

NIE Connect with your environment

Learn about environmental issues, in your community and how you can get involved.



PENNSYLVANIA SEA GRANT

Shorewood Park in Harborcreek Township is outlined in yellow.

Applications open for coastal grants

The Department of Environmental Protection is accepting grant applications for the preservation and protection of Pennsylvania's coastal zones. The deadline is Oct. 17.

The DEP's Coastal Resource Management Program (CRMP) awards grants for projects that improve public access, preserve habitats, enhance community planning and educate the public about the benefits of the state's coastal zones. Grants are open to any incorporated nonprofit, academic institution or government organization that borders Pennsylvania's coastal zones along a 112-mile stretch along the Delaware Estuary and 77 miles along Lake Erie.

Eligible projects are reviewed and evaluated by program staff, two local Coastal Zone Advisory Committees and the State Coastal Zone Advisory Committee, based on criteria outlined in the "Grant Application Instruction

Guide." Past Lake Erie-funded projects include:

- A National Weather Service buoy for the Pennsylvania Waters of Lake Erie that collects additional weather and wave data to provide safety information for boaters.

- A marine archaeology survey and inventory of identified shipwrecks

- Development of a master site plan for Shorewood Park in Harborcreek Township

- This weekly NIE page which involves 6,000 area students so they, too, can learn about and solve local environmental issues

An updated application instruction guide and link to the online application and previously funded projects can be found at www.dep.state.pa.us/river/grants/grants.htm. Contact Amy Murdock, Erie County Planning program administrator, at 451-6018 or amurdock@eriecountygov.org.

— Anna McCartney



NOAA



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/Anna McCartney

A dramatic increase in plastic marine debris injures and kills marine life, interferes with navigational safety, has adverse economic impacts for coastal communities and poses a threat to human health. The majority comes from cities and towns when sewage systems and storm drains overflow.

It's all garbage

You can prevent trash from fouling waterways

By ANNA MCCARTNEY
Contributing writer

An astounding 560,000 volunteers in 91 countries picked up more than 16 million pounds of trash during the 2014 International Coastal Cleanup.

Even though the ICC sheds light on marine debris, it can't begin to eliminate the immense amount of our trash that reaches the ocean, or the serious problems it creates. Marine debris injures and kills marine life, interferes with navigational safety, has adverse economic impacts for coastal communities and poses a threat to human health.

While some debris may come directly from ships, the majority started its journey miles away in cities and towns around the world. Inadequate garbage disposal, overflow-

ing sewage systems and storm drains, and rivers carry it to the ocean. Marine debris is now found worldwide even in remote places far from any human inhabitants. The amount has increased drastically over the last 40 years because of our throwaway society.

Data collected during cleanups confirms that single-use plastic items can no longer be ignored. Water and beverage bottles, cigarette butts, straws, food containers, bags, plastic utensils, and straws — the list is endless.

Because plastic does not biodegrade, it can remain for centuries, causing havoc in marine ecosystems. Coral, fish, seabirds, turtles and other animals die from choking, intestinal blockage and starvation when they ingest the plastic or are caught in it. Fur-

thermore, plastic breaks down to smaller pieces, which act like sponges by absorbing manufactured toxic chemicals in the water. Because these pollutants accumulate and magnify up the food chain, they are also finding their way into food we eat.

This enormous problem is preventable. A good start is eliminating single-use plastic from the waste stream.

- Refuse disposables, reduce, reuse and recycle (in that order) at home, work and school.

- Buy products with little or no packaging.

- Keep storm drains clean — they drain to waterways and the ocean.

- Keep cigarette butts/litter off streets and beaches.

- Properly dispose of fishing lines, nets and hooks.

- Encourage lawmakers

to address marine debris, such as bans on plastic bags and smoking; extended producer-responsibility laws; bottle bills; street sweeping policies, etc. (Germany, the Netherlands and other countries have mandatory disposable bottle deposit systems and their recycling rates are better than 95 percent.)

- Educate your family and friends.

- Register to volunteer for the 2015 PA Lake Erie ICC at www.nie.goerie/coastalcleanup.

To learn more or to schedule a program or cleanup at your school or workplace, contact Anna McCartney.

ANNA MCCARTNEY, a communications and education specialist for Pennsylvania Sea Grant, can be reached by e-mail at axm40@psu.edu.



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Union City High School take part in the 2014 ICC.

Your school can join September cleanup

Students and their teachers in local K-12 programs can join the effort to collect trash and data on their school grounds and in their neighborhoods for the 30th annual September International Coastal Cleanup.

The Coastal Resources Management Program and Pennsylvania Sea Grant once again invite schools receiving sponsored Tuesday newspapers that include the "Connect with your environment" page to make a difference by hosting a school cleanup this month. This effort is an important component of the CRMP-funded pages to educate and involve local students in protecting the Lake Erie Coastal Zone.

Students will conduct school cleanups and tally every item they find on school grounds and nearby neighborhoods on data cards provided by the Ocean Conservancy. The results and student writ-

ing about the cleanups along with other student-led environment projects throughout the year will be featured in "your space."

Many past participating students have started recycling programs and tried to come up with solutions to the litter problem at their schools. Their efforts and yours can help to solve this preventable problem.

Contact Anna McCartney at axm40@psu.edu to register your school or classroom and to reserve bags, gloves, data cards and instructions. You can decide on a convenient day, and once your cleanup is complete, you will share the data with PA Sea Grant. Results will be added to the Lake Erie ICC data. If your school doesn't receive the Tuesday newspapers, you can order them at www.nie.goerie.com or e-mail Christopher.LaFuria@timesnews.com.

— Anna McCartney



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/Fran Skellie

Register for ICC at <http://nie.goerie.com/coastal-cleanup/>.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/Troy Mayne

Plastic trash is mistaken for food by marine animals.



ALGALITA MARINE RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Microplastic is eaten by fish and enters the food chain.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/Rebecca R. Jackrel

Plastic debris breaks down to smaller pieces.

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Check out these websites to learn more:

<http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/>
www.paseagrant.org/
www.algalita.org/
www.oceanconservancy.org/
<http://plasticpollutioncoalition.org/>

Plastic water and soda bottles, straws, food wrappers, cups, plates, plastic utensils. You may think picnic but — it's no picnic when they become marine debris. These items are consistently on the "Top 10 ICC Items Found," with cigarette butts leading the pack. Write a letter to encourage readers to use reusable bags, bottles and utensils instead, to dispose of cigarette butts and litter properly, and to participate in this year's ICC. Submit your letter to axm40@psu.edu for possible publication in "your space."

