

Project Name -- Removal of Ghost Fishing Gear from Cuttyhunk Shoreline

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Summary

This multi-sector partnership will undertake concerted over-land and vessel-based fishing gear debris extraction working with commercial lobstermen and volunteers to remove debris known as ALDFG (Abandoned, Lost or otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear) from the base of cliffs and on boulder-strewn shores. Volunteers (island residents, students, artists, shellfishermen) and donated equipment will be organized to collect and strategically stage debris piles along the shoreline, to then be removed by floating or hauling gear to a vessel, or by transporting with a truck/tractor over-land to a centralized location, processed, and then barged to the mainland for disposal. A public event including art created from project debris will showcase the results.

Partnering Organizations (as of November)

Massachusetts Environmental Police
MA Division of Marine Fisheries
Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association
Town of Gosnold
Cuttyhunk Shellfish Co

Buzzards Bay Coalition
Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation
Cuttyhunk Island Artist Residency
Cornell University

Project Timeframe

Prep work Feb-March 2023

Field work/exorcism April 2023

Public art event June 2023

Project Description

This removal work is part of a multi-sector plastics/pollution reduction community response, an approach often employed by the Center for Coastal Studies Marine Debris & Plastics Program in gear removal projects that brings together commercial fishermen, artists, community volunteers, town boards, local businesses and others to successfully collect, remove, document and dispose of debris responsibly.

The proposed field work will involve "many hands to make light work". Volunteers from Cornell, Buzzards Bay Coalition, the artist residency, the Center's own Beach Brigade and others will be engaged to support all ALDFG handling, hauling and processing. Heavy equipment provided by the Town of Gosnold, Cuttyhunk, lobstermen and contractors will assist with extracting, hauling and removing debris. Trainings for project personnel will ensure safe handling of very dangerous debris and impart local knowledge regarding the island's access points. Lobstermen will be selected for their vessel size and capacity, experience in handling boats in nearshore waters, familiarity with the Cuttyhunk shoreline, and equipment/assets which could assist with removal and transport.

With all these components in place, the project will not only remove thousands of pounds of ALDFG, but it will generate what may be the first data set regarding ALDFG in Southern New England. Data regarding gear type, age and provenance of gear, amount of gear (by weight and count) and wildlife impacts will all feed directly into the regional effort to address ALDFG and create a Southern New England Marine Debris Action Plan. Under the umbrella of NOAA Marine Debris Program, a regional action plan will position stakeholders to better identify priorities and seek solutions to issues of importance to that region. With an organized collection, removal and disposal effort leveraging well-established intersectional partnerships, this collaborative approach toward habitat restoration can provide a template for future debris remediation on islands in the Southern New England area, and by incorporating the data and findings in a Southern New England Action Plan, more island communities may join the effort to improve their own shorelines.

Upcoming principal tasks include:

- enlisting lobstermen and their vessels (up to 5) through the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association who will commit to assisting with shoreline removals during the month of April 2023;
- fine-tuning the spring break field work expectations for Cornell's students and locating suitable housing and board for their group while on the island;
- coordinating efforts with the Buzzard Bay Coalition to avoid sensitive bird areas during removal efforts, plan the field work around critical nesting or staging times, and engage their volunteers for assistance both in April and June;
- coordinating with island residents beginning as soon as possible, to identify which may be able to participate in person or provide housing support;
- discussing with the artists residency program how we will dovetail the marine debris artist participation into their week-long June residency;
- broadcasting the volunteer opportunity within all channels including the CCS Beach Brigade (over 300 individuals), CCS general membership and on-line supporters, and artist network developed by the CCS Marine Debris & Plastics Program;
- promoting activities through social media, personal communication and press releases.

Before the field work begins in April, we will conduct an aerial survey of the shoreline using a CCS drone, just prior to heading out there for the removal operations. This is an essential component of the project as it is by far the most efficient way to assess an island's shoreline and any debris thereon. By including this component in the budget, we will save hours and days of time that would otherwise be needed to assess by foot or by vehicle, and we will obtain much higher quality information about the presence and access points for the ALDFG.

Field work in April will engage the on-island heavy equipment to collect and move gear to centralized locations. Volunteers will log all data, process ghost gear to remove items of interest to artists including rope, buoys, bricks and other gear parts, and prepare all debris for removal by vessel or barge. Gear will be sorted and loaded by type into containers and then head to the mainland via ferry cargo hold, lobster vessels or landing craft. Containers hauled to the mainland (New Bedford or Fairhaven) will be sent to a waste/recycling company for proper disposal.

Some material will be set aside for the marine debris artists, who will visit the island in June to create their pieces and present them at a public event on-island to share results with the community.