CONTROLLING MARINE DEBRIS: AN EXPLORATION OF THE RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR OF RECREATIONAL USERS IN RI

Sarina Lyon and David Bidwell, University of Rhode Island

Like many other coastal communities, people are attracted to Rhode Island's waters for the range of recreational activities available among the diverse marine habitats. This large influx of people to coastal areas leads to increased threats to the marine environment. One prominent issue is the presence of debris in the ocean which is predominantly a result of land- based sources. The most persistent debris item in the ocean is plastic, due to its chemical composition; plastic will never fully degrade in the environment. For this reason and the difficulty in cleaning up the waste, marine debris is a growing concern with no simple solution. A method to reduce the amount of debris entering the marine environment is to change the behavior of those who use the coast and it natural resources. The scope of this study is to understand how people visiting and living in Rhode Island behave towards the environment, with particular attention to behaviors that could reduce the amount of plastic debris entering the marine environment. This study uses multiple variables such as the New Ecological Paradigm, marine environmental concern, connectedness towards the marine environment, and knowledge about marine debris as potential indicators of one's environmentally responsible behavior. Based on suggestions in the literature that participation in nature-based recreation influences pro-environmental behavior; this study also includes several forms of coastal recreation as predictors of behavior. Other variables such as residency, age, education, and income will be used as possible predictors on how a person behaves towards the environment. This presentation will highlight results from a path analysis of 186 surveys conducted of outdoor recreationalists in coastal Rhode Island during the summer of 2015. By studying behavior towards the environment, we can begin to see areas of improvement among the people who use Rhode Island's coasts.