

Media Backgrounder: Marine Debris Recovery

Shortly after the earthquake and tsunami of 2011 that devastated the Tohoku region of Japan, its government did an amazing thing. Japan made gifts of money to the governments of countries whose shorelines would be impacted by the vast amount of material that was torn from the lives of coastal residents by the enormous wave that laid waste to Tohoku. Canada received a gift of \$1 million, which it transferred to the B.C. Ministry of Environment to administer.

The Ministry of Environment made these funds available to First Nations, municipalities and non-profit groups working to remove marine debris from the most heavily impacted regions along the outer west coast of B.C. The groups listed below organized themselves as the Vancouver Island Marine Debris Working Group, to co-ordinate efforts and share best practices.

This year, the funds provided by Japan will be fully expended. The Working Group decided to collaborate further, to recover the maximum amount of debris possible and ensure that the maximum amount is recycled rather than landfilled. The group created the “GarBarge” project: a tug-and-barge operation that spans the entire west coast of Vancouver Island, heli-lifting debris from remote locations otherwise accessible only by boat or trail. The groups worked throughout the spring and summer to bag over 400 cubic metres of debris and rope together thousands of floats and other large material for helicopter lifting--an estimated 40 tonnes of material in all.

The GarBarge is scheduled to begin its circumnavigation of Vancouver Island September 18, 2016 and the project will culminate in an event to take place at Steveston Harbour, October 1-2. The Consul General of Japan has been invited to attend to receive our thanks and a brief report on how the gift was put to use.

Volunteers are welcome to attend the event October 1-2, as all of that debris needs to be sorted and re-bagged for recycling, repurposing or disposal. Volunteers are asked to [reply via Facebook](#), so we can plan for appropriate numbers. Anyone seeking to repurpose plastics should come prepared to lend a hand or make a donation.

The Vancouver Island Marine Debris Working Group Members:



BC Marine Trails Network Association is a volunteer organization with a mandate to secure and care for accesses and campsites throughout the BC Coast for small beachable watercraft. To date, our stewardship committee, with the generous donation from the Japanese Government has successfully removed 3.44 tons of debris in 2015 and approximately 4 tons in 2016, from difficult to access remote locations...with the aid of kayaks. We have so far focused our work between Quatsino Sound and the North Brooks peninsula. More information at www.bcmarinetrails.org.

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Since 2012, the **District of Ucluelet**, through Council's leadership, has been a contributory figure for the Japan Tsunami Debris file by establishment of Ucluelet's Marine Debris Program and as a local government subcommittee representative for the Provincial-Federal Japan Tsunami Debris Coordinating Committee Planning and Scientific Monitoring teams. To help address the possible influx of tsunami driftage material, the Environmental & Emergency Service Department established a scientific monitoring site through the NOAA Marine Debris Monitoring and Assessment Project, directed large scale clean-up projects which at times required specialized cleanup teams, hosted several Japanese clean-up events and memorials, developed a response and recovery plan, and initiated a regional emergency committee. The Department and a small team of volunteers discovered and analyzed the first pieces of recognized Japan Tsunami Marine Debris (JTMD) material with probable Japanese species to be recognized in British Columbia and the first JTMD wood to land in North America with living Japanese biofouling. A communications plan evolved throughout the program to administer local to international media relations, and to advise and engage with the public.

Ucluelet's program has gained respect and recognition from neighbouring communities and jurisdictions, all levels of governments, international scientists and organizations, local to international media companies, and the people of Japan. The District of Ucluelet was awarded \$81,538 in 2014 and \$30,000 in 2016 for shoreline cleanup efforts in the Ucluelet, Barkley Sound, and the Broken Group Island in the Pacific Rim

National Park Reserve. The successful proposal is supported by significant in-kind contributions in terms of volunteer efforts and resources from 28 collaborative partner agencies and organizations.

The Department continues to collaborate with local and international partners to collect data, assess the debris, and reduce possible impacts to our natural resources and coastal communities.

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The Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup began in Vancouver in 1994 and since then has grown to be a truly national program, with cleanups taking place year-round in every territory and province. The program is a joint conservation initiative of the Vancouver Aquarium and WWF-Canada. The

Shoreline Cleanup activates more than 60,000 volunteers each year at more than 2,000 cleanup sites across Canada. In 2014, the Shoreline Cleanup received funding from the Government of Japan, via the Government of Canada and Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Environment to coordinate remote cleanups on the west coast of Vancouver Island on shorelines affected by debris from the 2011 Tohoku tsunami.

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Living Oceans Society was formed in 1998 in Sointula, a tiny fishing village in Vancouver Island's north coast region. Our marine debris work began locally in 2008 and expanded to include the northwest coast of Vancouver Island in 2012.

In 2013, we became founding members of the VIMDWG and accessed funding from the Tsunami Debris Relief Fund administered by the Province. To date, we have removed over 8 tonnes of material from the WCVI; we expanded operations this year to bag an estimated 10 tonnes. We provide co-ordination for the GarBarge project.

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Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council

The Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council (NTC) provides programs and services to over 9,000 registered members. The role of the NTC is to represent fourteen First Nations in three regions stretching 300 kilometers of the Pacific Coast of Vancouver Island from Brooks Peninsula in the North to Point-no-Point in the south. Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council represents Ditidaht, Huu-ay-aht, Hupacasath, Tse-shaht, and Uchucklesaht Ahousaht, Hesquiaht, Tla-o-qui-aht, Toquaht, and Yuu-cluth-aht Ehattesaht, Kyuquot/Cheklesah, Mowachat/Muchalaht, and Nuchatlaht First Nations and provides a variety of programs and services to them. As well, it can act as a sounding board and coordinator on many issues of common concern. The NTC operates many programs that help further the wellbeing of the communities within their sphere of influence. Nuu-chah-nulth means “All along the mountains and the sea.”

Following the Tohoku Earthquake in Japan, the Japanese government provided funding to the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations to help clean the shorelines of tsunami debris in an effort to reduce the negative effects of marine debris on coastal environments. JAS Projects, a Vancouver Island-based consulting company acted as the lead coordinators for this project and worked with each Nation over a two year time frame to clean and remove tsunami and marine debris from traditional coastal territory of the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations. With over 150 volunteers and the help of nation guardians, JAS Projects was able to remove over 200 cubic meters of marine debris from Nuu-chah-nulth coastal territory.

JAS Projects is a concept to completion consulting service focused on program and project management for First Nations.

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The **Ocean Legacy Foundation** was formed in 2013 in Vancouver and has worked locally and internationally to clean shorelines, map pollution, develop education and explore sustainable end-of-life technologies to mitigate plastic pollution. Since 2014, Ocean Legacy has assisted in removing close to 20

tonnes of plastic driftage from the West Coast of Vancouver Island with community partners and was able to purchase its first Japanese based plastic to fuel machine. In 2016, we received funding from the Government and kind people of Japan issued by the Government of Canada through the British Columbia Ministry of Environment. This season, operations have collected close to 200 bags with community partners plus additional loose plastic items.

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The **Surfrider Foundation** is a non-profit grassroots organization dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of our world's oceans, waves and beaches through a powerful activist network. Founded in 1984 by a handful of visionary surfers in Malibu, California, the Surfrider Foundation now maintains over 250,000 supporters, activists and members worldwide. The Vancouver Island Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation is based in Victoria, BC and has been in existence since 2004. Since 2011, the Vancouver Island Chapter has been removing debris from remote beaches along the west coast of Vancouver Island. In 2014, 2015, and 2016, the Vancouver Island chapter received funding from the Government of Japan, via the Government of Canada and Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Environment to assist with these cleanup efforts.

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