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West Elwha Beach Stewardship

Introduction

In 2015 the Clallam MRC moved their Fourth of July firework cleanup effort from Ediz Hook to the beach west of Elwha River as the fireworks ban came into effect in Port Angeles. The last four summers the cleanup at the beach has been led by a summer intern and it quickly became apparent that the main issue was dog and human waste.

The Surfrider Foundation has for years funded a Sanikan and dog waste disposal bin located at the beach parking lot. Unfortunately, because of the distance from the beach to the parking lot not all beach goers use these facilities. As the 2017 intern, Waverly Shreffler stated in her public presentation at the Intern Celebration “What I did not expect to find was 54 dog poops lining the dike out to the beach (about 950 ft.). I determined early on that this should be my focus for outreach, reducing dog waste on the dike and beach by encouraging visitors to pick up after their dog”. Through the summer Waverly conducted usage surveys and educational outreach at the beach including installing a row of small humorous signs encouraging owners to pick up after their dogs. Another issue she pointed out to the dog owners is the impact of free running dogs on migrating birds. “Migratory birds such as Brant travel huge distances and they need access to their feeding grounds especially at low tides. If they get chased away by free running dogs they will likely not feed during that tide cycle.” The 2018 intern, Collin Boe, continued the beach use surveys as well as conducting dog waste surveys on the dike.

Arnold Schouten, a member of Clallam MRC has for many years surfed at the mouth of Elwha River. Since the removal of the two dams and the ensuing expansion of the beach, Arnold has seen an increase in beach usage “On good surf days the parking lot is full and people are parking along the road. This puts more pressure on the access point and the beach and sometimes surfers and other beach users wear out their welcome by leaving trash and dog waste behind.”

During these high volume days the Sanikan and the dog waste disposal bin in the parking lot did not meet the demand. Because the Surfrider Foundation supports other Sanikans throughout Clallam County they were not able to fund an additional Sanikan and dog waste disposal bin at West Elwha Beach. To meet the demand Clallam MRC decided to fund an additional Sanikan, dog waste disposal bins, a dog waste bag dispenser and new signs at the trailhead.

This report summarizes the stewardship efforts conducted by Clallam MRC at the West Elwha Beach.

Beach Use Surveys

The Clallam MRC has conducted beach use surveys since 2016. All the surveys have been conducted by summer interns. In 2016 the summer intern, Anthony Creasey, conducted six surveys in which he focused on documenting which section of the area – beach or along the river – was most used by people. Not surprisingly the usage was focused on the beach. In 2017 the summer intern, Waverly Shreffler, expanded the effort by conducting 11 surveys. With the surveys she tried to determine at what time of day and when during the week most people visited the beach. In 2018 the summer intern, Collin Boe, expanded the survey effort again by conducting 26 surveys looking at what people were doing at the beach, amount of debris on the beach, dog waste surveys on the dike and a survey of car license’s plate to see where the visitors were coming from. All of the interns documented the number of leased and unleased dogs in their surveys. A database compiling the data from the 43 surveys is submitted as a separate file.

Table 1 summarizes some of the finding based on the surveys. The average number of visitors increased more than 100% from 2016 to 2018. During the surveys on average five dogs were presented at the beach. The number of unleased dogs was always greater than the number of leased dogs; however, the percentage of leased dogs increased over the years from 33 in 2016 to 47 in 2018. Many factors played into the number of visitors on the beach including weather (wind, fog, rain, and sun), time of day and day of the week making it difficult to capture peak usage. Based on these surveys mornings and afternoons, in general, had the most

visitors and the most common activities documented in 2018 were walking, picnicking, and surfing. Based on the 26 surveys conducted in 2018 10% of the cars in the parking lot carried out of state license plates.

Table 1. Beach use data collected in 2016, 2017 and 2018

Year	Average Number of Visitors	Average Number of Leased Dogs (%)	Average Number of Unleased Dogs (%)	Average Total Number of Dogs
2018	21	2.2 (47)	2.5 (53)	4.5
2017	28	2.2 (41)	3.1 (59)	5.3
2016	44	1.5 (33)	3.0 (67)	4.7

West Elwha Beach Signage

In 2015, when Clallam MRC initiated stewardship efforts at the West Elwha Beach, visitors to the beach were greeted with a “forest” of signs at the trailhead. Some of the signs were redundant and other important information was lacking. In 2017 Clallam MRC worked closely with Malcom Dudley (the private owner of part of the dike access trail; the other part is owned by Lower Elwha Tribe) to create a sign which captured all the important information allowing for removal of most of the other signs at the trailhead (Figure 2). Clallam MRC also installed a fire lane sign on the yellow gate to ensure that cars did not block the access to the beach for emergency vehicles.



Figure 2. Some of the many signs at the trailhead prior to winter 2017 and the new sign installed in 2017.

In 2017 the summer intern, Waverly Shreffler, created four signs to remind dog owners in a humorous way to pick up after their dogs (Figure 3). However, in summer 2018 some of the owners of the houses along the beach installed a new sign at the trailhead which stroke a more direct and less friendly way to inform the public about restrictions on the beach (Figure 4) and the Clallam MRC decided to remove the four humorous signs. It is always difficult to assess the utility and impact of signs and at the West Elwha Beach the assessment has been made more difficult because of the newly installed sign by the house owners.



Figure 3. Humorous signs created by the 2017 intern, Waverly Shreffler, reminding dog owners to pick up after their dog. Arnold Schouten and Waverly installing the signs.



Figure 4. In summer of 2018 some of the land owners installed this sign at the trailhead.

Sanikan, Dog Waste Bins and Bag Dispenser

As stated in the introduction Clallam MRC decided in winter 2017 to fund a Sanikan, dog waste disposal bin, a dog waste bag dispenser to meet the demand on high volume days, and also to reduce the distance to waste facilities and thereby encourage the visitors to use the facilities instead of leave waste on the beach and in the bushes. The initial facility only included one dog waste bin (Figure 5), but after tracking the waste disposed in the spring of 2017 Clallam MRC decided to install a second bin.

Figure 5. Sanikan, dog bag dispenser and dog waste bin installed by Clallam MRC. Later in the spring a second dog waste bin was added because the disposed dog waste exceeded the capacity of the first bin.



Dog Waste Surveys

In an attempt to document the amount of dog waste at the beach and the potential impact of installing dog waste bins bimonthly surveys were conducted in the dike access trail starting in late January coinciding with adding bags to the dispenser. The survey distance is about 950 ft. and during the surveys the number of dog poops are counted and placed in a plastic bag. At the end of the survey the weight of the dog waste is weighed using a hand held scale. Figure 6 summarizes the results of the 17 surveys conducted in the last seven months. Both the number of poops and the total weigh vary greatly; the current averages in September are 17 poops weighing about 1.5 lbs.

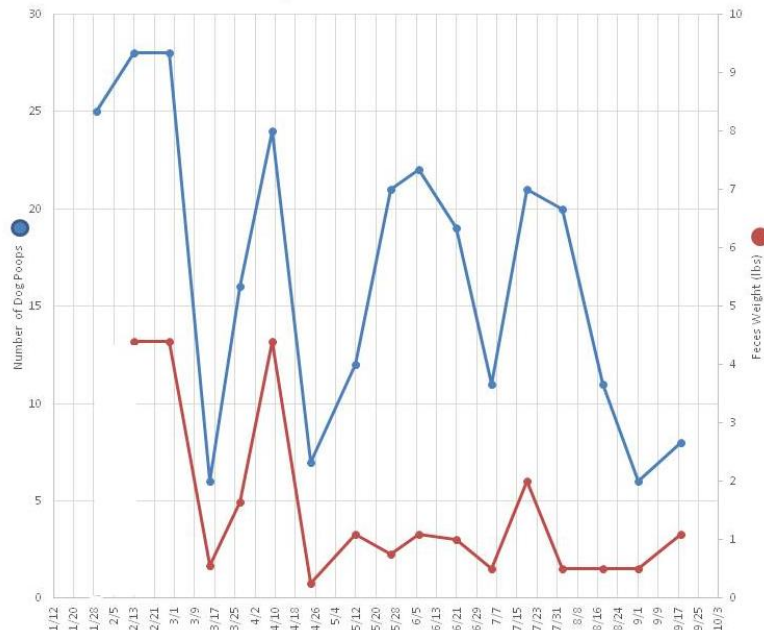


Figure 6. Results of dog waste surveys on the dike access trail (about 950 ft.) between January and September 2018. Blue line is number of poops and red line is estimated weigh of all waste collected during a given survey.

Fourth of July Marine Debris Surveys

In 2016 Clallam MRC began conducting beach cleanup at West Elwha Beach after July 4th when the personal firework ban went into effect in Port Angeles. The cleanup efforts were done by the summer interns and their recruited volunteers. In 2016 about 26 lbs. of firework related debris was collected. In 2017 about 13 lbs. was collected which included other sources of debris and in 2018 no firework debris was left on the beach after the Fourth of July.



Figure 7. Summer interns conducting debris removal after the Fourth of July in 2016 and 2017.