

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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From: Maine Marine Trades Association

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### **MAINE COALITION URGING BOATERS TO PREVENT MARINE DEBRIS**

“This isn’t just any shampoo bottle. It’s a Farrah Fawcett shampoo bottle!”, exclaimed Stacey Keefer. Stacey is the Director of the Maine Marine Trades Association and was volunteering with others to clean marine debris (trash) off of Eastern Egg Rock in Muscongus Bay. It was a late April day when a team was helping the Seabird Institute prepare the seven-acre island and field research station for the summer season. The island is one of several preserves on the Maine coast that provide critical nesting habitat for puffins, guillemots, terns, and other seabirds. One of the younger volunteers (much too young to know of Farrah Fawcett’s fame and iconic hair that Faberge capitalized upon during the late 70’s) was the first to find the shampoo bottle among the many pieces of plastic and foam that littered the island after the major winter storms. A vintage shampoo bottle is a good reminder of how random plastics can enter the marine environment and easily last for decades.

Keefer is a paddler and sailor and often cleans up marine debris and trash in her travels. Her efforts helped inspire a new awareness and educational campaign about marine debris with respect to boaters. At the Maine Marine Trades Association (MMTA) Keefer helps represent the boating industry in Maine and advocates for boat builders, dealers, marinas, boatyards, and related businesses. Their member businesses serve both recreational and commercial customers. After the increase in recreational boating since the pandemic, MMTA partnered with several other organizations to promote more informed, responsible, and respectful boating. They partnered with the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, Maine Island Trail Association, and Friends of Casco Bay to put together a website with information for boaters ([lovemainewaters.org](http://lovemainewaters.org)) and messaging using the social hashtag #LoveMaineWaters.

That coalition has now extended their educational outreach thanks to a collaboration with Maine Sea Grant with support from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA). Keri Kaczor, Environmental Literacy and Workforce Development Program Manager for Maine Sea Grant “this project is a great opportunity to send the message that we’re all in this together, we all contribute to marine debris, and we all have a role to play as far as preventing marine debris in our shared waterways.”

The coalition considered and discussed the need for better public information about responsible navigation around lobster gear and sea farms. Any vessel traveling with line cutters on their prop shaft has the potential to run over a buoy and accidentally cut a line attached to a trap or other gear. Sailboats also run a risk of snagging lobster gear lines in their rudders, keels, or props. There are various ways that lobster traps can end up as derelict fishing gear (aka “ghost gear”). “We

decided it was time that recreational boaters could step up and be more conscientious about their possible contribution to this problem,” noted Keefer.

Monique Coombs, Director of Community Programs with the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association (MCFA), has represented the commercial fisheries' perspective in the coalition. Coombs describes, "Fishing gear is incredibly expensive, and losing it due to unforeseen circumstances can significantly impact a fisherman's day or even their entire season." The industry appreciates the support according to Coombs, "MCFA loves the #LoveMaineWaters campaign because it effectively conveys that marine debris is an issue we all contribute to, but also one we can all help clean up!"

Marine debris has further possible economic impacts beyond fishermen losing their gear. Debris of all types can wash ashore in rural communities where the municipal resources are limited for their own trash removal, let alone what is deposited there unexpectedly by the sea. The process of "going to the dump" on an island can be complicated. Residents of Matinicus, Maine use a ferry to transport their trash and recycling for disposal on the mainland at an estimated cost of \$.40 to .50 cents per pound, according to Eva Murray, Matinicus Town Clerk and Volunteer Trash Coordinator. That cost does not pay a commercial hauler -the labor is 100% volunteer burden. The volunteers must work around limited ferry schedules and only make about 16 trips per year with the island's non-compostable refuse. Though island residents do care about water and shoreline stewardship, their resources cannot tackle the growing burden of ocean cleanup.

Many Maine islands are uninhabited or sparsely populated, thus hundreds of miles of coastline have no official stewards for debris removal. Maine Island Trail Association (MITA) is a nonprofit membership organization dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the wild islands of coastal Maine. They promote stewardship by people who love to recreate on islands and coastal public access points. In 2023, MITA volunteers removed 2600 bags of trash from Maine's island shorelines, including over 1300 derelict traps weighing over 12 tons. "The islands tend to catch and hold any marine debris that drifts by," says MITA Program Director Brian Marcaurette. "Keeping shorelines clean is an endless task. It is the largest component of our stewardship work and budget."

And lastly, marine debris can have detrimental impacts on wildlife. Marine creatures of all types and sizes can be impacted by consuming debris that mistakenly looks like a food source, or from exposure to ingested microplastic debris over time. Direct external physical harm is well known, and whale deaths make the headlines. But the sea turtle that dies from consuming a candy wrapper and a nesting bird tangled in balloon ribbons, don't usually make the news. The Seabird Institute tries to keep seven protected nesting islands in the Gulf of Maine as clean as possible, but Sue Schubel notes, "Islands only stay cleaned up for a couple minutes it seems!" Schubel is the Outreach Educator for Audubon's Seabird Institute whose budget is influenced by marine debris as well. In recent years they were able to secure a NOAA marine debris grant to clean up 13 tons of debris off Stratton Island in Casco Bay --filling several 40-yard dumpsters. But despite that injection of grant funds, the constant cleanup takes resources and focus away from research and conservation projects that are the core of their mission.

Stacey Keefer knows that her volunteer time cleaning up a vintage shampoo bottle and other marine debris is not the answer –education and prevention are key. She summarizes the project,

“We know marine debris is not just from recreational boaters, and not just from fishing sources. But we can all do our part to try to be cleaner by securing loose items, navigating carefully, and being respectful of all water users –human and nonhuman. This awareness campaign is a way to bring attention to a challenging but important topic for all those who love Maine waters”

The coalition’s grant project has also received support from the Maine Coastal Program, the Maine Lobstermen’s Association, and the Maine Harbormasters Association. This summer MMTA will be working on distributing educational signage to boatyards, marinas, and public boating access points. They are also planning to create some short video clips to add to our communication products. The project is supported by NOAA and funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). For more information on the campaign and to learn tips on how to navigate around lobster buoys, go to [lovemainewaters.org](https://lovemainewaters.org). To acquire signage or posters regarding boater marine debris prevention reach out to the Maine Marine Trades Association: [info@mainemarinetrades.com](mailto:info@mainemarinetrades.com).

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Image #1

Vintage plastic shampoo bottle found washed ashore on Eastern Egg Rock with other marine debris and trash. Photo credit: Stacey Keefer



Image #2

Seabird Institute staff and volunteers staging bags of marine debris to be removed from Eastern Egg Rock using small boats. Photo credit: Stacey Keefer



Image #3

One of the social media graphics created for the coalition's educational campaign that urges boaters to help prevent marine debris.

# HELP KEEP OUR WATER CLEAN

by preventing marine debris



**#LOVE  
MAINE  
WATERS**

[lovemainewaters.org](http://lovemainewaters.org)

Image #4

Some examples of marine debris. Photo credit: Stacey Keefer

