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Project Aims To Help Clean Up Gulf Of Maine, Record Location Of Marine Debris

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NH Sea Grant

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Reporters and editors are welcome to attend this event. Ken La Valley can be reached at 603-862-4343 or ken.lavalley@unh.edu.

DURHAM, N.H. - A new project is encouraging residents and fishermen alike to remove trash from more than just the beaches.

Marine Debris to Energy is a project that seeks a holistic approach to cleaning up the Gulf of Maine, says Ken La Valley, NH Sea Grant commercial fisheries specialist. Marine debris can include derelict commercial fishing gear such as nets, trawl material or buoys and may end up floating farther offshore on the ocean surface or littering the bottom.

The debris can create hazards for vessel navigation and interfere with a fisherman's operating gear, La Valley explains. It may also entangle protected marine species or result in "ghost fishing," where the gear continues to catch the targeted species but without economic benefit. The debris on the shore, underwater and on the ocean surface will be removed in this ongoing effort by volunteers and fishermen.

Marine Debris to Energy will have an official kickoff at the Yankee Fishermen's Cooperative in Seabrook, April 18, 2008, at 10 a.m. This event will include a ceremonial opening of the Dumpsters to collect marine debris. In addition, speakers will discuss project goals and objectives and project information will be distributed.

The Dumpster at the Fishermen's Cooperative will be available to collect commercial fishing gear waste. Smaller bins will be placed at recreational fishing locations, marinas and tackle shops to collect monofilament line, which can take hundreds of years to decompose. The project will also encourage the continuation of beach clean-ups to remove garbage from those locations.

Debris sources and distribution patterns in the Gulf of Maine will also be recorded using underwater sonar. Fishermen, beach cleanup crews and the general public will be able to report the location, including latitude, longitude and water depth where they found the debris. Once the information is entered into a database, it will be available on GIS maps for online access at www.nhmarinedebris.org.

"If someone wants to learn about how ocean currents might impact the location of marine debris, they can layer GIS maps for current and debris location together to learn about it," La Valley says.

In addition, once the debris is disposed of in collection bins along the coast, it will be converted into energy via a waste-to-energy plant in the state, La Valley adds.

The project is funded by the NOAA Marine Debris Grants program, and cleanup will be conducted by a team of individuals from the UNH Environmental Research Group, NH Sea Grant, UNH Cooperative Extension and the Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation. Additional support will be provided by commercial and recreational fishermen, the cleanup volunteers and educators.

For more information on the program and the kickoff, please contact Ken La Valley at 603.862.4343 or ken.lavalley@unh.edu. For more information about beach cleanups and the Blue Ocean Society Adopt-A-Beach Program, please contact Jen Kennedy at 603.431.0260 or jen@blueoceansociety.org.

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