

# GOAL

## CLEAN SEAS



## ABOUT GOAL: CLEAN SEAS

Marine debris is a significant challenge facing our ocean and marine wildlife. Debris, including lost or abandoned fishing gear and trash, poses threats to marine life from ingestion or entanglement and it damages habitat quality. Marine debris is an ongoing challenge in our national marine sanctuaries, risking the health of the wonders that sanctuaries are meant to protect.

**Goal: Clean Seas** was established in May 2018 as a community stewardship partnership to remove marine debris between Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, and Blue Star Dive Operators. Blue Star is a program established by Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary recognizing tour operators who are committed to promoting responsible and sustainable diving, snorkeling, and fishing practices to reduce the impact of these activities on ecosystems in the Florida Keys. The **Goal: Clean Seas** program is unique in that it targets hard to reach, underwater, and/or difficult debris from sensitive habitats without causing undue harm. The work requires training, permits, and dedication from those performing the cleanups.

The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation now partners with two sanctuaries, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, to train and equip community partners—local businesses and industries that rely on the marine ecosystem—to conduct specialized removals and empower long-term conservation of these sites. **Goal: Clean Seas** also engages the public in marine debris awareness and prevention through education and outreach.

Removing marine debris and derelict fishing gear restores, protects and enhances marine habitats and ecosystems for the species that rely on them; supports a robust, sustainable tourism industry; and prevents future damage through entanglement, abrasion, and breakage of corals, kelp forests, and other critical ecosystems.



Photo Credit: DiveN2Life



Photo Credit: The Rainbow Reef

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Support from the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation was critical to the success of the **Goal: Clean Seas** initiative in 2020.

The Foundation funded eight different Blue Star Dive Operators to conduct debris removal dives in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Over 28 dives, volunteers collected 4,642 pounds of debris and 9,339 feet of rope and fishing line. Dive shops reported having to go to deeper reefs to locate marine debris at sites, an indicator of the program's success after three years of work. In 2021, the Foundation will add new dive operators to the program thanks to a grant from the NOAA Marine Debris Program.

The Foundation expanded the program to Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, working with local spiny lobster fishermen and tourism operators to remove debris from remote beaches on Santa Cruz Island. Over the course of three collection events, 34 volunteer participants spent 350 hours clearing 8,360 pounds of debris from the shoreline, benefiting the marine wildlife and ecosystems of the Channel Islands.

Overall, in 2020 the Foundation supported the removal of 13,002 pounds of debris from 12,000 square meters of underwater area and 2.5 miles of shoreline in national marine sanctuaries through the **Goal: Clean Seas** program.

In both the Florida Keys and Channel Islands, support from the **Goal: Clean Seas** program served as a financial support by replacing a portion of lost tourist income for tourism industry operators that have seen their businesses hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021, the Foundation plans to continue current partnerships and start new ones, pursue new funding opportunities, and grow the success of **Goal: Clean Seas** to protect these treasured places in our ocean.

**Goal: Clean Seas** has been an inspiration in our workplace. It encourages partnership, tenacity, and an overwhelming sense of caring for the environment amongst our staff.

*Maddie Cholnoky, Rainbow Reef Dive Center*

It's important that we as a community don't make a mess, especially on the pristine beaches of Santa Cruz Island. Today, we cleaned up the beach at Yellowbanks, the epicenter of where the lost fishing gear goes. And so we were really effective in getting a lot of gear off the beach.

*Captain Chris Voss, commercial lobsterman*



Photo Credit: Laura Ingulsrud

## GOAL CLEAN SEAS: FLORIDA KEYS

Through **Goal: Clean Seas Florida Keys**, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary trains SCUBA diving operators on environmental best practices for removal of marine debris from sensitive areas like coral reefs. Blue Star Diving Operators apply through a competitive Request for Proposal process to receive funding through the Foundation to conduct marine debris removal dives.

Building on the success of the program in the two prior years, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation provided funding to eight recognized Blue Star Dive Operators in 2020 through the **Goal: Clean Seas Florida Keys** initiative. These included DiveN2Life, The Dive Shop at Ocean Reef, Key Dives, Horizon Divers, Rainbow Reef, Pirates Cove, Forever Young and Island Ventures. The dive operators conducted 28 debris removal dives in 2020, which resulted in 4,642 pounds of debris taken out of the water. Divers collected items such as derelict lobster traps, fishing rope and line, cinder blocks, swimming fins and flippers, aluminum cans, and assorted single-use plastics. In all, divers cleaned approximately 12,000 square meters of reef and seafloor.

A key aspect of **Goal: Clean Seas Florida Keys** is empowering the community to act as stewards of the environment. Through the dive shops, 73 recreational divers participated in removals, which resulted in 355 hours of volunteer cleanup time.

After three years of work, the program is showing signs of broad success. Dive shops have reported that they are starting to have to go to deeper reefs in order to find marine debris at sites, an indicator of our success in responding to the damage caused by Hurricane Irma.

Along with the benefit to the reef ecosystem, the program also supports the dive shops themselves and the resilience of the Keys economy. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, dive shops and the rest of the tourism industry were cut off from their customer base as roadblocks on U.S. Route 1 stopped all outside visitors, causing immense economic hardship. Having these contracts to remove marine debris helped to financially support the dive shops and their staff members and work through this difficult time.



## GOAL CLEAN SEAS: CHANNEL ISLANDS

**Goal: Clean Seas Channel Islands** was launched in 2020 by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation to fund shoreline cleanups to remove thousands of pounds of marine debris from difficult-to-access locations on two of the northern Channel Islands, Santa Cruz Island and Santa Rosa Island (planned), within Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary.

**Goal: Clean Seas Channel Islands** launched with a two-day marine debris cleanup on July 30-31, 2020, associated with NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries' "Get Into Your Sanctuary" weekend. Two local commercial lobster fishing crews, captained by Sam ShROUT and Chris Voss, and local non-profit Santa Barbara Channelkeeper removed marine debris from a mile-long shoreline on Santa Cruz Island known as Yellowbanks. The lobstermen devised a system with their vessels' hydraulic pulleys to retrieve heavy debris from the shore.

A second **Goal: Clean Seas Channel Islands** cleanup was held on September 16, 2020 in conjunction with California Coastal Cleanup month. Three commercial lobster fishing crews, led by Captains Sam ShROUT, Jim Colomy and Chris Voss, and volunteer staff from local tourism outfitter Santa Barbara Adventure Company removed marine debris from another shoreline on Santa Cruz Island called Chinese Harbor, which acts as a catcher's mitt to collect marine debris, especially plastics, floating in on the prevailing currents. Kayaks donated by the Santa Barbara Adventure Company were used to ferry collected debris and volunteers back to vessels waiting offshore.

Between the cleanups at Yellowbanks and Chinese Harbor, the 34 cleanup participants successfully removed 8,360 pounds of trash and debris, including 131 lost lobster traps as well as miscellaneous plastics, foam fishing buoys, and rope. All debris was transported back to the mainland and deposited into a dumpster at the Santa Barbara Harbor for sorting and recording. The project partnered with Marborg Industries to haul the trash and recyclables away.

In addition to improving the marine environment, **Goal: Clean Seas Channel Islands** benefits regional tourism and fisheries-based businesses impacted by marine debris. These two industries have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting loss of business, and the program provides opportunities to partner for stewardship and engages these hard-hit businesses in the community.



## LOOKING FORWARD

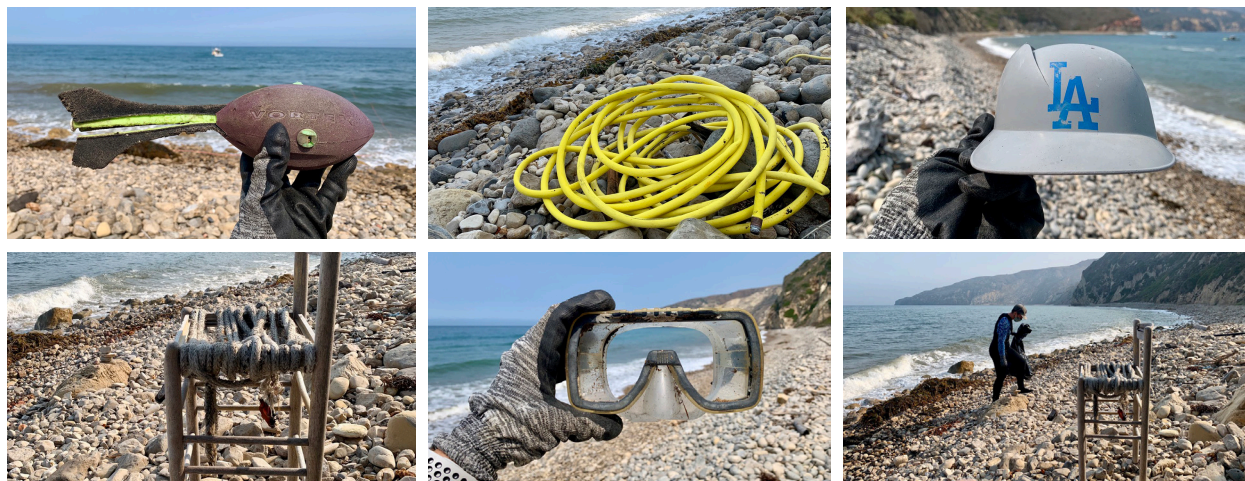
In 2021 and beyond, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation will continue its support of **Goal: Clean Seas** by strengthening the partnerships with communities and sanctuary staff, exploring new ways to maximize current efforts, and securing long-term funding.

In the Florida Keys, a new grant from the NOAA Marine Debris Program will amplify this ongoing work and allow the ability to add more dives from additional Blue Star Dive Operators. In 2021, the Foundation will welcome two new Blue Star Dive Operators to the program: Sailfish Scuba and Florida Sea Base. In addition, as some reefs are seeing decreased amounts of debris due to the program's success, scoping dives are planned to find new locations where marine debris is collecting. Finally, the Foundation will collaborate with highly trained divers from the U.S. Army Special Forces to remove heavy industrial debris from U.S. government restricted waters, assisted by safety and medical teams, with dive perimeter support from the U.S. Coast Guard.

In the Channel Islands, the Foundation will continue and expand the important partnership with commercial lobstermen, local tourism operators, nonprofit organizations, and community volunteers in 2021 and beyond. The program will institutionalize yearly cleanup efforts and address marine debris in Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary by introducing new elements, including integration of smaller scoping cleanups with lobstermen; expanding the number of lobstermen who are engaged in cleanup efforts; and adding new cleanup locations on the islands.

### WHAT OTHER DEBRIS ARE WE PULLING FROM THE SANCTUARIES?

HOT WATER HEATER | NERF VORTEX AERO HOWLER FOOTBALL | WROUGHT IRON PATIO TABLE SEATING FOR 6 | WOODEN CHAIR WITH A MAKESHIFT ROPE SEAT | DECORATIVE CRAB (WITH SUNGLASSES) BOTTLE OPENER | "CAUTION" ROAD SIGN | PINK BB GUN | REFLECTIVE PAVEMENT MARKER | CINDER BLOCKS YELLOW HOSE | SWIMMING FINS/FLIPPERS | SNORKEL MASK | CHANNEL MARKER WITH LIGHT STILL INTACT AND ON | MINI LA DODGERS HELMET



Photos Credit: Laura Ingulsrud

## ABOUT

### NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY FOUNDATION

The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, established in 2000, is the official non-profit partner of the National Marine Sanctuary System. The Foundation is a leading voice for U.S. protected waters, working with communities to conserve and expand those special places for a healthy ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes.

The Foundation directly supports America's national marine sanctuaries through our mission to protect species, conserve ecosystems and preserve America's maritime heritage. We accomplish our mission through community stewardship and engagement programs, on-the-water conservation projects, public education and outreach programs, and scientific research and exploration. The Foundation fosters innovative projects that are solution-oriented, scalable and transferable, and develop strategic partnerships that promote the conservation and recovery of species and their habitats.

## ABOUT

### FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Designated on November 16, 1990, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is one of the marine protected areas that make up the National Marine Sanctuary System. Administered by NOAA and jointly managed with the State of Florida, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary protects 3,800 square miles of waters surrounding the Florida Keys. Within the boundaries of the sanctuary lie spectacular, unique, and nationally significant marine resources including North America's only coral barrier reef, extensive seagrass beds, mangrove-fringed islands, more than 6,000 species of marine life and archeological treasures.



Photo Credit: Daryl Duda/NOAA

## ABOUT

### CHANNEL ISLANDS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary was designated in 1980 to protect marine resources surrounding San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa and Santa Barbara islands, off the southern California coast. The sanctuary spans approximately 1,470 square miles, extending from island shorelines to six miles offshore, and encompasses a rich diversity of marine life, habitats, and historical and cultural resources.

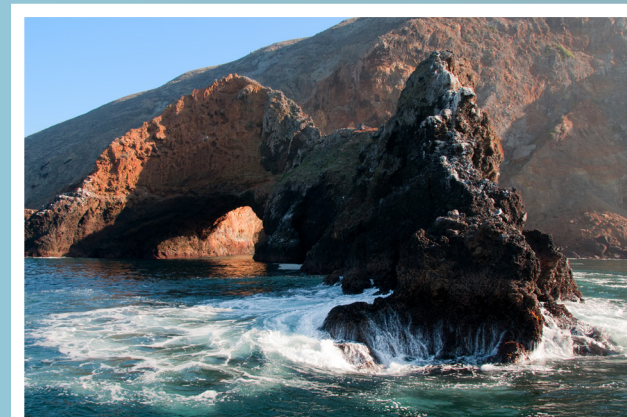


Photo Credit: Robert Schwemmer/NOAA



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