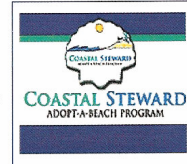


COASTAL STEWARD

WORKING HARD TO CLEAN UP THE ENVIRONMENT

by Hank Foglino



Beginning in the last decade, we, the human inhabitants of this great planet, began to realize that we cannot take from the bounties of nature forever without bringing on untold hardships. We thought that there was no end to the buffalo; now their numbers are down to a very small fraction of what they once were. Some uncaring individuals had great fun shooting at carrier pigeons; now they are gone. Exploitation of land throughout the world has brought many species close to extinction. We thought that the oceans were so huge that their inhabitants were endless. Now we find that we cannot continue to drop our garbage into them, and that the once huge populations of fish and aquatic mammals are now diminishing.

We are learning that we cannot fool with the bottom of the food chain. If we cause toxicity in the photic zone, the surface areas of our seas, we destroy the planktonic organisms that are the primary producers, feeding the small young fish and providing the planet with oxygen. Since the ratio from bottom to top is about 10,000 to 1 (see Figure 1), we can see that destroying life at the bottom of the triangle will eventually decrease the species at the top.

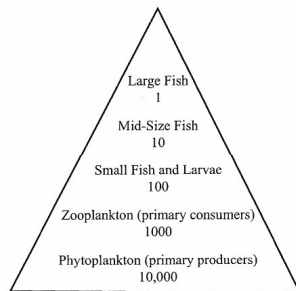


Figure 1 Feeding Triangle

Another aspect of the triangle is that if the species at the bottom ingest toxic material, it will be transmitted to the top in multiples of 10, resulting in a great deal of toxicity within the fish we eat. This toxic material may originate on land in our garbage, from illegal dumping and/or in run-off carrying with it the oils of any other materials lying on the ground.

Organizations have been formed nationally and statewide to educate the population and try to deal with the problem. Three years ago, here on Long Island, Captain Dave Johnson formed a new non-profit environmental restoration organization, The Coastal Steward. The organization is dedicated to preserving the health of the shore-

line domain, currently being accomplished with funding from local governments such as the Town of Brookhaven, Suffolk County, Sea Grant and individual donors. Volunteers include students, teachers, scouts, the Cornell Cooperative Extension, local government and retirees. Current projects include:

Shellfish restoration - Due to disease and habitat destruction, the oyster population on Long Island has dwindled to 1 percent of its historical high. Port Jefferson and Mount Sinai Harbors, with their abundance of plankton, are still ideal oyster habitats. With the donation of three slips and 120,000 seed oysters from the Town of Brookhaven, Dave Johnson was able to make substantial progress in 2003 in trying to develop disease-resistant oysters to repopulate the harbor. This year 98,000 oysters that were wintering in Mount Sinai Harbor were brought up from the harbor bot-



A group of volunteers about to do a cleanup on a Port Jefferson beach.

tom and placed in floating cages. Upon reaching adult size, 76,000 were planted in Port Jefferson and Mount Sinai Harbors. To date, 202,000 adult oysters and 6,000 bay scallops have been released. Bay scallops also are being raised from the size of a pinhead to adult size, when they will be released after spawning. Theoretically, that is over 10 million gallons of water being filtered every day, not including the amount their offspring will filter.



Capt. Dave Johnson, founder in 2004 of environmental restoration organization "Coastal Steward."

Beach cleanups - There is an International Coastal Cleanup Day coordinated in this area by the American Littoral Society. The Coastal Steward volunteers perform more than six additional clean-ups a year at local beaches. To date, 148 tons of garbage have been collected and documented, enough to fill 30 large dumpsters. Think how much "poison" has been kept out of our environment. The Town of Brookhaven passed a resolution to sell the organization a confiscated ATV for \$200 that aided in the cleanups.

So far this year, beach cleanups have been conducted at Montauk, West Hampton Beach, various locales on Long Island



Busy youngsters using plastic cups to count baby oysters.

Sound, and Port Jefferson and Mount Sinai Harbors. This effort began with a couple of scuba buddies wanting to take part in the International Coastal Cleanup after a very satisfying dive. As years went by, Dave developed the beach clean-ups into major events, filling dumpsters with garbage. The intent was, and still is, to return the beaches to their pristine state. Now he has hundreds of volunteers and several municipalities helping out. The techniques he has developed allow him to do high impact beach clean ups.

Education - There are plans for efforts by students in several local public and private schools interested in the environment to analyze data collected by the organization. This includes what types of material are removed - bottles, cans, garbage, etc. This information will be used to try to determine the origin of the discarded waste and come up with possible actions to be taken to ease or fix a negative situation.

Wildlife - The occupants of an osprey nesting platform built by the organization left recently for their southern migration.



A pair of cleanup volunteers busy on Long Island Sound beach.

The list goes on, but I'm sure you get the idea of the organization's efforts to maintain a healthy coastline. If you have any questions, suggestions or want to get involved, call Captain Dave Johnson at 631-946-6560 or contact him at coastalsteward@optonline.com.