license for roughly two acres of land in the Buskin Valley where we're going to be able to sort, store and essentially

process marine debris.”

Pogson said the extra space is really exciting and could allow opportunities for on site sorting and educational tours and outreach. He said the organization is very limited with what it can do with the debris right now because it doesn’t have enough space to open the bags and actually sort through the debris.

Poor weather this fall prevented ITN from even collecting all of the marine debris it gathered this summer. Pogson said the landing barge was unable to make the trip down to Tugidak so all of the items collected there are still on the island.

“There was not any weather window that would allow the landing craft. It’s secure. We had a friend fly by and have a look at it. Everything’s there, it’s fine, but we’re going to have to pick it up next year.”

The Alaska Forum on the Environment kicks off on February 3 at the Denaina Convention Center in Anchorage.