

TROPIC NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

February 1998

Volume 10 Number 5

The Ocean: How You Can Help

1998 The International Year of the Ocean

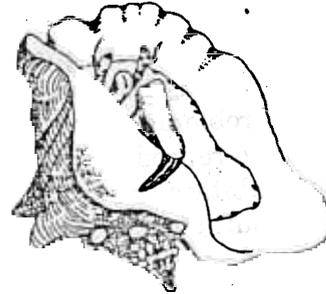
Here in the Virgin Islands we are surrounded by the ocean. Our actions affect its health. How we use or abuse water has far reaching affects. Here are some tips for helping the ocean that you can practice in your own home:

- Buy organic, locally grown produce when you can. Agricultural runoff introduces thousands of pounds of fertilizers and pesticides into the ocean every year. Encourage farmers to reduce their use of hazardous chemicals.
- Reduce the amount of trash you create. Each wrapper, bottle, or box you don't throw away eliminates the possibility that someone will find it during a beach cleanup.
- Use baking soda, vinegar, and borax for cleaning jobs that used to require bleach, detergents, and ammonia.
- If you must use harsh chemicals, don't pour them down the drain or into storm sewers. Keep them in their original containers, tightly sealed and wrapped, and put them with your regular trash.
- Leave the car at home as often as possible. Every trip you don't make reduces the threat of oil contaminating the ocean.
- If you fish, fish responsibly. Don't throw trash overboard, and remember that many fish species are suffering from overfishing. Take only what you will eat.
- Conserve water as much as possible to avoid overloading your local sewage system. Overloading can cause overflows of raw sewage and debris into local waterways, especially when it rains.
- Don't waste water by letting the faucet run when shaving, brushing your teeth, or doing the dishes by hand.
- Use sediment retention measures on your property to prevent soil from washing into the sea.
- Save energy by using fans and open windows to air condition your home.
- Fill a gallon plastic bottle with water and place it in your toilet tank. You can save up to 5,000 gallons of water per year.

Suggestions by Center for Marine Conservation.

Buyer Beware!

Some souvenirs you buy in the Caribbean could end up costing a lot more than you paid for them.



Queen Conch

The World Wildlife Fund, together with other Caribbean governments and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)

has put together a brochure to educate tourists and protect endangered wildlife. "Buyer Beware." available at the Division of Fish and Wildlife office, outlines which wildlife products should generally be avoided when looking for souvenirs. Among them are sea turtle products, reptile skins and leather, wild birds and wild bird feathers and coral jewelry (except locally imported black coral.)

In the Virgin Islands, it is legal to take a queen conch shell if it is 9 inches or larger. On the other hand, V.I. law prohibits the removal of shells, sea fans, corals etc. normally found on our beaches. These items will be confiscated by U.S. Customs agents upon departure from the territory.

If you are tempted to buy a wildlife product - plant or animal - ask questions about the product's origin and the species' status. If the vendor seems poorly informed, think twice about your actions. Otherwise, your purchase might encourage the continued illegal trade in wildlife, and be confiscated either before you leave the country you are visiting or as you return home. When in doubt don't buy!

Quote

"The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased and not impaired in value.

- Theodore Roosevelt

Why Restore Habitats?

Imagine that your house has been leveled, your local grocery has vanished and your garden has been turned into a parking lot. That's the problem facing many species of fish and wildlife in the United States. If a beach is paved, a wetland filled or a tide-flat contaminated with toxic materials, its inhabitants may not survive. Their home and food supplies have been poisoned, degraded or destroyed.

Because a damaged home is better than no home at all, plants and animals may continue to live in degraded or polluted environments. However, food may be less abundant or of poor quality. Good spawning or nesting areas may be scarce. Pollutants may cause health problems or diminish the ability of some organisms to reproduce. Plants and animals in poor-quality habitats live under constant stress and may lack sufficient reserves to recover from setbacks such as drought or disease. Habitat restoration attempts to reverse these problems by rebuilding damaged environments for the benefit of fish and wildlife.

Habitat is the place where a community of plants, animals and microorganisms live. Habitats generally are defined by their nonliving parts (sandy beaches, rocky shores) or by key plants or animals (sea grass beds, algal plains, coral reefs). Aquatic habitats are also characterized by their chemistry, for example, whether water is fresh or salt, nutrient-rich or nutrient-poor.

Habitat restoration is the cleanup, repair or reconstruction of habitat that has been damaged or destroyed. Restoration projects can speed up natural processes, such as the spread of plant life and the break-down of oil by bacteria, allowing

injured areas to recover more rapidly than they would otherwise.

Waters close to shore provide essential food and shelter for fish and many other species. A large number of the fish caught by recreational and commercial anglers spend part of their lives in coastal waters, including mangroves habitats. Habitat destruction has contributed to the decline of many species. Rebuilding habitat is essential to the recovery of these stocks.

Habitat restoration and cleanup can help protect humans from dangers caused by spills of toxic chemicals. The repair of injured marine habitat can provide additional benefits. Plants stabilize shorelines and protect wildlife habitats that otherwise might be damaged by floods or coastal storms. Plants and animals in restored wetlands can filter pollutants and hasten their breakdown into non-toxic compounds, improving the quality and clarity of water in coastal areas.

Habitat restoration is extremely important. But restoration is expensive, it takes time, and our best efforts don't always work as planned. Preserving habitat and preventing damage is always more effective and economical than restoring habitat that has already been injured.

Final Note - Each foot of shoreline that is preserved is important. So is every inch of coral that is repaired, every tree planted, and patch of mangrove restored. Your efforts count.

Excerpted from booklet on Habitat Restoration, produced by Washington Sea Grant Program.



This newsletter was funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration Acts, the Caribbean Fishery Management Council and the Government of the VI.

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