



Washington State Marine Debris Task Force News Release

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY
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Crew reaches beached dock on Olympic National Park shoreline

FORKS, Wash. – After being turned back by dangerous conditions the day before, a team led by National Park Service staff, including the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Oregon State University, on Friday safely reached and inspected a dock suspected to be set adrift by the March 2011 Japanese tsunami.

The team was able to thoroughly inspect five surfaces of the dock and took live samples of potentially invasive species for laboratory analysis. More about the species sampled and whether they pose a risk to the sensitive ecosystem should be known over the weekend.

They noted extensive damage to the dock, likely due in part to the rough weather and continued battering of the dock on rocks on the beach. They also looked for – but did not find – an identifying plaque like the one found on the Misawa dock that washed ashore on Agate Beach. However, the team located some Japanese writing in one of the holds, and photos are being shared with the Japanese consulate to officially confirm this dock as tsunami debris.

A tracking beacon is now attached to the dock to track its position. Photos taken today will be used to help develop a plan to remove the dock from the beach. No timeframe has been set for removal, however. Crews also took samples to test for any radioactivity, which is considered highly unlikely by state Department of Health experts.

Today's expedition is the only time this month crews will be physically able to inspect the dock until early January due to tides and daylight access. The Incident Command Post will stand down beginning this weekend and resume operations when tides allow safe access to the dock.

"This week-long operation has only been possible through the great cooperation and support of many organizations," said Terry Egan of the Washington Emergency Management Division. "We have a deep appreciation for the initial response by the U.S. Coast Guard and the daily work by state natural resource agencies and federal partners to track down and inspect this dock."

Photos from today's inspection will be posted as soon as possible to <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ecologywa/sets/72157630409598334/>.

The samples taken are being evaluated to identify any invasive species by scientists from Williams College and from the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History.

Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary regulations prohibit disturbing wildlife by flying below 2,000 feet within one nautical mile of the coast or offshore islands. This includes the area where the dock has washed ashore.

Pending further information about the risks associated with the dock, the section of the park between Goodman Creek and Jefferson Cove is closed to all public entry.

Olympic National Park protects more than 70 miles of wild Pacific coast. Much of this coastline, including the dock's location, was designated by Congress as Wilderness in 1988. Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary protects the 3,188 square miles of the marine environment seaward of the national park.

The coastal section of Olympic National Park and Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary protect one of the richest and biologically diverse intertidal zones on the west coast of North America. Invasive species present a significant risk to the rich native coastal community.

Marine debris is an ongoing problem with everyday impacts, especially around the Pacific, and natural disasters can make the problem worse. Anyone sighting other significant debris that may be from the tsunami is asked to report it to DisasterDebris@noaa.gov.

As of Dec. 13, NOAA has received approximately 1,432 official debris reports, of which 17 have been confirmed as definite tsunami debris. For the latest information on tsunami debris please visit <http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/tsunamidebris> and <http://marinedebris.wa.gov>.

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