

Terra Bowling:

My name is Terra Bowling, and I'm a senior staff attorney at the National Sea Grant Law Center. Thank you again for joining us. So, in today's presentation, we will be hearing from Haley Dalian, Great Lakes regional coordinator for the NOAA Marine Debris Program, Jill Bartolotta, extension educator for Ohio Sea Grant, and me about laws, policies, and practices for plastic reduction and prevention in the Great Lakes. So next. So before we begin, just a few quick housekeeping notes.

We have everyone on mute right now to cut down on the background noise, but please feel free to use the chat box at any time if you have questions. During this webinar, we'll answer questions after each presentation. And again, if we have time at the end of the webinar, if you have technical issues, you may private chat Lauren Fremin, who's the National Sea Grant Law Center's project coordinator and host of the webinar. And I also wanted to let everyone know that the webinar is being recorded, and we will post it to our website as soon as we can after the webinar.

So be on the lookout for an email about that. So next. So for anyone in the audience who might be new and not know much about us, the National Sea Grant Law Center was founded in 2002. We are housed at the University of Mississippi School of Law, and our mission is to conduct legal research, education, and outreach for the wider Sea Grant Network of 34 Sea Grant Programs and their stakeholders. So if you're interested in our work, I encourage you to visit our website and also to follow us on social media. Next, please. So as I mentioned today, we have three speakers. First up will be Haley Dalian.

She's the Great Lakes regional coordinator for NOAA's Marine Debris program. She leads, organizes, and supports marine debris-related actions with many partners and the public across all eight Great Lakes states and in collaboration with Canadian stakeholders. Haley also manages the five-year Great Lakes Marine Debris Action Plan, which includes marine debris research and monitoring, policy and management, prevention and removal. She's passionate about helping people understand that marine debris is a serious ocean and freshwater issue caused by people yet entirely preventable.

Then, following Haley, we'll have Jill Bartolotta, an extension educator, and emerging contaminant specialist for Ohio Sea Grant College program and the Ohio State University Stone Lab. Her work focuses on the issue of plastic pollution in the Great Lakes and overuse of non-essential plastics. Excuse me. Through education and outreach, she educates consumers and businesses on their use of plastics and works with them to utilize sustainable alternatives.

Her work has been used to inform plastics policy and international research and education products. And my name is Terra Bowling. I'm senior research council at the National Sea Grant Law Center, where I provide legal research and outreach on ocean coastal and natural resources issues... legal issues. All right, with that, we'll get started with Haley's presentation.

Haley Dalian:

Thank you so much, Terra. And thank you to the National Sea Grant Law Center and everyone for joining us today. I'm Haley Dalian. I'm the Great Lakes regional coordinator for NOAA's Marine Debris Program. I'll be setting the stage for our webinar today with an overview of marine debris and our program's work both nationally and regionally. Next slide, please. Marine debris is defined as any persistent, human made material that's directly or indirectly disposed of in the marine environment, including our ocean and Great Lakes.

Marine debris can come from both land-based sources and on-water activities, which can include littering, illegal dumping, natural disasters, stormwater discharge, cargo ships, recreational vessels, and many other sources. Next slide, please. Marine debris can take many different shapes and forms as well. On the larger side, we tend to see abandoned and derelict vessels, derelict fishing gear, and other forms of large debris that can't be removed by hand, such as barges, pier pilings, and bridges. Next slide, please.

On the smaller side, many of you are probably quite familiar with plastic pollution if you're attending this webinar, which is a prime form of marine debris. This non-biodegradable mixture of polymers can come in many different colors, sizes, and chemical makeups. The diversity of plastics is also well reflected in what we end up finding in the environment, from consumer products of all kinds to microfibers. It's estimated that 22 million pounds of plastic debris enter the Great Lakes every year from the US and Canada.

And furthermore, after 20 years of beach cleanup data from Alliance for the Great Lakes, they found that 86% of the litter collected was either partially or fully made of plastic. Next slide, please. Where there are plastics, there are, of course, also microplastics. We generally consider these to be plastics smaller than five millimeters in size, which is about the size of a standard pencil eraser. Microplastics can either be intentionally manufactured to be very small in size, in the case of microbeads and pre-production pellets, or they can also break off from the degradation of larger plastic items or even shed from our clothing. Next slide, please.

Many of the harmful impacts of marine debris are also well-known. Animals can often mistake marine debris for food, or they can easily become entangled in the debris itself, including fishing gear, plastic bags, and other items. On the water, floating debris or even sunken debris can be a major navigational hazard to safety, and it can even obstruct our commercial ports, as we've seen. Next slide, please. Marine debris can physically damage sensitive habitats, or it can serve as a transport mechanism for invasive species.

Overall, there's a large economic cost to having to deal with marine debris once it's in the environment. Tourism, recreation, and community livelihoods ultimately suffer. Next slide, please. But in the face of this wicked problem, there are thankfully many dedicated entities that are working to tackle it, and this includes the NOAA Marine Debris Program. We are the federal lead for addressing marine debris, and our small but mighty team works towards the vision of having a global ocean and all of our Great Lakes free from the impacts of marine debris of all types. Next slide, please.

We carry out our work under these six strategic pillars of prevention, removal, research, monitoring and detection, response and coordination. Next slide, please. Our staff is also stationed across the country. The colored blocks you see represent our 11 regions of domestic focus, and the stars show you where our regional staff are based, including myself, in southeast Michigan. The rest of our team reports to the NOAA headquarters based in Silver Spring, Maryland. Next slide, please. Now, I'll provide you with a sample of the work that we're engaged in on the national scale. First, our program funds many different competitive grants currently with funding from the bipartisan...

Lauren Fremin:

Looks like we have a little glitch. Let's see if it'll even itself out just a little bit. Hold tight.

Haley Dalian:

Let's see. Am I back? Can you hear me?

Terra Bowling:

Yes, we can hear you now.

Haley Dalian:

Okay. It wouldn't be Zoom without a technical difficulty. So I'm going to keep my camera off just for a minute to stabilize the connection. But I was saying that one of the deliverables we meet is the development of a microfiber pollution report, which was congressionally mandated by the Save our Seas

Act 2.0. So our team is working with EPA, and we published a draft in 2022 for public comment and are now in the process of finalizing the report for publication. We also engage in many collaborative projects.

One example of this is a partnership with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation to fund the first Ocean Odyssey DEIJA Awards to benefit underserved communities. We also partner with the National Park Service to create interactive marine debris art displays in coastal parks across the country. And displays that are currently in development in the Great Lakes are at Isle Royale and also Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Lastly, we help to tackle marine debris on an international scale. Our program works closely with the Department of State and the other US national agencies.

We're providing input and leadership on the issue, and we also collaborate with other countries in research prevention and removal of marine debris. Next slide, please. So now let's zoom in to some of the exciting marine debris projects that are in action, more specifically across the Great Lakes region. Next slide, please. Terra mentioned this earlier in my bio, so I'd like to highlight briefly the current Great Lakes Marine Debris Action Plan, which is a five-year plan driven by the voluntary commitments of 39 different partners who are working together to accomplish 47 unique actions.

Similar to our program's overall pillars, the goals relate to research and monitoring, policy and management, prevention and removal. There are many different types of debris as I mentioned, and so those dominant debris types challenges and the best-fit solutions are often geographically unique. So that's why we rely on regional expertise and partners, and we also create these regionally tailored action plans. Next slide, please. Prevention is a crucial part of the marine debris puzzle. So we like to support diverse prevention projects with the goal of turning off the tap and stopping marine debris from its source.

Prevention can include proper alternatives to landfill disposal or environmental disposal. And one example pictured here is installing monofilament line recycling bins at fishing sites. Through funding, we've provided the Clean Water Fund. They're also able to provide technical assistance to restaurants that are seeking to replace their disposable food service projects with reusable options pictured here. Our program also engages with youth through formal classrooms and informal settings. We host an annual K through eighth-grade art contest, and winners are also featured in an annual calendar pictured here.

We believe that involving art is a creative and powerful way to get people thinking about marine debris and, ultimately, how they can change their actions to be part of the solution. Next slide, please. I mentioned this as well, that once in the environment, although it's challenging, it's super important to remove marine debris. And one example of this on a large scale is a project by Superior Watershed Partnership. They're working along Lake Superior Southern Shoreline in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. To date, the organization has removed over 10 tons of marine debris. They've also been able to partner with two tribes and many other organizations in the process.

You can see a number of the tires that they frequently find in Lake Superior and have been able to remove. As a program, we've also funded more than 160 removal projects since 2006, and more than 36,000 metric tons of debris have been removed over the life of our program. Next slide, please. Great marine debris research continues to take place in the Great Lakes. One example of this is an international joint commission work group that myself and an MDP colleague serve on. You can also see Jill pictured here from participating at one of the workshops last September.

The work group's focus is to develop a region-wide environmental monitoring framework to understand microplastics and their ecological risks, specifically in the Great Lakes. And so, there are different representatives and experts serving on this workgroup from Canadian entities and also US entities. Another example of research activities is the plastic debris session and panel that I co-chaired at the International Association of Great Lakes Research Conference, which took place in May in Windsor just a month ago. This session also accomplished one of the action plan goals, which is to annually convene researchers.

So 15 presenters shared their research that largely focused on microplastics and looked at different compartments, from stormwater ponds in Ontario to green frog tadpoles in Michigan. Next slide, please.

Next slide, please. Oops. Thank you. And then the final Great Lakes examples I'll highlight center on the importance of monitoring to understand baseline marine debris data and trends over time. MDMAP is our Marine Debris Monitoring and Assessment Project, which is a standardized protocol that citizen, scientists, and funded partners use to monitor shorelines near them on a monthly basis.

This data can then be used to answer research questions and fuel community interest in beach cleanups and marine debris broadly. You can see the shotgun shells and wads pictured here that were uncovered near a Lake Erie MDMAP site during just a short walk. And through the Ocean Odyssey Awards I mentioned earlier, rural students are also getting hands-on experience using our protocol to explore debris on Lake Huron that's near the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary in Alpena, Michigan. Next slide, please.

I hope you now have a better sense of the diverse projects and the different communities that are working on these issues and also the work of the NOAA Marine Debris Program both locally, nationally, and globally. So thank you. I'm happy to take any questions and appreciate your time.

Terra Bowling:

All right. I don't see any questions in the chat, so we can pass it to Jill to begin, and then we'll have time for questions at the end.

Jill Bartolotta:

Sounds great. Thank you, Terra. And thank you, Haley, for a wonderful presentation and to the National Sea Grant Law Center for hosting us today. So my name is Jill Bartolotta. I am an extension educator and emerging contaminant specialist with Ohio Sea Grant and the Ohio State University Stone Laboratory. And I'm just going to talk about some of the programs that we have been doing to help mitigate the issue of plastics in the Great Lakes, but also work towards preventing the introduction of new plastics into the natural environment. Next slide, please.

So Ohio Sea Grant is a national program. We are one of 34 programs based in the large coastal areas of the United States and US territories. So as you can see, there's a list of all of our ocean-based partners, but then also all of our Great Lakes and Lake Champlain partners. And we are a state-federal partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Ohio State University. We educate and work with coastal communities to better manage their coastal areas through outreach, education, and research. We also operate and manage Stone Laboratory, which is one of the oldest freshwater field stations in the world.

So if you're ever out in the Ohio area, we welcome you to visit us there. Next slide, please. Just to set the stage. So I'm going to be talking about projects that are focused in the coastal areas of Ohio. So Ohio borders Lake Erie. And so a lot of these projects are going to be happening in the Cleveland and western part of the lake. And as you can see from this picture, just like everybody else, we have a plastics issue. Lake Erie we actually have the second-highest concentration of microplastics, and the Great Lakes see about 22 million pounds of plastic entering them each year. And about half of that will go into Lake Erie.

So we are a very urbanized lake. We have combined sewer overflows, and so that makes our plastics and trash issue very problematic. Next slide. So the first project I want to talk about, and a really exciting one, is trash removal technologies. So in this picture, you'll see two of the technologies we are piloting in the Great Lakes. The one that is in the water is called the Pixie Drone. And then the one that you see on the beach there is the BeBot. Next slide, please. So this is a project that was funded by Meijer through the Council of the Great Lakes region.

They've supported the purchasing of these trash removal technologies as well as providing a stipend for waste characterization and outreach events. We then took it one step further and were successful in receiving money through the Climate Ready Coast Program and have added in a workforce development for students from Cleveland Metropolitan School District. And so here you can see the many onsite

partners as well as education partners who are involved with this project. Next slide, please. The BeBot is a sand-skimming, remotely controlled robot so it can comb the top two to four inches of sand. It is able to remove anything that is five millimeters or larger in size.

And as you can see, it removes everything. So it's not going to just remove the trash. It's going to remove rocks and sticks and things like that. So we are only using this equipment in highly trafficked areas or on beaches that are already groomed larger raking devices. And so the operator stands behind the equipment, they have a remote control, the BeBot is electric powered, and this is what is left behind after we comb a beach. Next slide. So what we'll do is we'll go through that pile because we don't want to take out the rocks and twigs. Those are important for the natural environment. We just want to take out the plastic items. And so we do waste characterization.

So after going through that pile, we put everything in a bucket, we weigh what we find, and then we go piece by piece, and we identify everything that we find. And this is our research from 2023. So, as you can see, we're collecting primarily smaller pieces of plastics. These are the plastics that beach cleanup volunteers don't see to pick up or that the larger raking devices don't pick up. So this equipment is very important at picking up these smaller items. We primarily find plastic fragments and cigarette filters. And if you are aware, the filter in a cigarette is actually plastic fiber. So it's important to remove those out of the environment.

And we submit all of this data to the International Trash Trap Network, which is a partnership between the Ocean Conservancy in the University of Toronto Trash Team. And they collect everyone in the Great Lakes. So there are several other states within the Great Lakes that have BeBots and Pixie Drones, and they submit their data to the International Trash Trap Network as well. Next slide, please. So the Pixie Drone is the one that will skim along the water. It has this metal grate in it. That metal grate is able to remove three millimeters or larger, and it's only going to remove the floating debris. Next slide, please.

And so we put it in the water, someone will be on shore again with a remote control. This is also an electric operated vehicle, and we were also doing waste characterizations with this. So this is a cleanup that we just did a few months ago in response to tornadoes that we had here in the western part of the state. So you can see some of what they were picking up. Again, mostly, foam fragments, which makes sense. We're only picking up the items that can float. Next slide, please. And so a really exciting project that we're partnering with Cuyahoga County Community College is the beach and On-water Trash Trapping Tech Team for Lake Erie.

So we are working with students from Cleveland Metropolitan School districts to train them on these technologies, support us at outreach events, and then present on the project to their peers or people in the industry. And it's a really important project because Cleveland Metropolitan School District, it does have graduation retention rates. These students are primarily coming from very low-income families. And so this is just a really exciting opportunity to provide a new workforce for them, but then also teach them about Lake Erie through a bit of a different lens than what they are not getting in their regular schooling. Next slide, please.

So what we've done with them is we do trainings on the equipment. So we put the Pixie Drone in the pool, they all get to drive it, they love it, they're really good at operating this type of equipment. We also go to outreach events. So this was us at Cedar Point, where they were driving the BeBot around and educating people who are coming to Cedar Point for the day. Next slide, please. We also were able to take them up to Stone Laboratory, where they were able to go on a science cruise, do fish dissections, and just be introduced to careers that they may not be aware of, such as fish biology, environmental education.

For the majority of the students who joined us this day, we have to take a ferry and then another boat to get to OSUs Island. It was their first time ever being on a boat, ever being on the lake. So it was a really exciting opportunity for them, and they had a really nice time. Next slide, please. All right, so those are our trash removal technologies. The next project I want to talk about is Plastic-Free Cleveland. This was also funded by that Climate-Ready Coast funding.



We are a sub-award on the project with Wisconsin Sea Grant, and this is going to be a two-year project, and it is really to establish an initiative here in Cleveland where all of the plastics organizations are coming together, working together to achieve the common goal of reducing plastics in the Cleveland area. Next slide, please. So we're still in the... getting everyone situated, we're going through developing missions and visions and values and things like that, but it's a really wonderful program. We have about 20 organizations from public and private sector already involved. We're going to have a website where we're going to house all of this information.

So if you have any questions about what is happening on plastics in the Cleveland area, we now have one place where people are going to be able to go to get this information. Next slide, please. And our focus areas that the group has decided to work on over the next year, the first one is going to be textiles. Cleveland used to be a hub for textile manufacturing, and it was actually a fashion hub similar to New York City. So we are seeing a resurgence of fashion designers coming to the Cleveland area. We also have... Kent State University is a fashion design institute. It's very well known, and they have a whole sustainability component. So that's why textiles were chosen for our area.

We're also going to be working with dining wear. We have a Surfrider chapter here in Cleveland, the northern chapter for Ohio. And they have their Great Lakes-friendly restaurants program, which I see Haley has posted in the chat for you. So the group will also be focusing on assisting Surfrider with implementing this program in restaurants Cleveland. The other item the group would like to focus on is construction materials. So specifically things like plastic landscape mesh. We're seeing a lot of shoreline management, new construction, riparian management happening here in Ohio. And we're seeing a lot of plastics purposefully being put on the landscape.

And so, how can we work with cities, contractors, state departments to better manage what we put on the landscape? And then we're also going to be working on balloons. Cleveland has legislation on balloon bans, so we would like to just provide more education on that. Also, Cleveland has a unique history with balloons. We tried to set the world record for a balloon release. It did not go well. So that's why we're going to be focusing on these four items. Next slide, please. All right, so now I want to move into a little bit of the research we've done to look at legislation policies.

So we have done a lot of work around plastic bag fees and bans because again, we have a unique history with these. So Cuyahoga County where Cleveland is located has a bag ban in place, but it is legally not able to be enforced because Ohio is a preemption state, meaning that is illegal to ban bags in the state of Ohio. And Terra will talk more about this when she discusses the memo. And this is what really started us having... working with the National Law Center and having memos. So, as you can see from the pie chart, is we've done some survey work with thousands of individuals living in northeast Ohio. My colleague, Dr. Scott Hardy, and I through a project funded by the NOAA Marine Debris Program.

And a lot of people, the majority of people are supportive of some type of legislation that will work to reduce their access to plastic bags. We also wanted to see do they support businesses. Because when you live in places where you don't have legislation, a lot of times, businesses are making these decisions because they think it's the right thing to do. And so you can also see that people will support businesses that will take action to either charge or ban bags within their stores. Next slide, please. So a project we did is we've done a lot of education and outreach in the community. Our research has now been used to help inform Cuyahoga County's plastic bag ban.

They've been using what we found out to help support this bag ban. But then also they've developed a grants program now for businesses who want to get rid of plastic bags on their own. So they now have a grants program to help these businesses train their staff and move through that transition process to phase out plastic bags. So very exciting work happening in Cleveland. If you want more information, you can scan this QR code and that will take you to Cuyahoga County's website for their Bring Your Own Bag Program. Next slide, please. Also, we did some Skip the Straw work. So this was a project we did up on the, this was also funded by the NOAA Marine Debris Program.

So Sue Bixler and I worked on this project, and we wanted to just get some information and feedback on Skip the Straw. So we worked with the Boardwalk family of restaurants, and we found that Skip the Straw is actually a very successful program. Customers support the program, staff support the program, and we found that the business did not suffer financially because they were no longer freely putting a straw in every single drink. Next slide, please.

And because we are also here to talk about policies, I do want to say I was... had the privilege of going to the fourth negotiations for the Global Plastics Treaty in Canada in April. I was there representing the Deep Ocean Stewardship Initiative to talk about plastics in the deep ocean. And it was just a really interesting experience. Unfortunately, it seems like the treaty is really going to focus on the waste management part of plastics, which, yes, is important. But we also really need to focus on the prevention and the reduction of plastics because that's the only way we're going to solve this problem. We cannot recycle or beach cleanup our way out of this plastics issue.

We have to change behavior. We have to get industry to use less toxic, reusable products instead of just these single-use plastics. So that's all I have for you. Next slide. This is my contact information. I'm actually going to be leaving Sea Grant within a couple of weeks, so I will no longer be reachable, but feel free to reach out to me before the end of June. Or if you have any questions on the BeBot and Pixie Drone, the Botttle project or Plastic-Free Cleveland, you can reach out to Abigail Comar. She will be the lead for those projects. Thank you.

Terra Bowling:

All right. Thank you, Jill, for sharing all that cool work, excellent projects that y'all have going on. So if you have any questions, again, you can put them in the chat. Haley did answer one, as Jill mentioned, about funding opportunities. And Haley posted the link there to the Marine Debris Programs funding opportunities as well as the link to opportunities that Surfrider has for restaurants. All right. Well, we'll just move into my presentation. So, as I mentioned at the beginning, my name is Terra Bowling. I'm a senior staff attorney at the National Sea Grant Law Center. So I'm going to talk about some of our research that we've done on plastic bag and styrofoam bans for Ohio Sea Grant over the past few years.

And I'm going to focus on our most recent memo that we completed this spring. So we, as Jill mentioned, we began looking into this in 2018 with a memo looking at state laws that ban limit plastic bag use. We also looked into those state laws that preempt local governments from enacting plastic bag bans and then the local government reaction to those actions. And then, in 2020, we updated that information. We looked at state or local actions in the Great Lakes region for other plastic or trash like straw bans, cigarette butt bans, styrofoam balloons, as Jill mentioned.

And also, at that time, we looked at the impact of COVID-19 on some of these bans because a lot of states and local governments were suspending their plastic bag bans during this time due to some health and safety concerns that they had at the time. So we can move to the next slide. All right. So then, in 2024, we updated the previous research. We again looked at state actions related to plastic bags since the publication of the previous memo in 2020. And then, we took a nationwide rather than a regional look at state actions related to styrofoam. And then we looked at two bills currently in Congress. So that's what I'm going to talk about. Next.

All right. So, first up, let's look at plastic bag bans nationally. So the District of Columbia was the first non-municipal entity to restrict plastic bag usage. In 2009, they enacted a 5 cent fee on any disposable carryout bag. And then in 2015, Hawaii had the first statewide ban. That was kind of a defacto ban because it was just at the county level because each of their four counties enacted a ban. So California was the first true statewide ban enacted by legislation in 2016. So there are currently 12 states with plastic bag bans. As you can see on the map, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington. All right. Next slide, please.

So I just wanted to talk about a few of the recent state plastic bag bans. So, first up, we have California, which expanded its plastic bag ban to include not only plastic bags but pre-checkout bags. So these are the bags that are typically used for fresh fruit and vegetables in the grocery store, as well as any bags for unwrapped food items like meat or fish, poultry, candy, bakery goods. Under this law, retailers may provide compostable plastic bags meeting certain criteria or recycled paper bags. The ban will take effect January 1st, 2025. And then, we have Colorado's Plastic Pollution Reduction Act, which became effective, January 1st, 2024.

This bans retail stores and food establishments from providing single-use plastic bags and eliminates a law preempting local plastic bans. There are exemptions under that law for smaller stores and some food establishments. Then we have New Jersey's plastic bag ban, which went into effect May 22nd or May '22, banning stores from distributing single-use paper and plastic bags to customers at checkout. So this law does have exceptions for plastic bag products such as fresh produce, raw meat, fish, newspapers, prescriptions, dry cleaning bags, and there are exemptions for smaller stores and some food establishments.

And then, finally, we have Rhode Island's Plastic Waste Reduction Act. That was passed in '22. Also, in advance, the use of single-use plastic bags at checkout counters. Businesses can only offer reusable bags or recyclable paper bags, and there are fines for retailer non-compliance. All right. Next slide, please. And so now we're going to move on to the preemptive bans. So these are the states that prohibit local governments from setting local standards on plastic bag use. And you can see the states in green have plastic bag bans or fees. There are 17 states there.

Many of these states enacted legislation that prohibit the bans closely following a model law that was prepared by the American Legislative Exchange Council. Next slide, please. And then you can see there, there's some key provisions of that model legislation. They define auxiliary container, and then there's a prohibition on local governments regulating the auxiliary containers. 12 of the states use this exact language, and other laws are modified. So, for example, Mississippi has legislation on auxiliary containers, but it's narrower in scope than that model law because it applies only to food service establishment rather than all retailers. Next slide, please.

All right, and now moving on to styrofoam. States and local governments have banned the polystyrene-expanded foam, which is another word for styrofoam. These are mostly bans for products used in restaurants or for packing material. They're currently 11 states in the District of Columbia that have the statewide bans. They're generally for food service products like cups or to-go boxes. There are typically exceptions, though, that allow for styrofoam use for meat, poultry, and seafood products. Next slide, please. So, finally, wanted to mention two bills that are currently in Congress. So, first up, we have the Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act, which was first introduced in 2020 and reintroduced in 2021.

This law would be a very comprehensive approach to addressing plastic pollution. It was... There you can see what it would do, but some of the key provisions would include a nationwide Beverage Container Refund Program banning certain single-use plastics that are not recyclable, and then banning single-use plastic carryout bags and then placing a fee on the distribution of the remaining carryout bags. And so that bill is currently in committee. It's been read a couple of times, but it really hasn't had much movement. Second, we have the Plastic Pellet Free Waters Act.

This act would require the EPA to issue, a final rule prohibiting certain discharges of plastic pellets and other pre-production plastic into waters of the United States. And again, this one is also still in committee, so not too much movement there. All right, we can move to the next slide. If anyone has any questions, feel free to ask them. You can in chat, or if you would like to raise your hand and unmute, you're welcome to do that too. Oh, okay. Let me share. I have two links actually that... from Haley, and let me share those first for the NOAA Marine Debris Program. And I have one also for the memo that I mentioned. All right. Kathy, do you have a question?



Kathy:

Yes. Are there any attempts to stop the... through [inaudible 00:42:07] really legally fight the ban on bans? I actually was in a talk a Zoom meeting, and I can't remember where it was, but they actually, in a city, did fight the ban on a ban. And one, it was out west. I don't remember what state and city it was. Can't we legally do something about this because it just doesn't seem fair or right?

Terra Bowling:

Yes, you can... you could challenge the laws in court, but whether that would be successful, I don't know because I don't know that there are that many examples of people successfully challenging them so far. Right. There's another question. "What are some strategies for holding corporations accountable for the plastics they produce?"

Jill Bartolotta:

Do you want me to take that one?

Terra Bowling:

Yeah, Jill.

Jill Bartolotta:

Okay.

So, at least from what we've been seeing, especially in the international treaty, is extended producer responsibility. That seems to be the option that has been identified for holding corporations accountable. However, there are some concerns around that because that will then reflect the true cost of plastics, which is very important because the true cost of plastics is not currently shown in their purchase price. And when I say the true cost, I'm talking about human health impacts, environmental impacts, the waste management impacts. And so that's what keeps plastic so cheap.

So if you do put that true cost of plastic, you'll see it become more expensive than some of these more reusable, less toxic items such as certain metals, sustainable woods, glass, and things like that. So that's one option, but there is some concern around that. The other thing is something that was very influential here in the Great Lakes was the Microbead Plastic Pellet Free Waters Act. That's when microbeads were placed in beauty products such as face exfoliants, body exfoliants, and things like that.

So when that was discovered, there was public outcry through social media, and that did help these... There was a federal law put in place, but many companies were actually already going to move away from these plastic beads because there was such consumer outcry. So you do still have power as a consumer. So always keep that in mind. And as much as you can be a aware consumer. Be careful of things like greenwashing that's very prevalent right now. So just make yourself aware of what you're buying and try to buy products and support businesses that are trying to do the right thing as best you can.

Terra Bowling:

And I guess I can add onto that. The Break Free from Plastic Act that I mentioned does have some provisions in there for producer responsibility, some related to incentives... incentives for providing environmental considerations and product design and packaging, and then some source reduction targets in that bill as well.

Jill Bartolotta:

Yeah, and I saw somebody just mentioned about plastics used in docks and Buoy. Canada has a similar law that docks and buoys won't have plastic.

Lauren Fremin:

Okay. It looks like I'm not seeing any more questions coming through the chat. Maybe we'll give it a couple more minutes in case folks are typing. And you are also welcome to raise your hand if you prefer to use that feature.

Terra Bowling:

Okay. Tracy says, "We've noticed a lot of the fishing line recycling bins out there aren't effective, and most of it's just being thrown away because they get it full of trash. We're thinking of redesigning them. Has anyone else thought of doing this or using something other than PVC pipe?" Jill, I don't know if you know in your programs or Haley.

Jill Bartolotta:

I do understand the concerns around fishing line recycling. I still think these types of bins are important to get the line at least out of the environment. For us here in Ohio, fishing line is the number one item that entangles Ohio's fish, birds, and wildlife. I do think what is needed, though, with these bins is proper placement. So I've noticed this. You have a trash bin here, and then there's no recycling, or you have a recycle bin, but then no trash bin or you have one of these fishing line recycling bins, but no trash bin.

I know people want to recycle as much as they can, but that's just not the way the system is set up. So I think if you're going to do this effectively, you have to have the land, the trash bin, the recycle bin, the monofilament bin, a compost bin, whatever your waste management structure is for your community, that will help. There... As far as, yes, they do have issues. A lot of birds make nests in them. I have not seen new designs for fishing line recycling, but maybe anyone... if anyone else on this call has any new fishing line recycling bins, that could be helpful.

Haley Dalian:

Yeah, I would just briefly echo what Jill said about if there aren't any other receptacles available, then people will think that the PVC pipe can be used for all waste and not just the monofilament line. So definitely echo that placement is really important.

And if you're able to incorporate educational signage or a bit of an explanation near that so that way the regular park visitors can recognize what that bin is for, that can certainly help. But I'm also not familiar with any other different designs or common designs for those collection bins.

Jill Bartolotta:

One new design I would suggest is a new material. We're trying to tell people, "Use less plastics," but then we're just making all these things out of PVC. Can you use some reclaimed wood or something like that to make a bit more of an aesthetically pleasing recycle bin? And then, as Haley mentioned, of course, using the informational signage to accompany that bin.

Terra Bowling:

We have another question that says, "We're considering piloting self-serve cleanup stations at some high-traffic beaches in northeast Michigan with hopes to duplicate and spread them to other beaches around the Great Lakes region. Does anyone have any experience around getting these started? Are any of these currently on Great Lakes beaches that you're aware of?"

Jill Bartolotta:

I have not seen any in the Great Lakes. I've either seen them in Hawaii or Florida. But Meg, if you reach out to me privately, I will work to connect you with our Sea Grant partners in those regions, and they might be able to facilitate the conversation with their partners who are doing this.

Terra Bowling:

Anne, go ahead.

Jill Bartolotta:

I will say I do work with someone who does a beach cleanup weekly at a local beach. She comes with all the equipment, but she sits there with the equipment, lets people take it, and then they bring it back to her. And that program has been very successful.

Terra Bowling:

All right. Anne's asking, "For the BeBot, do you think it's scalable to sort plastic versus pebbles, or will people just throw the pebbles away along with the plastic?"

Jill Bartolotta:

So, for that project, we are sorting through everything. It could be happening, yes, that people are throwing away the pebbles, but this equipment, it can only be used on sandy beaches, I should mention that. So you're not going to want to clean a primarily rocky beach, but there are rocks on every beach.

So we do take the time to go through everything that we collect. So yes, it is a tedious process, but there are certainly people I'm sure who, for ease of time and use, would throw away the pebbles. But we are trying not to do that because we understand the importance of rocks and sticks and things on beaches.

Terra Bowling:

All right. Well, I do not... Oh, there we go. Here's another question from Mary. She says she works for Partners for Clean Streams, "A nonprofit based out of Perrysburg, Ohio, but we work throughout northwest Ohio. We've installed 46 of these bins and are currently working on..." Oops, sorry, "On some redesigning at the moment." We have tested some different designs on the opening of the bins, either placing a wooden block in the middle that makes the opening harder to put things that aren't fishing line.

Another option has been working on is sort of a rubber covering with silt through the middle so people are able to stick their hands into recyclable line, but it deters any wildlife from trying to get in there. Still a work in progress, but we love what the Reel in and Recycle Program has done for our community, and I've loved to work with it."

Okay, thanks. All right, if there aren't any more questions we can wrap up. I want to thank everyone much for joining us for our webinar. A big thanks to Haley Dalian and Jill Bartolotta. Again, we'll be posting the recording on our website as soon as we can get it available. And the best way to stay tuned for future announcements from the Law Center is to follow us on social media. So thanks, everyone, and have a great afternoon.