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Debris Removed from Key Shorebird Habitat Near Padre Island's John F. Kennedy Causeway



PADRE ISLAND, TX – Beautiful beaches, vibrant seagrass meadows teeming with life, and productive tidal flats are just a few of the things that make Padre Island a choice destination for visitors. Though many visitors make their way to the Island via the John F. Kennedy Causeway that stretches from Flour Bluff across the Upper Laguna Madre, another kind of visitor prefers to travel by air – and doesn't require any tarmacs or terminals. Many shorebirds, colonial waterbirds, and waterfowl rely on the

Upper Laguna Madre and habitat on nearby spoils and barrier islands, such as Mustang and Padre Islands, during their migrations. These birds routinely travel thousands of miles during their annual migrations, and the habitat between their wintering and breeding grounds becomes paramount in the success of their journey and survival. While the Upper Laguna Madre offers a productive habitat with many foraging and nesting opportunities, much of the habitat is impacted by litter and debris that can pose a fatal threat to wildlife.

Unfortunately, one of the first pieces of habitat seen when arriving on Padre Island is not always a welcoming sight. The tidal flats and mangroves between Packery Channel and the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW), known as "The Village", accumulates a large amount of litter and debris that floats up during high tide events, is carried by the wind, and even dumped. Aside from the litter, this area is an ideal habitat for shorebirds who often nest on the ground, offering abundant foraging opportunities nearby and their preferred nesting substrate. Once the trash is there, it often remains in the habitat and begins to break down into smaller, more harmful pieces. With recent research



[quantifying the abundance of microplastics in the bays and estuaries](#) of the Coastal Bend showing high levels and a wide variety of materials, the ecologic impact of plastic pollution is growing from an eye sore to posing increased threats to both wildlife, and human health.

On a particularly humid early-spring morning, volunteers flocked to the Waterline at Doc's to get their heading and gather their Up2U litter prevention bags and gloves. The volunteers disappeared into the dense and lingering fog, focused on gathering as much trash as possible in the next three hours. As the sun warmed the haze away, 30 volunteers materialized across the 88 acres of marsh and tidal flats with full bags of trash and debris quickly piling up. A wide variety of materials were pulled out of the habitat, ranging from brittle remains of plastic bags, car bumpers, traffic cones, tires, deteriorating Styrofoam cups and coolers, and thick wads of discarded fishing line.



This effort would not have been possible without the support of dedicated volunteers and stewards of our natural resources, our partners at the Waterline at Doc's for supplying a delicious BBQ lunch and rendezvous point, and Marker 37 for sponsoring the dumpster, the habitat at the Village was a lot more welcoming for the quickly approaching nesting season. While this was our first time focusing on this area of Padre Island, CBBEP also hosts a bi-annual cleanup at the Packery Flats habitat that lies just to the north and is heavily utilized by both wildlife and recreators. To get involved in habitat cleanups like this, follow us on Facebook or Instagram (@cbbep) to stay up to date on upcoming events.

The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring bays and estuaries in the 12-county region of Texas Coastal Bend. CBBEP is partially funded by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. For more information about the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, contact Quinn Hendrick,

361-336-0305 or qhendrick@cbbep.org.

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