

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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### **Oregon Marine Debris Team**

**Oregon** - Four non-profit organizations with long histories of stewardship over the Oregon coast have joined forces to address the threat of 'tsunami debris' washing up on our shoreline.

The four groups - CoastWatch, Surfrider Foundation, SOLVE and Washed Ashore - along with academic partner Oregon Sea Grant, have formed the Oregon Marine Debris Team to collaborate on citizen-based efforts to track and clean up debris generated by the tsunami that struck Japan in March, 2011. An estimated 1.5 million tons of debris pulled out to sea by the tsunami is circulating the Pacific-an unknown portion is likely to wash up in Oregon.

The goal of the Oregon Marine Debris Team is to organize hundreds of volunteers to systematically monitor the coast, identify and report areas where tsunami debris is accumulating, and participate in cleanup efforts. Willing citizens will be assigned to pools of volunteers available to respond to cleanup alerts in a given area.

Oregonians interested in being part of a citizen-based effort to take care of the Oregon shore are encouraged to sign up and get on the list for notification at [bit.ly/MvxUI4](http://bit.ly/MvxUI4).

"Public agencies are making plans at the state, federal and local levels to address tsunami debris issues," says Charlie Plybon, Surfrider Foundation's Oregon Field Manager. "They have an important role to play in setting up hotlines, providing debris receptacles and handling material that is dangerous or too bulky for volunteers to handle. We commend these efforts."

"However, cleaning up our beaches relies upon all of us. The key to

responding to this challenge to our coastal environment lies with educating and activating volunteers," Plybon continues. "Hundreds of people are needed to monitor every beach, cove and headland for marine debris. Hundreds are needed to turn out for cleanups. Agencies are not able to do that. It is up to us, the people who care for our coastline and take responsibility for it, to step up. Our role as non-profits is to provide the support to make that happen."

The groups forming the Oregon Marine Debris Team began working together earlier this year, holding a series of 13 public workshops throughout the coastal region and inland. The workshops, featuring speakers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other agencies, helped to inform Oregonians about the nature of the tsunami debris problem, dispel unnecessary concerns about radiation, and explain the role that state and federal agencies can play, and the roles for which volunteers are crucial. Through these workshops, the Team began building a database of potential volunteers for their collective project.

The Oregon Marine Debris Team intends to capitalize on Oregon's long history of public stewardship over the public beaches, of which these groups have been an important part:

- CoastWatch is the only program in the nation through which the citizens of a state have adopted and keep watch over its entire shoreline. It is a project of the Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition, a regional conservation group which has addressed beach management, land use, water quality and marine conservation issues on Oregon's coast for more than 40 years.
- SOLVE is an Oregon non-profit whose mission is to bring Oregonians together to improve the environment and build a legacy of stewardship. Through SOLVE's programs, volunteers clean up litter, remove invasive species, plant native plants, and maintain and monitor natural areas. Since 1984, their coast-wide beach cleanups have brought together thousands of volunteers to keep our coastline safe and clean.
- The Oregon chapters of the Surfrider Foundation have long organized citizen and volunteer based programs from beach cleanups to water quality sampling. Oregon chapters executed over 36 beach cleanups in 2011 and have nearly twice that many planned for 2012.
- Washed Ashore, based in Bandon, is a uniquely Oregonian project through which volunteers gather marine debris and process it into art supplies to create monumental sculptures. Hundreds of volunteers then participate in the construction of these giant art pieces which the community-based project displays as a traveling exhibit to

educate the public about the issue of marine debris.

- Oregon Sea Grant (OSG) is based at Oregon State University (OSU), and works to apply the best available science to timely and important marine issues, and engage with coastal stakeholders to help them reach informed decisions. OSU and OSG are involved in several efforts related to Japanese tsunami debris, including public education and volunteer engagement.

"We have an extraordinary tradition of public use of our shoreline, and public stewardship over that shoreline," says CoastWatch Director Phillip Johnson. "The Oregon Marine Debris Team is another expression of that. If there is a threat to our beaches, we need to step up as citizens to deal with that, not wait around for someone to take care of it for us. That is the reason all these organizations exist in the first place, and it is the reason we have come together to collaborate on the tsunami debris challenge." The long-term goal of the new partnership is not only to deal with the immediate threat of tsunami debris, but to develop an approach to address the broader issue of marine debris. The Oregon Marine Debris Team is also represented and collaborates on Oregon's Japanese Tsunami Marine Debris Coordination efforts, West Coast Governor's Alliance, and Governor's Tsunami Debris Task Force. For more information on how to get involved in monitoring and cleaning up tsunami debris, sign up for the Oregon Marine Debris Team volunteer list at <http://bit.ly/MvxUI4>. For questions, contact Briana Goodwin, SOLVE, [briana@solv.org](mailto:briana@solv.org) or (503) 844-9571, x317, or Phillip Johnson, CoastWatch, [orshores@teleport.com](mailto:orshores@teleport.com) or (503) 754-9303.