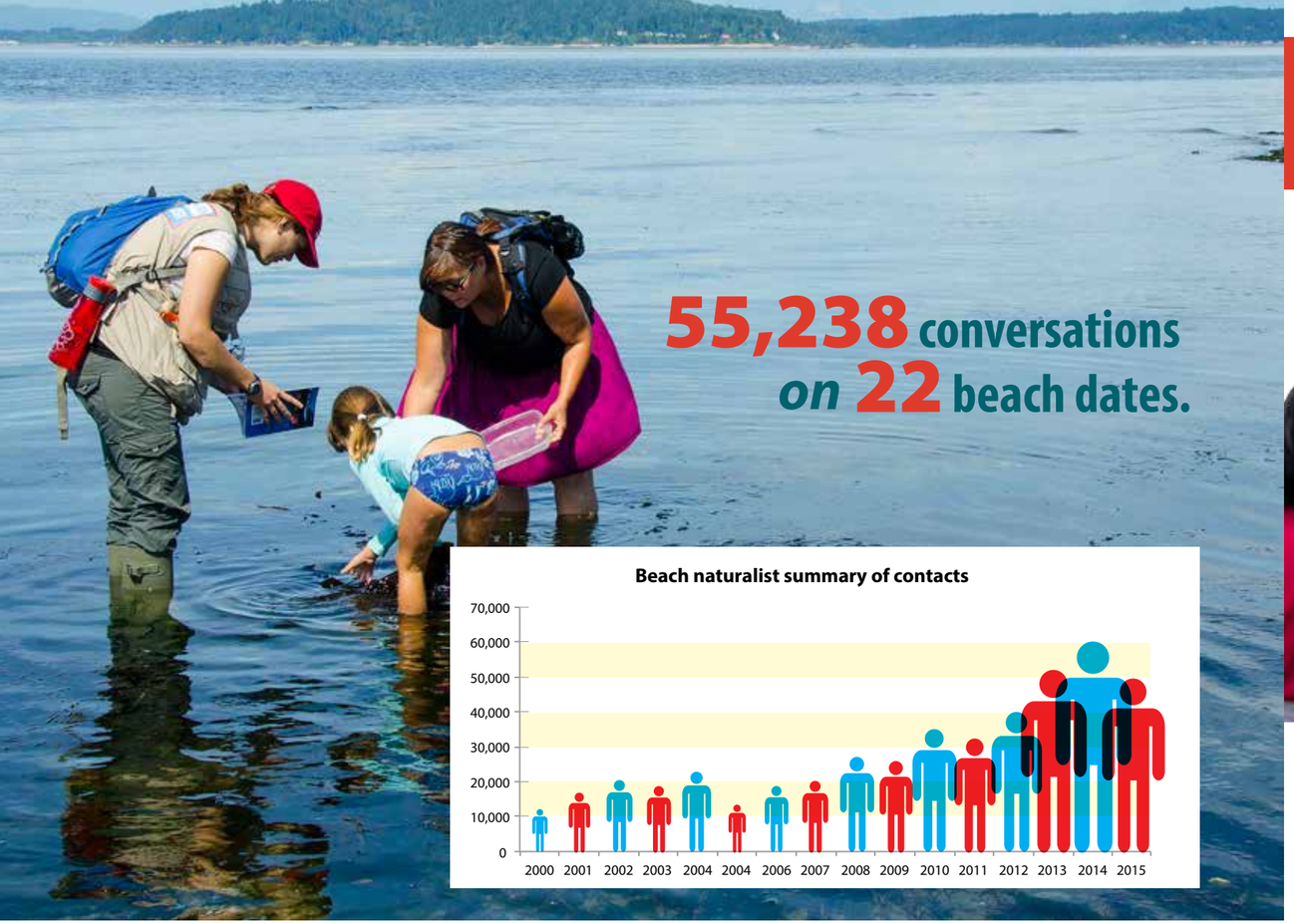
Beach Naturalist program 2015

Accomplishments and successes

SEATTLE AQUARIUM



- Twelve beaches served (with five dates on a new beach, Dash Point State Park): Richmond Beach, Carkeek Park, Golden Gardens, Olympic Sculpture Park Beach, Blake Island State Park, S. Alki/ Constellation Park, Lincoln Park, Seahurst Park, Des Moines Beach Park, Saltwater State Park, Redondo Beach, and Dash Point State Park.
- Nine low-tide weekday school dates to capture school groups that arrive at the beach with little or no preparation for their beach trip.
- Seven weekday summer dates to capture camp groups and vacationing beach visitors.
- Beach naturalists donated 2,766 hours of their time to talk to visitors on local beaches.
- Naturalists facilitated 6,065 conversations with beach visitors on salmon issues and the nearshore.
- Beach Naturalist and Cedar River Salmon Journey volunteers were also at the Chittenden Locks this summer. Over four days, 3,705 additional salmon conversations took place at the Locks for a total of 9,770 salmon and/or nearshore conversations.
- 1,713 public response cards given to beach visitors; 499 returned to date.
- We provided classroom beach prep classes and beach field trips with transportation for traditionally underserved students. We taught six classes at Viewlands Elementary Summer Staircase program, three preschool classes at Refugee Women's Alliance of Washington, and one class for elementary-age students at the Chinese Information and Service Center's summer program for new immigrant students. Funding for this summer programming was provided by a grant from King Conservation District.
- We will host two evening beach walks in January and February 2016 to keep Beach Naturalist volunteers engaged and to reach a different audience.
- Beach Naturalist volunteers continue to monitor sea star wasting disease on two beaches (Lincoln and S. Alki/Constellation Park).

Evaluation

The beach journal page is designed to record the number of conversations each naturalist has while on the beach, to provide a chance to debrief about the day's shift, and to capture anything unusual we see.

At the end of each beach shift, we ask the naturalists as a group to gauge public beach etiquette using the following criteria:

- **Excellent** = Almost all visitors exhibit careful beach etiquette: replacing rocks; if picking up animals doing so gently and staying in place; returning animals to where they were found.
- **Good** = Almost all visitors exhibit careful beach etiquette, with a few exceptions that respond well to information and reminders.
- **Needs improvement** = Mixed etiquette: 50 percent good; 50 percent rough exploration.
- **Poor** = More than 50 percent of the people/family groups not replacing rocks; rough handling of animals; not returning animals where they were found; digging up the beach.

Beach etiquette by beach

Beach	Excellent	Good to Excellent	Good	Good to Needs Improvement	Needs improvement	Poor
Richmond Beach:	32%		36%		19%	
Carkeek Park:	18%	4%	59%	13%	4%	
Golden Gardens	23%	14%	36%	13%	14%	
Olympic Sculpture Park	77%	8%	15%			
S. Alki/Constellation Park	27%		50%		18%	
Lincoln Park	.5%		65%	15%	2%	
Seahurst Park	32%		42%	11%	11%	
Des Moines Beach Park	31%		54%		15%	
Saltwater State Park	35%		45%		15%	
Redondo Beach	50%		50%			
Blake Island State Park	33%		66%			
Dash Point State Park	20%		60%		20%	

- We did note that on school days it was hard to decide on overall etiquette when behavior varied so much by school.
- Blake Island has a very short time visitors can be on the beach, because most go to the Argosy salmon dinner and show. We make the most of this audience by talking about salmon on the boat trip over to Blake Island and pointing out beach life using biofacts and the sea life we see on the dock and pier.
- Redondo has many visitors, but they are most often there for recreational purposes: to use the boat launch, walk the boardwalk, etc. We had two dates at Redondo during the 2015 season and set up a station on the sidewalk to meet and greet more visitors than we typically see using the beach.
- Data was not recorded on some beaches for every beach date.
- We only had two dates at Redondo due to the day and timing of the low tides.

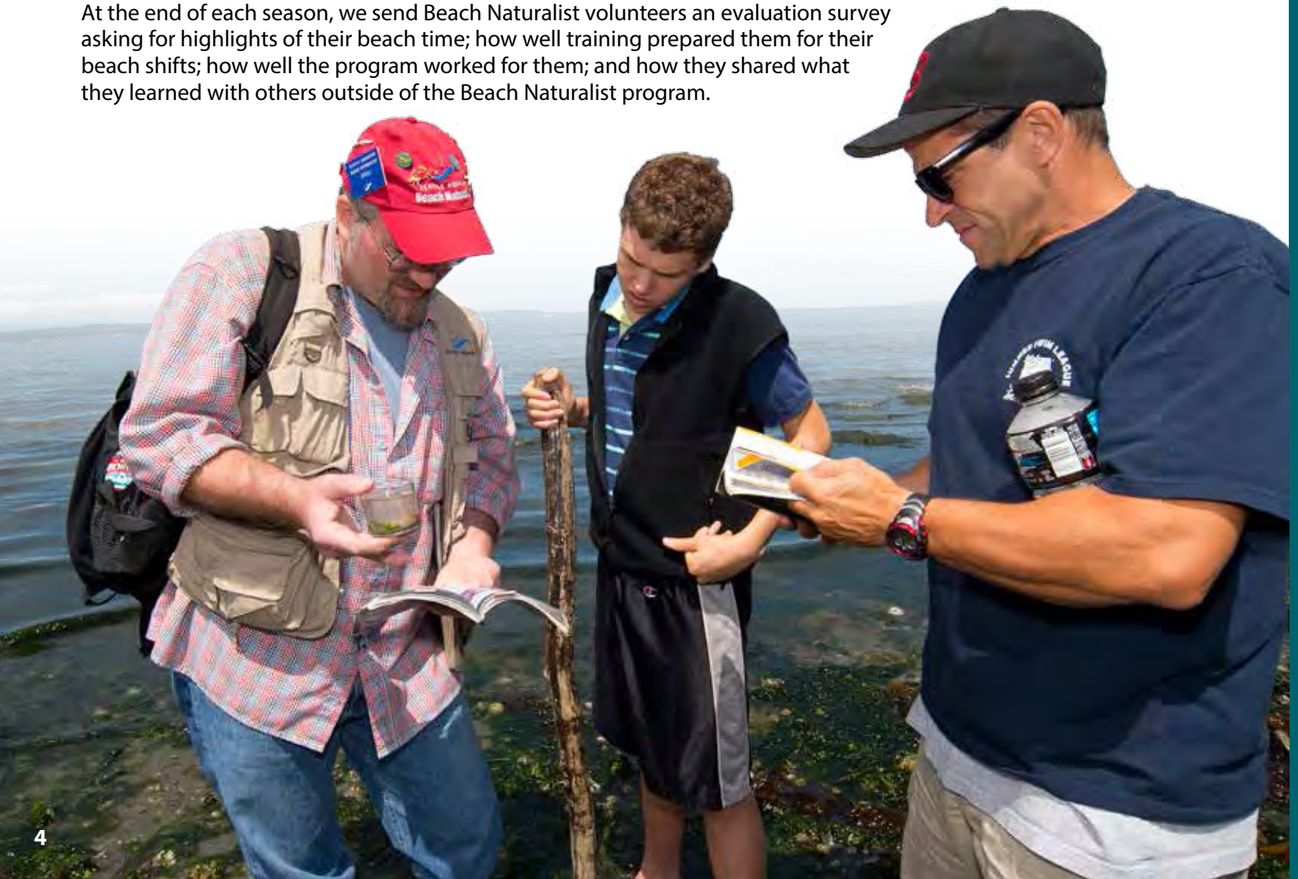
We measured naturalist conversations that led to better beach etiquette

- We asked naturalists and staff if they had **at least one conversation** during their beach shift that led to a positive behavior change by a beach visitor.
- Data was not recorded on some beaches for every beach date.

Beach	% of naturalists on duty that felt their conversation changed at least one beach visitor's etiquette for the better
Richmond Beach	92%
Carkeek Park	99%
Golden Gardens	92%
Olympic Sculpture Park	100%
S.Alki/Constellation Park	89%
Lincoln Park	97%
Seahurst	97%
Des Moines Beach Park	75%
Saltwater State Park	87%
Redondo Beach	100%
Blake Island State Park	83%
Dash Point State Park	100%

Beach Naturalist volunteers evaluate the program training and delivery

At the end of each season, we send Beach Naturalist volunteers an evaluation survey asking for highlights of their beach time; how well training prepared them for their beach shifts; how well the program worked for them; and how they shared what they learned with others outside of the Beach Naturalist program.



Naturalists share highlights from the beach:

"Having several kids say they really like it when we are on the beach because they always learn something new."

"One day a little boy followed me around for about an hour, and he was so excited to learn and then share what he was learning with others. It was really great to see! Also seeing a moon snail out of its shell underwater."

"The people were curious about the wonderful restoration of Seahurst and this made a nice transition into how the forest feeds the beach."

"I had visitors in town from Missouri for one of my beach days and they LOVED learning so much from me and fellow naturalists. My high-school-aged cousin even said, 'It's much better to learn this stuff in real life versus seeing photos in a book!' "

"One of my favorite encounters involved a visitor to the beach locating a clutch of squid eggs. She devoted her entire stay to protecting the eggs from desiccation and trampling. It was great to see this sort of stewardship in a young child."

"Watching newly empowered visitors share information with their friends and/or family."

"Particularly enjoyed the school group and day care group that came to the beach, was wonderful to see the skills they came prepared with and put into use to enjoy the beach."

"Kids were building a four inch 'river' from the top of the beach toward the lower, flipping rocks along the way. Was able to turn them into 'environmental engineers' instead, going back and saving lots of creatures."

"I worked a school day at Constellation Park where there were probably 300–400 students. It was awesome!"

"Showing some children a hidden sea star clinging to the underside of a rock, awaiting the return of the tide. They were ecstatic."

"Talking with a mother and her young son...their first time at a beach in this country. The boy was full of questions and enthusiasm. I felt so lucky."

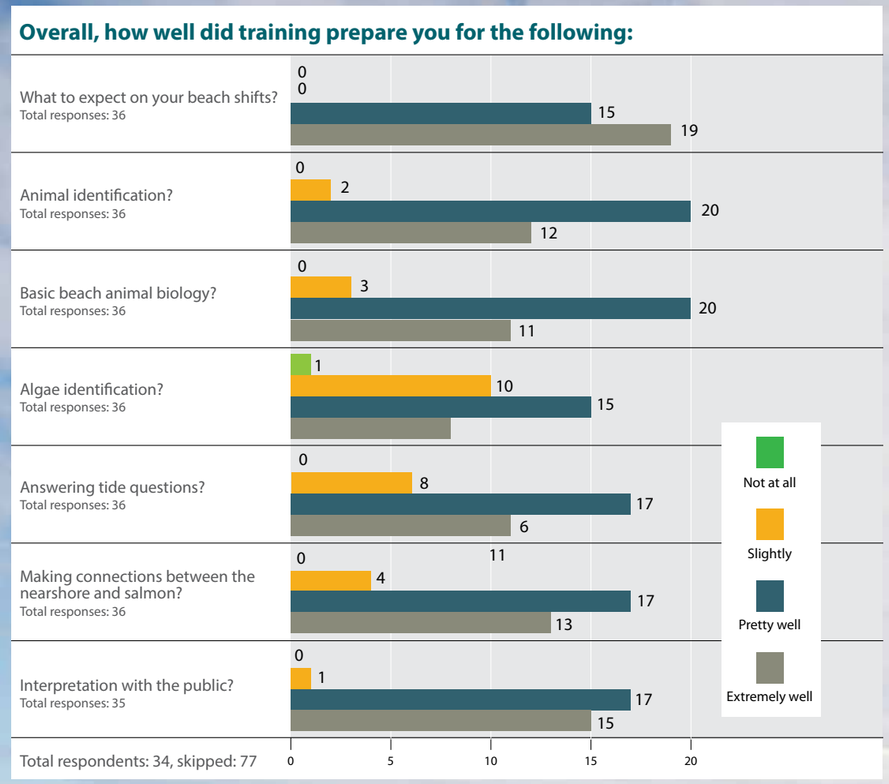
"A little girl said to me 'You guys make the beach more fun!' There is also a wonderful sense of community working with people who have the same passions."

"Normally I would say 'seeing a baby octopus,' but honestly, it was probably the 7-year-old girl who wanted to be a marine biologist and tagged along with me for at least an hour pointing out all the creatures by name. She was amazing and I hope she follows through with her dream."

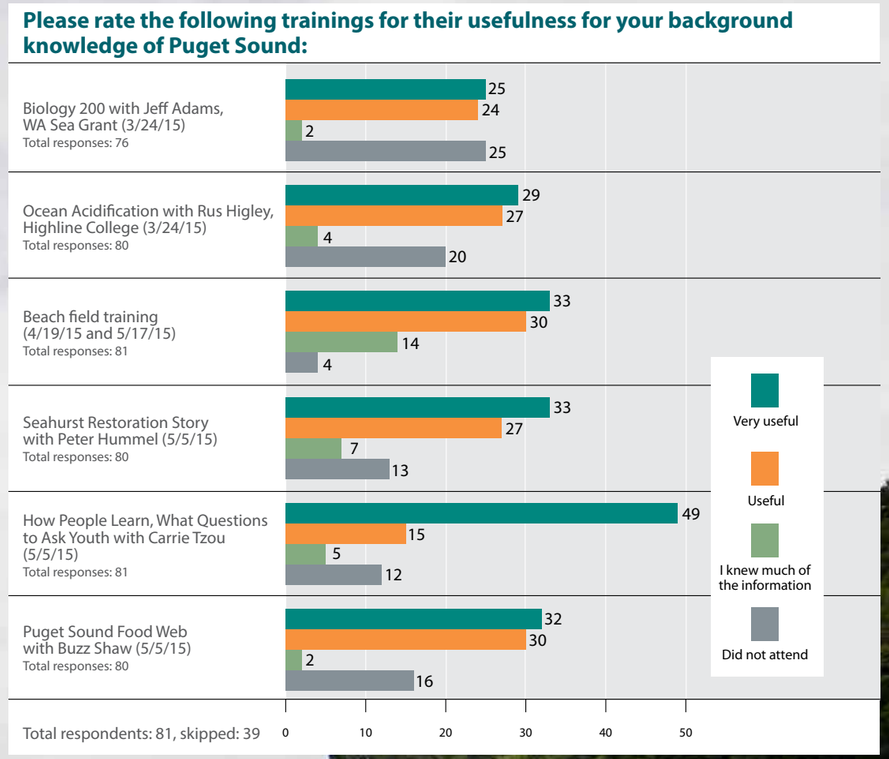
Training

We asked new naturalists if the training they received prepared them well for their beach shifts.

120 volunteers have completed the evaluation (37 new volunteers, 83 veteran volunteers).



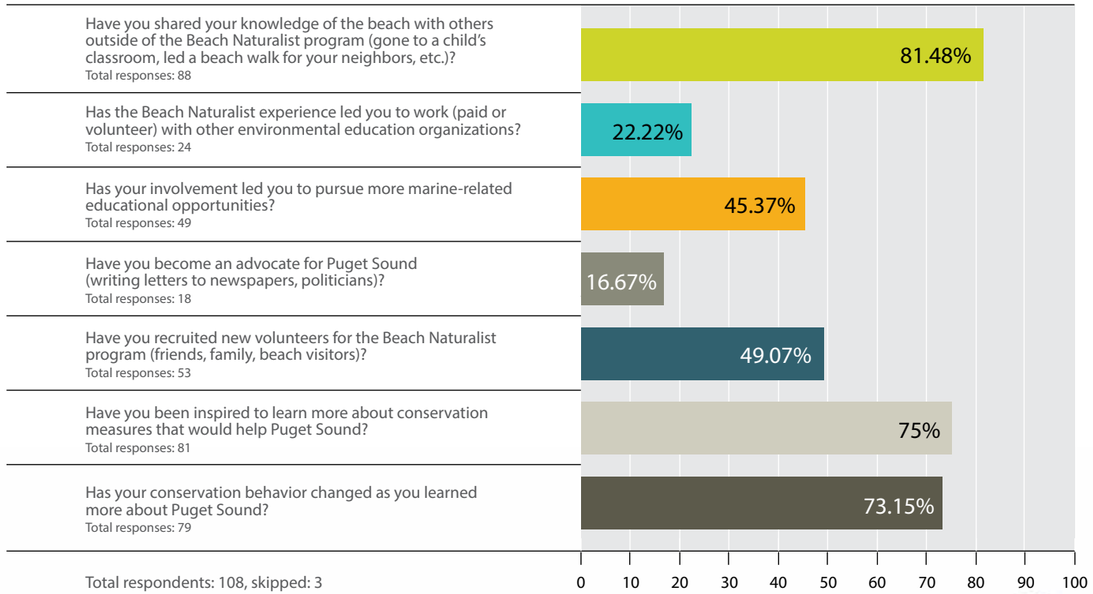
We asked veteran beach naturalists if their training topics provided useful information.



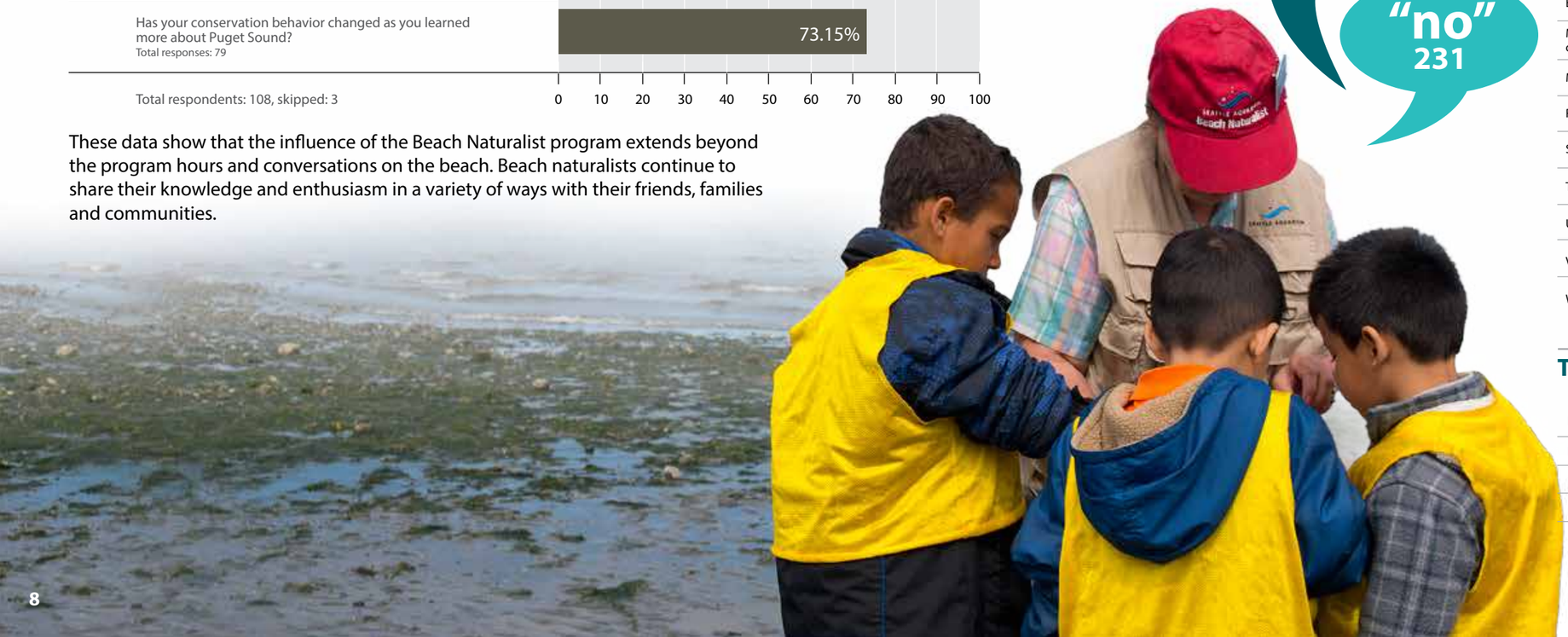
Evaluating the ripple effect of the Beach Naturalist program

The 2015 volunteer survey showed that the Beach Naturalist program extends far beyond the hours naturalists spend at the beach. In fact, 81 percent of the volunteers who participated as naturalists shared their knowledge with people outside the general public they meet as beach naturalists. Seventy-four percent of our volunteers who responded to the survey were inspired by their experience to learn even more about marine conservation measures, and 73 percent reported making changes in their own conservation behavior as a consequence of participating in the program.

In just this past 2015 season, in what way has your involvement with the Beach Naturalist program led to other activities? Please mark all that apply.



These data show that the influence of the Beach Naturalist program extends beyond the program hours and conversations on the beach. Beach naturalists continue to share their knowledge and enthusiasm in a variety of ways with their friends, families and communities.

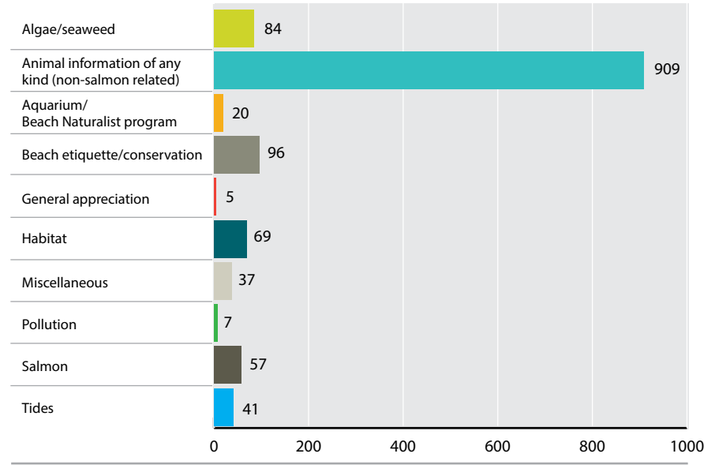


Public response cards measure what the public takes away from their beach time with naturalists and what the public can do to help Puget Sound. We provide visitors with a two-for-one ticket to the Seattle Aquarium when they complete and return a card while at the beach. This is a great incentive, and also a good way to connect the public to the education opportunities at the Aquarium as well as the local beach environment.

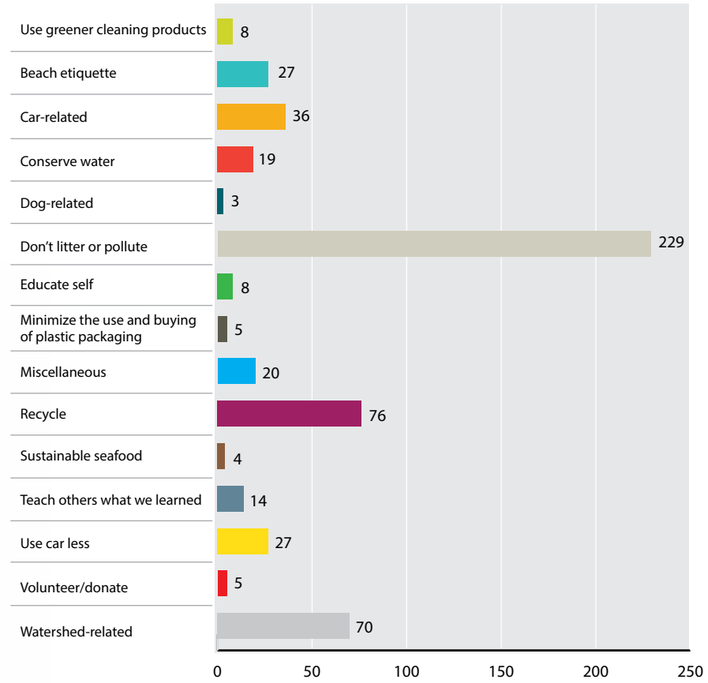
We look forward to working with these data in the future, possibly combining similar categories.

Have you talked to a Beach Naturalist before?

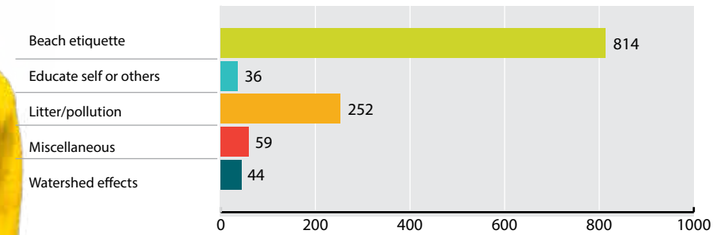
Three things learned from naturalist



Actions to keep Puget Sound healthy



Three things you can do to protect the beach



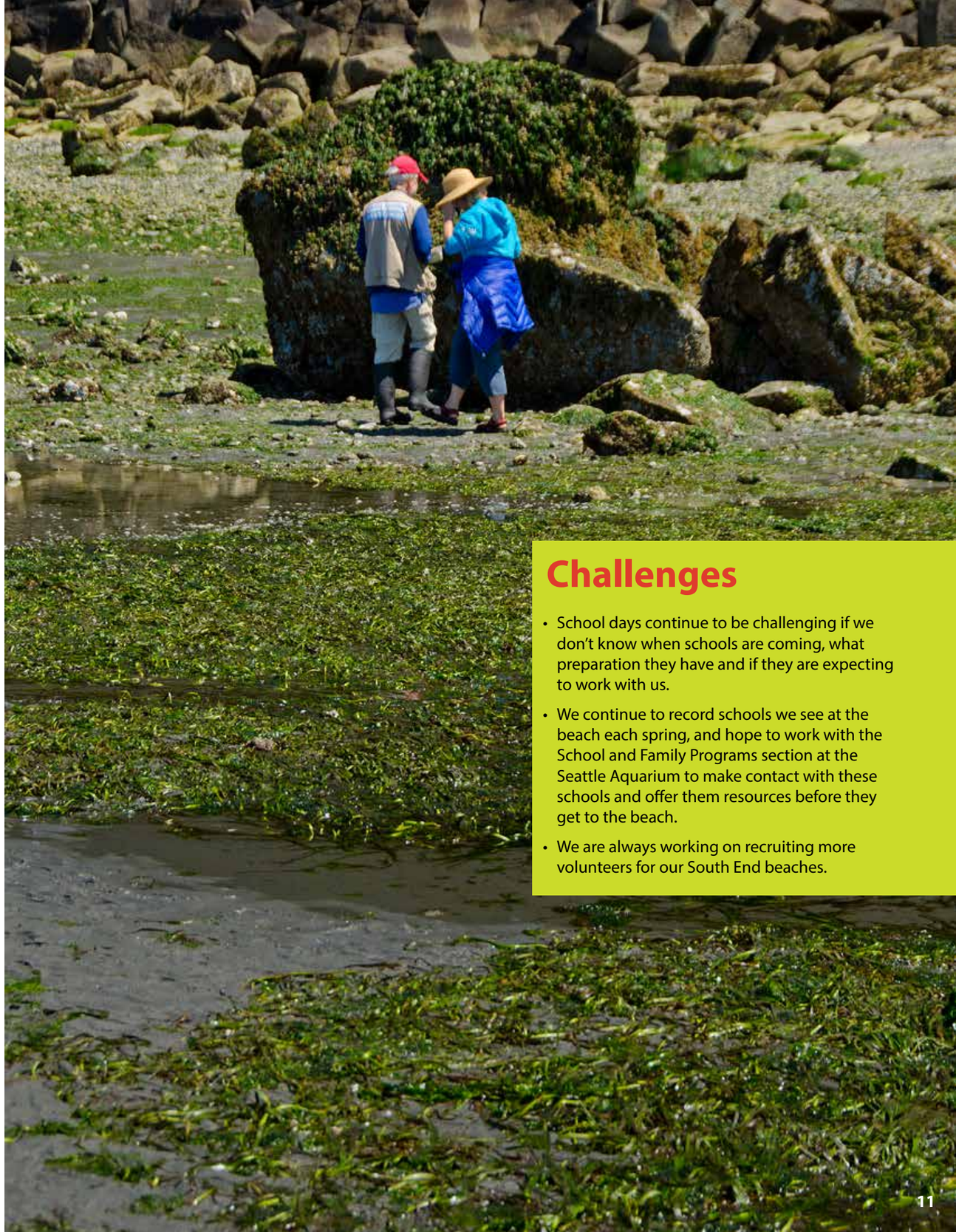
New initiatives and program highlights

- Conducted an all-day training pilot at Saltwater State Park. This training session combined basic beach biology (biology of beach life); interpretation (practicing how to share the information with beachgoers in an engaging way); and beach exploration (spending time on the beach looking at the animals) into a one-day training for our South End volunteers. We are planning to offer this to veteran volunteers in 2016. It was a great way to reinforce what the volunteers were learning in multiple settings and different ways.
- Continued to schedule more low-tide weekdays to capture school groups utilizing the beach for study and recreation. This provides a great opportunity to interact with students with sometimes little training on how to explore in ways that don't harm the beach inhabitants and habitat.
- We added additional staff and volunteers for school days to enhance the school groups' learning experience. Some designated staff greeted groups with a short beach etiquette introduction before they went on to the beach. Presence of naturalists was introduced to students, teachers and chaperones to let them know who was approaching them on the beach and that we were there to help them learn more about our rich nearshore environment.

- Included ocean acidification training for new and returning volunteers and began the transition to talking about it on the beach by providing the naturalists with talking points.
- Videotaped guest speakers and made the recordings available online for naturalists and staff.
- Incorporated sea star wasting disease information into training.
- Provided sea star fact sheets with pictures of sick and healthy sea stars and species information in beach box materials.
- Adjusted which beaches on which we offer coverage on school dates based on data from previous years to put the most resources (staff and volunteers) where we had the largest numbers of school groups.
- Worked with summer school and community groups that might not have the opportunity to visit the beach. We provided pre-trip training, transportation and naturalists at the beach.
- Redesigned the classroom portion of the program we offered to summer school and community groups this summer.
- Added Dash Point State Park to beaches we staffed. It was worthwhile to have access to a new and interested audience.

AZA award

The Beach Naturalist program is the first winner of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) inaugural Innovation in Volunteer Engagement Award. The award recognizes achievement in volunteer program development, and programs are judged by their ability to engage volunteers in the overall mission and operation of the organization. Beach Naturalist program staff and volunteers fulfill the Seattle Aquarium mission of *Inspiring Conservation of Our Marine Environment* on 12 local beaches, taking it outside the building on summer low-tide days.



Challenges

- School days continue to be challenging if we don't know when schools are coming, what preparation they have and if they are expecting to work with us.
- We continue to record schools we see at the beach each spring, and hope to work with the School and Family Programs section at the Seattle Aquarium to make contact with these schools and offer them resources before they get to the beach.
- We are always working on recruiting more volunteers for our South End beaches.

SEATTLE AQUARIUM

Inspiring Conservation of Our Marine Environment