Native Lands & Abuse of Privileges

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Have you ever heard of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch? The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is a collection of marine debris in the North Pacific Ocean. Marine debris is litter and trash that ends up in the ocean, seas, and other large bodies of water. While many different types of trash enter the ocean, plastics make up the majority of marine debris because they are not biodegradable. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch covers an area twice the size of Texas or three times the size of France. 80 percent of plastic in the ocean is estimated to come from land-based sources, with the remaining 20 percent coming from boats and other marine sources. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is rapidly expanding as rotating currents called “gyres” pull more and more trash into the area. In each of the ocean’s five “gyres”—one in the Indian, two in the Atlantic, and two in the Pacific—have accumulated their own garbage piles of varying size, with the Great Pacific Garbage Patch being the largest and most well-known. A trash cleanup system called “Jenny” has been invented after many trials and seems to be working. But Great Pacific Garbage Patch contains roughly 79,000 tons of plastic. “Jenny” can remove 20,000 pounds of trash and they need about ten “Jennys” to clean up half of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch in five years. However, A 2020 study found that more than 24 billion pounds (11 million metric tons) of plastic are being dumped into oceans each year, a figure that could nearly triple by 2040.

Solutions have to begin with three things on land:

1) Forcing companies to create biodegradable plastics or a biodegradable replacements for different kinds of plastics by protesting and choosing to shop in other ways and voting for policy changes.

2) Preventing trash dumping on a global scale so the ocean has a chance to renew itself for future generations. That will take a lifetime of support from many countries but we all have a lot to gain: fishing, water travel and sports and a healthy ecosystem.

3) Teaching litter prevention in our homes, schools, community centers, cities and parks. This is something that is small enough that everyone, even children can pitch in and help with.

How bad can it get?

In Hawaii, “News Now” talked about how the Moiili neighborhood was desperate for help because there was so much park trash that the community park was being turned into a drug den. The problem had gotten so bad that people felt trapped inside of their homes.

In the Dominican Republic there were waves of garbage covering the beaches in the summer of 2018, they got sixty tons of trash washed onto their beaches after several days of heavy rain. The Dominican Public Works\Communications Ministry did manage to clean trash on the coast of Santo Domingo, Montesano’s Beach.

In Alaska tons of trash from across the ocean was fouling the nation’s parks and beaches. The problem was that much of this trash has reached the ocean from other places by riding the currents and shows up on Alaska’s beaches after storms.

In Puerto Rico’s San Juan Estuary, one of the top inland Caribbean waterways, is a body of water that goes to freshwater rivers and streams which flow to the ocean and then it mixes with the sea water, but was still full of trash. They held a massive cleanup in 2013, and was able to pull more than 30,000 pounds of trash out of the estuary. The stuff they
extracted was refrigerators, tires, shopping carts, toys, fishing nets, and a lot of plastic bottles. This trash hurts the sea creatures because the plastic can't be digested and gets stuck in their stomachs, ties them up in nets and in other ways kills them.

What effect do these problems have in these places? There are lists of health and safety concerns to protect people and animals from broken glass, cans, needles, nails or more dangerous stuff like animal excretions that can bring disease. These conditions are not only impacting water quality; but also the food chain as farmers water their fields and as we eat fish from the ocean.

If we don’t start now that we know what is going on, then we are intentionally hurting the ocean’s water quality and sea creatures.

If we ignore the problem and keep polluting then our children and grandchildren will not have use of the beautiful parks, open spaces and beaches that we take for granted in our native lands.

We can make saving our oceans, beaches and parks fun if we find people who have creative ideas to help us think about getting our neighbors to pitch in with solving these issues.

There are millions of ways we can solve the issue of pollution. We can help out with trash pickup days. We can participate in “Save the Earth Days. We can raise funds to create events that raise awareness of the problem. We are all special in our own way and I know that if we get together, talk to each other, and spend time thinking about the problem, we can find solutions that work now and for future generations. What I am trying to say is the parks, beaches, open spaces and oceans are privileges that we are taking for granted. If we do not take care of them, then we will lose them to the trash we dump into them. I have created a short video that will help demonstrate the problem to children and families which includes some ideas on how to get involved with solutions for a new generation.

References


5. https://www.earthday.org/

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