



PRESS RELEASE

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MARINE DEBRIS FOUNDATION ENTERS MAJOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP WITH INITIAL FUNDING FROM NOAA

Partnership supports implementation of the bipartisan Save Our Seas 2.0 Act legislation, driving a five-year initiative focused on innovation, community grantmaking, and advanced technologies to prevent, reduce, and remove marine debris from U.S. waters

January 14, 2026. The Marine Debris Foundation (MDF), received an award from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Marine Debris Program for a five-year partnership to accelerate solutions to address the global marine debris problem and remove, reduce, and prevent marine debris in the United States. The award is intended to leverage and match charitable donations from individuals, businesses and foundations who are concerned about this problem and eager to make a difference.

Chartered by Congress through bipartisan legislation, MDF is a nonprofit partner of NOAA, with a mission to achieve plastic-free waters. MDF advances innovative solutions, invests in new technologies and supports community-driven initiatives to prevent, reduce and remove marine debris.

The NOAA award supports two core programs:

- The Genius Prize for Save Our Seas Innovation – a biennial national, competitive cash award authorized by Congress that recognizes promising or breakthrough innovations that prevent or remove marine debris; and
- Community Grants – direct funding for grassroots projects by communities and organizations to prevent and remove plastic trash, lost fishing gear and other marine debris from coastal and ocean waters.

“As the world’s leading ocean science agency, NOAA is committed to overseeing proper stewardship of our ocean and coasts,” said Neil Jacobs, Ph.D., Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator. “Through our partnership with the Marine Debris Foundation, we are proud to accelerate innovation to support our coastal communities and implement solutions to solve the global marine debris problem.”



This grant is instrumental to our work and fuels the type of collaboration and collective action that is required to address and eventually solve the marine debris crisis,” said Clare Romanik, MDF Executive Director. “Marine debris, especially plastics and microplastics, is a critical threat to our environment, our economy, and our health. But it is entirely solvable, and MDF is leading the way by driving and funding efforts that result in plastic-free waters locally, regionally, and globally.”

The competition for the Genius Prize for Save Our Seas Innovation is outlined in the Save Our Seas 2.0 Act, which also established the MDF. Through the Genius Prize, MDF will strive to foster innovation and provide networks, publicity, and access to longer-term investments that can propel novel ideas to market and thus “move the dial” on curbing the marine debris problem.

“Marine debris is a threat to many aspects of life in Alaska—communities along our thousands of miles of coastline, our pristine marine ecosystem, and the health of our world-class fisheries. But it is a solvable problem,” said Senator Dan Sullivan. “Tackling this challenge has been a consistent focus of mine as Alaska’s senator, and the Genius Prize, established through my Save Our Seas 2.0 Act, will continue this momentum. I look forward to seeing the innovation, technologies, and community-driven solutions this award will unlock for Alaska and for our whole country.”

“We are living with a flood of plastic pollution that is washing up on our shores and threatening communities and ecosystems,” said Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, Ranking Member of the Environment and Public Works Committee and Co-Chair of the Senate Oceans Caucus. “I’m pleased to see that my bipartisan Save Our Seas 2.0 Act continues to support innovative solutions to address the plastic waste crisis and protect our marine environments and coastal economies. This is a fight we cannot afford to lose, and I look forward to seeing the Marine Debris Foundation’s novel contributions for delivering meaningful progress in removing, reducing, and preventing marine debris.”

Through this public-private partnership, MDF will deploy cutting-edge technology and fund innovators and community-driven projects for cleaner waters throughout the country. Government match funding allows private donations to MDF go farther for transformative solutions and on-the-ground programs in highly impacted areas, especially those of significant historic, economic, cultural, and environmental value.

About Marine Debris Foundation

Chartered by Congress through bipartisan legislation, the Marine Debris Foundation (MDF) is a nonprofit partner of the [NOAA Marine Debris Program](#). With a mission to achieve plastic-free waters, MDF advances innovative solutions, invests in new technologies, and supports community-driven initiatives to prevent, reduce, and remove marine debris.

Learn more at <https://marinedebrisfoundation.org>.