

CLEAN BEACHES | CLEAN OCEANS

BY BARBI WALKER

Traveling to the beach this summer? Remember to pack sunscreen and your eco-friendly sense. As you head out to catch rays, waves or to just dig your toes in the sand, take your green living habits with you. From ordering certain types of fish to rethinking what you pack, these choices can have a positively green effect on your favorite beach.

Thinking green about your seaside vacation means you need to think about the ocean – and keeping beaches beautiful is the starting point of keeping oceans healthy.

The old camping/hiking rule “pack out what you pack in,” applies equally to the beach. A good day at the beach or lake means you’ll have (at a minimum) sunscreen and water, both of which come in plastic bottles. Most of the time you’ll have more – snacks, sodas or juice, and maybe the ubiquitous plastic grocery bag to carry it all in. If you bring anything else in disposable containers (like bags), make sure to take the empty containers with you and recycle them.

Plastic, Plastic, Everywhere

Surprisingly, human trash, despite our country’s long-standing “no littering” laws and “Keep America Beautiful” campaigns, continues to find its way onto beaches nationwide.

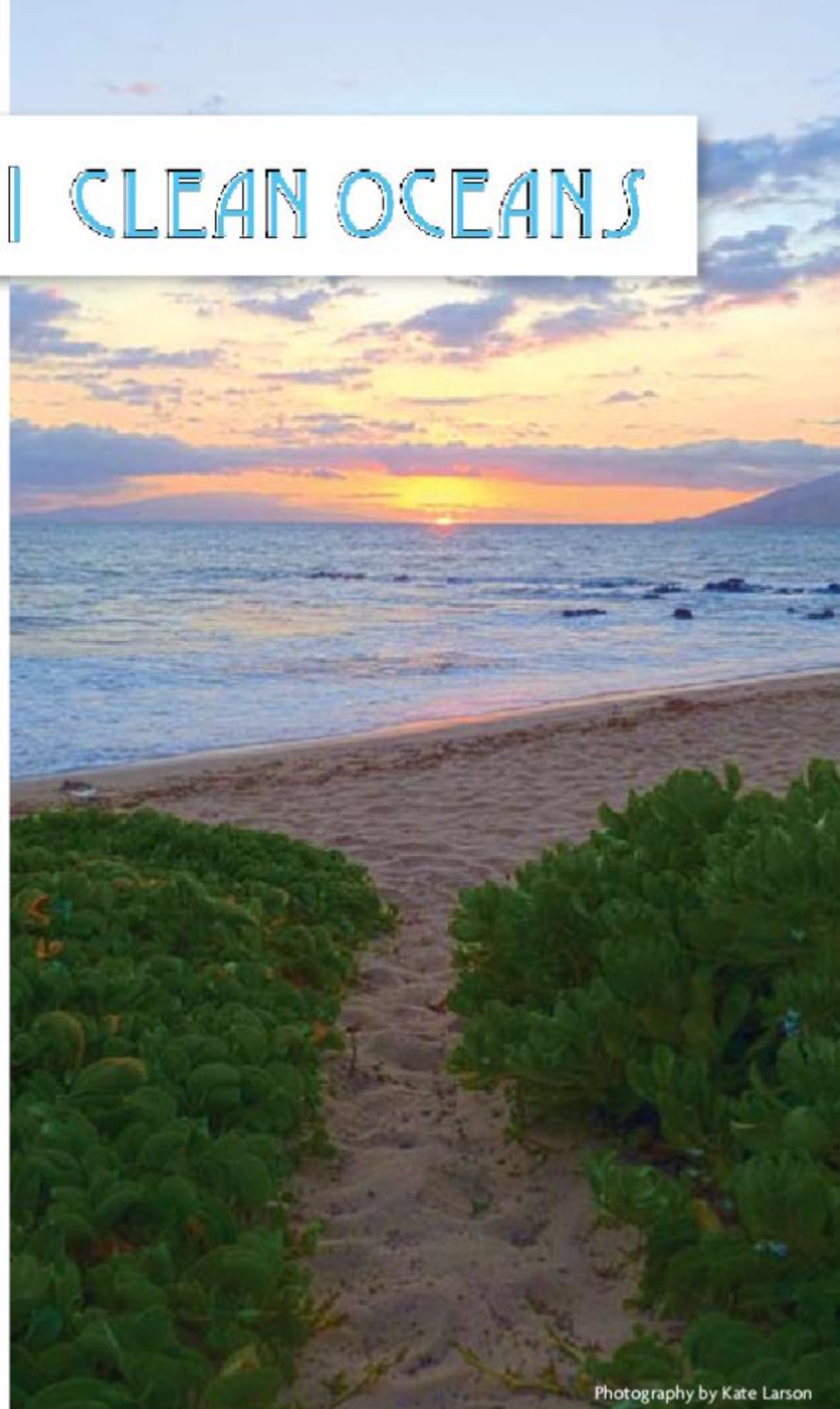
Trash is such a problem in waterways that millions of pounds of it are removed each year, and what doesn’t get picked up ends up in the ocean – shockingly, about 80 percent! Volunteers from the Ocean Conservancy’s International Coastal Cleanup (OCC) have cleaned up billions of pounds of trash.

According to the organization’s website, oceanconservancy.org, “Nearly nine million volunteers from 152 countries and locations have cleaned 145 million pounds of trash from the shores of lakes, streams, rivers and the ocean on just one day per year.”

The OCC has cleaned up and recorded every item of human trash it has found for the last 25 years. This data produces a clear indication of what items create the most harmful impact on humans, wildlife and the ecosystem.

The most frequently recorded item? Plastic. Plastic is everywhere and it’s suffocating our oceans and ocean wildlife. The organization has found plastic bags, water bottles, lighters, even wedding cake toppers on our beaches.

To start your eco-friendly trip to the beach, commit to bagging the plastic bag habit! Seriously. The easiest thing to do in terms of helping save beaches is to stop using plastic bags altogether. Plastic bags are such an epidemic that an



Photography by Kate Larson

award-winning documentary “Bag It” has been made about the proliferation of plastic bags in our world.

This film highlights our excessive usage of plastics has a profound effect on the sea. According to the documentary, filmed and directed by award-winning director Suzan Beraza, the number of plastic bags used by the average American per year is between 300 and 500, which adds up to about 100 to 150 billion plastic bags used in the U.S. alone last year.

Michelle Hill, “Bag It” producer, said via email, “Every time I go to the beach, I like to look for shells. Even on seemingly ‘clean’ beaches, half of the pretty colored things I get excited about end up being bits of plastic. It is very disheartening, especially knowing all we know from having made this film.”

Kelly Ricaurte of the Ocean Conservancy says plastics are having a negative effect on the oceans.

“Trash, especially plastics, are adding to the greenhouse gases,

which means more carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere than ever before," Ricaurte said. And Ricaurte explains that while there is a lot of debate over who's responsible for climate change, Mother Nature versus Human Nature, she says one thing we can do is "stop exacerbating a problem that already exists."

Hill suggests that the next time we go to the beach with friends, we should do our own beach walk and pick up trash. By doing this, she says, you make it personal. "That action really brings personal awareness to the problem," Hill said.

When you are headed for a little R&R at the beach, remember the other three Rs: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. Even on vacation, it is possible to recycle your items. Go to Earth911.com to find the nearest recycling facility or call 1-800-RECYCLE.

Fish Food

Another way to keep the beach "greener" is to consider what type of fish you eat. By choosing to eat only sustainable seafood, you can reduce your carbon "fingerprint," as the Ocean Conservancy calls it.



don't live near one. Aside from recycling and reducing your carbon "fingerprint," you can support communities that work to protect endangered sea animals and have clean beach initiatives in place. You can find more information at oceanconservancy.org.



For five simple ways to support clean and healthy beaches and oceans, look to the Website for Danson's book: oceanabook.net/your-part.

Surfrider Foundation's website lists local chapters throughout the globe and what each chapter is doing locally to keep beaches clean. You can learn more at surfrider.org.

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In the book, "Oceana: Our Endangered Oceans and What We Can Do to Save Them" by actor and ocean activist Ted Danson, overfishing is one of the many threats facing the ocean. Certain fish, such as the overfished Chilean Sea Bass and farmed Salmon, should simply be avoided – "They are caught or farmed in ways that harm other marine life or the environment," according to Seafood Watch. To keep up to date on the best fish and seafood to eat, follow our local Chef Barbara Fenzl's advice and check out the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch app for your smartphone. (You can download it for free from their site montereybayaquarium.org).

Apparently, Ted Danson uses that app as well. In a recent interview in the May 9, 2011 issue of *The New Yorker*, Danson used the Aquarium's Seafood Watch app to check on which fish to order. The article goes on to point out that he practices what he preaches: he tells restaurants that he only eats sustainable seafood, despite the embarrassment it may cause him.

The most recent update to the Seafood Watch app now highlights the site's list of "Super Green" seafood that's not only good for the ocean, but good for you too, according to the site. Use this app at a restaurant or out shopping at the grocer or fish market.

Learn to Surf (the Internet, that is)

Multiple reputable online sources are available to help you be green in the sand. For a good overview of climate change and how it affects the planet, start with the "Back to Basics" page of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) website, epa.gov/climatechange.

The Ocean Conservancy is dedicated to protecting the oceans and has an extensive list of volunteer beach cleanups along with suggestions for keeping beaches clean, even if you

For you Zonies who have property in San Diego, check out the local chapter's list of tips and events at surfridersd.org.

Even if you aren't headed to the beach this summer, keep in mind what the EPA's first Agency Administrator, William D. Ruckelshaus, once said in the forward of the 1984 book, "Greenhouse Effect and Sea Level Rise: A Challenge for this Generation":

"I think you will find that the matter of sea level rise is not an issue of the sort that Anwar Sadat had in mind when he jocularly said, 'These are questions for the future generation.' Just as the nations of the world are inexorably becoming more interdependent, so are the fates of the present and future generations."

The tide has come and it keeps coming, it's time for a sea of change, and it can start with you.

Hill thinks it already has, although she says it happens slowly.

"It all really comes down to paying more attention," she said. "If everyone was really paying attention to the choices we made, from the individual choices on up to the largest corporate choices, this would make a tremendous difference." ■

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Overfishing photo source: http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_xbwg2NdgKdI/TA-4l8NjetI/AAAAAAAAABk/IV6NVtai_Y/s1600/overfishing.jpg

Dirty beach photo source: planetgreen.discovery.com/travel-outdoors/images/2009-07/dirty-beach.jpg