



Your Guide to Puget Soundkeeper's Sound Sweep Series



Photo Description: Volunteers at Puget Soundkeeper's Earth Day Cleanup in 2026 having a blast!
[Photo Credit: Edward Yamut]

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Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in participating in Puget Soundkeeper's Sound Sweep Series, an initiative designed to empower Puget Sound residents to connect with and steward local waterways.

This guide is intended to support volunteers interested in coordinating their own community cleanup event as a Beach Captain. Below, you'll find information about event planning, volunteer management, safety guidance, data collection, and post-cleanup reporting.

We hope that this guide answers all your questions about coordinating a cleanup event.

About Puget Soundkeeper

Founded in 1984, Puget Soundkeeper Alliance is an environmental non-profit group in Seattle whose mission is to be a trusted leader and collaborator for all communities, in court and on the water, fighting for a healthy Puget Sound.

Puget Soundkeeper is also a founding member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, an international environmental organization made up of over 300 clean water advocates that work to protect rivers, lakes, and coastal waterways around the world.

Between our cleanups, community science initiatives, policy advocacy, and clean water legal defense, there are plenty of opportunities to get involved. You can learn more about our programming by [visiting our website](#).

About the Sound Sweep Series

The Sound Sweep Series is a Puget Soundkeeper initiative designed to mobilize volunteers across Puget Sound to connect with their local waterways and participate in activities that protect their waterways from pollution.

The Sound Sweep Series will also incorporate optional data collection opportunities through Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) initiative. Volunteers may opt to participate in debris data collection efforts that help researchers, policymakers, and environmental organizations better understand pollution sources impacting waterways across the world.

The Fall Sound Sweep season includes cleanup events occurring annually between **September 1 and November 30.**

Through collective action, community engagement, and data-driven advocacy, this series aims to reconnect residents with their local waterways, while creating healthier aquatic ecosystems throughout the Puget Sound region.

Like the sound of this? Continue reading to learn more about the event coordination process!

Beach Captain Role and Responsibilities



Photo Description: Beach Captain, Aden Park, with his welcome table before a cleanup.
[Photo Credit: Jina Park]

Purpose of the Beach Captain Role

Beach Captains will serve as the onsite volunteer lead responsible for supporting safe, organized, and effective cleanup operations. Beach Captains will serve as the primary point of contact for volunteers before and during the event and will help facilitate communication between participants and event organizers.

Beach Captains are expected to model professionalism, environmental stewardship, and positive community engagement.

Eligibility and Participation

Volunteers of all experience levels, backgrounds, and age groups are welcome!

Volunteers under 18 years old must:

- Be supervised by a parent/guardian
- Have a signed parent/guardian waiver completed prior to participation

Recommended Qualifications for Beach Captains include:

- Strong organizational and communication skills
- Ability to lead and support small groups
- Comfort working outdoors in different weather conditions
- Familiarity with environmental stewardship practices
- Outgoing and willing to connect with others
- Prior volunteer or cleanup experience (preferred, but not required)
- Looking to have fun!

Accessibility and Inclusion

Puget Soundkeeper is committed to making Sound Sweep events welcoming and accessible to participants of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities whenever possible.

Beach Captains are encouraged to consider:

- Accessible parking and pathways
- Public transportation access
- Terrain difficulty and mobility limitations
- Restroom availability
- Seating or low-mobility cleanup opportunities
- Clear signage and directions



Photo Description: Person in wheelchair.

Please note that not all cleanup locations will be fully ADA accessible due to shoreline and environmental conditions. Beach Captains are encouraged to communicate any accessibility limitations in advance.

Planning your Cleanup

Step 1: Choose a Cleanup Site

Identify beaches, waterways, parks, or other public spaces that are safe and appropriate for volunteer cleanup activities. You can use our [GIS map here](#) to find a beach near you!

During your site visit:

- Identify cleanup boundaries
- Assess hazards and accessibility considerations
- Determine where debris should be staged
- Identify restroom availability
- Locate emergency access points
- Evaluate parking and volunteer gathering areas
- Evaluate whether public transportation options are feasible
- Determine whether landowner permission is required
- Determine whether the site is safe from potential hazards (encampments, dangerous materials, etc.)

Note: Public spaces and waterways will often look clean, but we encourage you to look closely, as there is often a lot of debris that goes unnoticed, particularly in the wrack line.

Step 2: Obtain permission (if necessary)

We encourage you to pick sites that are open to the public, but if your cleanup occurs on private property or a managed site, contact the landowner or managing agency to obtain approval prior to the event.

Step 3: Complete Registration Forms

Beach Captains should complete the following forms before they close on **October 30**

- [Beach Captain Interest Form](#)
- [Site Selection Form](#)
- [Puget Soundkeeper Beach Captain Waiver](#)

Step 4: Attend Training

Beach Captains should watch the training video and/or attend a live training session hosted by Puget Soundkeeper. You can find the training video by scrolling down the [website page here](#).

Trainings will review:

- Cleanup coordination expectations
- Safety guidance
- Data collection procedures
- Reporting requirements
- Volunteer engagement tips

Step 5: Arrange Supplies and Waste Disposal

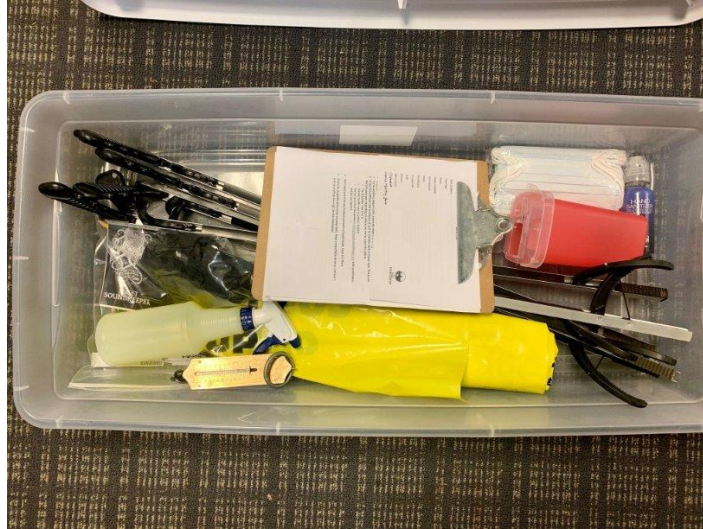


Photo Description: Bin with cleanup supplies. [Photo Credit: Puget Soundkeeper]

Beach Captains should identify supply needs and coordinate debris disposal plans before the event.

Potential supplies include:

- Trash bags
- Gloves
- Grabbers
- Buckets
- Hand sanitizer
- First aid kit
- Safety vests
- ICC data cards and pens/pencils if collecting data on the debris
- Sharps containers
- Water and snacks
- [Incident Report Forms](#) incase an incident occurs.

If you don't have the capacity to procure supplies, we encourage you to ask participants to bring their own pair of gloves, a bucket, and/or trash bags! It doesn't need to be complicated, and everyone can participate with minimal items.

The landowner and/or municipality will often assist with debris hauling or disposal coordination.

To find a local program to support your cleanup supply needs and/or debris disposal plan, [check the list here](#).



Photo Description: Adopt-a-Street trash bags next to trash cans.
[Photo Credit: Edward Yamut]

Step 6: Recruit Volunteers

Beach Captains are encouraged to create a registration link for their event through JotForm, Eventbrite, Google Forms, etc. You can share this information and recruit volunteers through:

- Social media
- Community organizations
- Schools and universities
- Flyers and in-person outreach
- Puget Soundkeeper's website and social media pages

If you are running a cleanup on behalf of another entity, group, school, or other non-profit organization, work with that entity to ensure you plan for participant waivers and liabilities. If you are running this cleanup site as a Puget Soundkeeper volunteer, we'll make you a registration link that includes our waiver.

During the Cleanup

Beach Captains should:

- Arrive 30–60 minutes early
- Set up check-in and supply stations

- Organize bags, gloves, and cleanup tools
- Review hazards and cleanup boundaries
- Confirm debris staging locations
- Check weather and tide conditions

Volunteer Check-In

- Collect waivers if applicable
- Welcome participants
- Direct volunteers to restrooms and snacks/water
- Distribute supplies
- Encourage participants to download the [Clean Swell app](#) if participating in data collection. This app allows participants to enter data on the debris that they pick up directly, without the need for a physical data card.

Suggested Volunteer Welcome and Talking Points

Beach Captains are encouraged to begin the cleanup with a short volunteer orientation. Suggested talking points include:

- Welcome and introductions
- Overview of Puget Soundkeeper and the Sound Sweep Series
- Why shoreline cleanups matter
- Cleanup boundaries and meeting locations
- Safety reminders and hazards
- What not to pick up
- Waste sorting instructions
- Data collection guidance
- Bathroom and water locations
- Cleanup timeline and gathering time

Before leaving the cleanup site

Beach Captains are expected to:

- Ensure all volunteers safely return
- Collect remaining supplies
- Confirm debris is properly staged

- Conduct a final walkthrough
- Take final photos and debris totals

Following the Event

Beach Captains should:

- Submit the [Cleanup Reporting Form](#)
- Upload data into the [TIDES database](#) if physical data cards were completed
- Return borrowed supplies
- Send photos to Puget Soundkeeper. Dropbox or Google Drive link preferred.
 - Email to cleanups@pugetsoundkeeper.org
- Coordinate debris disposal and/or confirm that debris was collected
- Thank volunteers and partners

Incident Reporting

Any injuries, hazardous materials, conflicts, wildlife incidents, or emergencies should be reported to Puget Soundkeeper following the cleanup.

If you are running a cleanup on behalf of an organization and/or other entity, you will be taking up the liability for any incidents that occur during your event.

However, if you are running a cleanup through Puget Soundkeeper and are not affiliated with any group, Puget Soundkeeper is the responsible party for any incidents that occur during the event. In this case, **Beach Captains should print out 1-2 copies of the attached [Incident Report Form](#) to document any injuries, medical emergencies, or other incidents that arise.**

If an accident occurs, please complete the Incident Report Form and email Puget Soundkeeper within 24 hours of the incident occurring (email: cleanups@pugetsoundkeeper.org).

Data Collection (Optional)

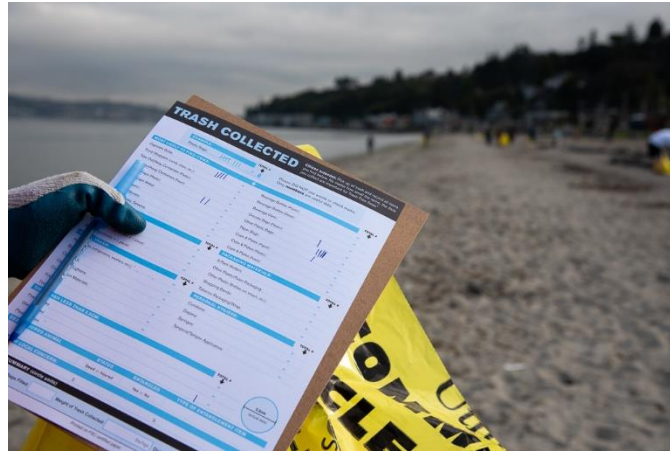


Photo Description: ICC data sheet being held by a volunteer.
[Photo Credit: Puget Soundkeeper]

[Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup \(ICC\)](#) is the largest global effort to unite organizations and individuals in protecting our oceans and waterbodies. During ICC events, volunteers remove trash from waterways, document debris sources, and support lifestyle and policy changes aimed at preventing further marine litter.

Participants collect data at the quantitative scale, recording the specific types and quantities of debris using data cards or the [Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell app](#). Once analyzed, this data helps inform local, regional, and international legislation and other data-backed solutions to protect our aquatic environments.

One example of a wonderful use of data to push for legislative change was the ban of balloon releases on Florida beaches: Volunteers reported several balloons on beaches during cleanups and, as a result, produced data which was used by legislators to ban intentional balloon releases.

Puget Soundkeeper serves as the regional coordinator for ICC events across Puget Sound. Following the end of the Sound Sweeps, Puget Soundkeeper will compile all the data from the TIDES database and will produce a report highlighting findings from cleanups across the Puget Sound!

It is completely **optional** to integrate data collection into your cleanup, however we highly recommend bringing data cards and/or encouraging participants to download the [Clean Swell app](#).

If you choose to opt in to the data collection component, there are two methods by which data will be collected by Puget Soundkeeper:

1) Physical Data Cards (more work)

Puget Soundkeeper can mail you physical data cards for participants that might not want to inventory debris using the app. If you go this route, please request data cards from Puget Soundkeeper at least 1 month in advance to allow time for staff to send mail to you.

If participants at your event utilize physical data cards, you will need to compile all the data collected from multiple sheets and enter the data into the TIDES database, where Puget Soundkeeper will then extract it.

Puget Soundkeeper encourages participants to download the Clean Swell app so that data is automatically entered into the [TIDES database](#). If you don't have a login, you will have to create an account.

- 2) Have participants directly download the [Clean Swell app](#) and inventory their debris as they pick it up. (less work for Beach Captains!)
- a. We recommend asking participants to download the app in advance to prevent connectivity issues

When you input the data into the app and/or TIDES website, please enter your Group Name using the following format: PSK_”YEAROFCLEANUP”_ICC (E.g. PSK_2026_ICC). This will help us to identify all the cleanups to include in our annual report.

Photos and Media

Photos and videos help document the impact of Sound Sweep events and will be included in Puget Soundkeeper's report.

Beach Captains are encouraged to:

- Capture volunteer action shots
- Document unusual debris finds
- Take a group photo

General Points to Remember

- Ask permission before taking close-up photos of individuals
- Avoid photographing minors without parent/guardian consent

- Respect participant privacy preferences
- Avoid photographing individuals who are not participating in the cleanup

Safety and Hazards

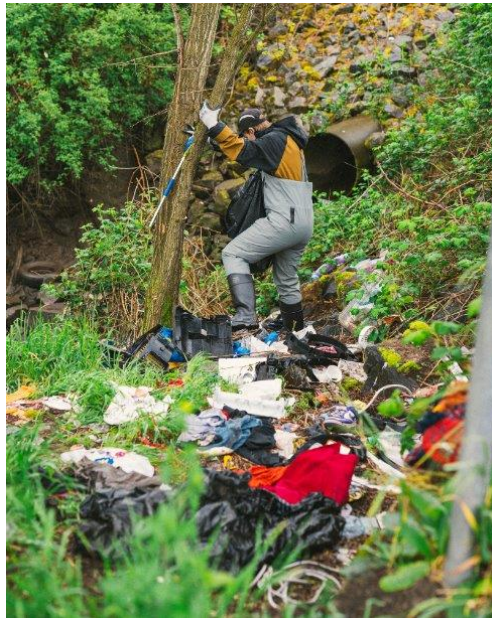


Photo Description: A volunteer in boots walking amongst debris.

[Photo Credit: Edward Yamut]

Volunteer safety is the highest priority during all Sound Sweep events. Beach Captains should review site-specific hazards before the cleanup begins and encourage participants to work within their comfort levels.

Generally, participants should:

- Wear closed-toe shoes suitable for uneven or wet terrain
- Dress appropriately for weather conditions (bring layers!)
- Wear gloves and/or use grabbers provided while handling debris
- Wash or sanitize hands before eating or drinking
- Stay hydrated and take breaks as needed
- Avoid lifting items that are heavy and/or hazardous (rusty metals, etc)
- Avoid entering the water
- Avoid being isolated and stay with a buddy!

IMPORTANT: Participants should avoid working alone in isolated areas and should remain aware of tides, slippery surfaces, sharp objects, and unstable shoreline conditions.

Needles, Sharps, and Hazardous Waste



Photo Description: Sharps container in a field.

[Photo Credit: Puget Soundkeeper]

You may encounter needles, broken glass, razor blades, metal fragments, or other sharp objects during your cleanup.

Volunteers should:

- Never handle sharps directly with their hands, even while wearing gloves
- Use grabbers if provided
- Place sharps directly into a designated sharps container if one is available
- Notify the Beach Captain if a sharps container becomes full

Volunteers should NOT attempt to handle:

- Medical waste
- Syringes containing liquid
- Chemical containers
- Oil drums
- Unknown powders or substances

- Pressurized containers
- Batteries leaking fluid

If you encounter hazardous materials and do not feel comfortable handling them:

1. Leave the item where it is
2. Mark or photograph the location if safe to do so
3. Notify the Beach Captain
4. Report the item to Puget Soundkeeper and/or the appropriate local authority

After handling debris, participants should avoid touching their face and should sanitize or wash their hands as soon as possible.

Wildlife Protocols

Puget Sound beaches and shorelines provide important habitat for marine mammals, birds, fish, and other wildlife. Volunteers should avoid disturbing wildlife during cleanup activities.

If you encounter wildlife:

- Keep a safe distance
- Keep dogs away from wildlife areas
- Do not touch, feed, or attempt to move animals
- Avoid loud noises or crowding around animals
- Stay at least 100 yards away from seal pups and marine mammals whenever possible

If an animal appears injured, stranded, entangled, or deceased:

- Do not attempt to intervene directly
- Notify the Beach Captain
- Contact the appropriate wildlife authority (**Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Enforcement: 360-902-2936** OR if located in the Greater Puget Sound area: **PAWS Wildlife Center 425-412-4040**)

Volunteers should also avoid disturbing:

- Bird nesting areas
- Dune vegetation

- Eelgrass beds
- Driftwood structures that may provide habitat

Natural materials such as seaweed, shells, and driftwood should generally remain onsite unless they are clearly associated with human-made debris.

Biological Materials



Photo Description: Food waste and packaging piled up.
[Photo Credit: Edward Yamut]

Participants may encounter containers with unknown liquids, spoiled foods, animal waste, and/or human waste during cleanups.

If you encounter sealed containers with unknown contents:

- Do not open the container
- Carefully place it directly into a trash bag if it appears safe and intact
- Avoid handling leaking or damaged containers

Volunteers should avoid direct contact with:

- Human waste, including diapers and feces
- Blood or bodily fluids
- Deceased animals
- Animal feces

Please leave any dead animals at the site. Only dispose of the other items listed if they are safely contained and can be handled without direct exposure. If the material is leaking, exposed, or unsafe to handle, leave it in place and notify the Beach Captain.

Large Debris



Photo Description: Pile of tires in a park.

[Photo Credit: Puget Soundkeeper]

Some debris may be too large, heavy, unstable, or hazardous for volunteers to safely remove debris. Examples include:

- Tires embedded in sediment
- Appliances
- Oil drums
- Large metal objects
- Construction debris
- Derelict vessels
- Heavy logs with attached debris

If large debris is encountered:

- Document the item with photos if possible
- Record the location and notify the Beach Captain
- Remove it and/or bring it out of the intertidal zone if you can safely do so
- Report the debris to Puget Soundkeeper's Pollution Hotline: 1-800-42PUGET (1-800-427-8438) or using our [webform](#)

Environmental and Site Hazards

Beach and shoreline environments may contain uneven, slippery, or unstable terrain.

Participants should use caution around:

- Mudflats
- Slick rocks
- Steep embankments
- Riprap and jetties
- Docks and piers
- Railroad tracks
- Fast-moving water
- Areas with limited visibility

Volunteers should avoid climbing on unstable structures or entering restricted or private property areas.

Beach Captains are encouraged to identify and communicate site-specific hazards while coordinating the cleanup with Puget Soundkeeper.

Encampment Interaction Guidance

Some cleanup locations may have active or inactive encampments. Volunteers should prioritize personal safety, respect, and non-confrontational behavior in these situations.

Participants should:

- Respect the privacy of individuals occupying the area
- Avoid entering tents, shelters, or clearly inhabited spaces
- Never photograph individuals without their permission
- Avoid touching personal belongings, including carts, bedding, clothing, bicycles, or containers that appear to belong to someone
- Work in groups and remain aware of surroundings

Volunteers should not attempt to:

- Ask individuals to leave the area

- Dispose of personal belongings
- Engage in arguments or confrontations
- Handle materials that may contain biohazards, needles, or human waste without proper equipment and training

If volunteers encounter an area that feels unsafe:

- Leave the area immediately
- Notify the Beach Captain
- Redirect cleanup activities to another location if necessary

Beach Captains should use discretion when determining whether areas near encampments are appropriate for volunteer cleanup activities. If conditions present significant safety concerns, portions of the cleanup area may need to be avoided or excluded entirely.

If immediate safety concerns arise, call 911. Non-emergency concerns may be reported to local municipal outreach or public works teams as appropriate.

Weather and Tide Guidance



Photo Description: Volunteers cleaning the beach on a foggy day.

[Photo Credit: Puget Soundkeeper]

Beach Captains should always check weather forecasts, tide charts, and site conditions before the event.

Events are generally rain-or-shine; however, cleanups should be postponed, rescheduled, or canceled if conditions become unsafe.

Unsafe conditions may include:

- Flooding
- Lightning or thunderstorms
- High winds
- Extreme heat or cold
- Wildfires
- Poor air quality
- Dangerous surf or tidal conditions
- Severe weather warnings

Participants should be informed in advance if weather conditions require schedule changes.

Emergency Procedures

In the event of an emergency:

- Call 911 immediately for medical emergencies or urgent safety concerns
- Notify the Beach Captain as soon as possible
- Move participants away from unsafe conditions if necessary

Beach Captains are encouraged to:

- Carry a basic first aid kit
- Know the nearest access point for emergency responders
- Identify the nearest restroom and potable water source before the cleanup begins
- Have a charged cell phone available during the event

Any injuries, hazardous discoveries, or major incidents should be reported to Puget Soundkeeper following the cleanup. Puget Soundkeeper will provide Beach Captains

with an Incident Report Form that should be completed if any emergencies and/or injuries arise.

Questions? Email our Clean Water Program team at cleanups@pugetsoundkeeper.org.

Beach Captain Checklist: One Pager

___ Find a site to host a cleanup. If you need inspiration, you can use our [GIS map here](#) to find one. Obtain landowner permission if necessary.

___ Complete the following forms to initiate interest: [Beach Captain Interest Form](#), [Site Selection Form](#), [Puget Soundkeeper Beach Captain Waiver](#)

___ Watch the [training video provided by Puget Soundkeeper](#) and/or attend a live training session (or read through the protocol document)

___ Arrange for supply rental and/or debris disposal. To find a local program to support your cleanup supply needs and/or debris disposal plan, [check the list here](#).

___ Recruit volunteers by promoting your event at in-person events or through social media. Let Puget Soundkeeper know if you need help promoting the event.

___ Have all volunteers at your cleanup sign a waiver. If you are not representing an organization, you can have Puget Soundkeeper put together a registration link that contains waiver language. If you are representing another entity, school, or group, you will be responsible for taking up liability and putting together the waiver/registration link.

___ Send an email to volunteers with details 2-3 days before the event (optional but not recommended). This is a great opportunity to highlight changes in weather, cancellations if needed, and/or other last-minute changes that might occur.

___ Carry out your event! Arrange the debris to be collected and thank all volunteers who attended. Take photos, collect all the data cards, and most importantly, have fun!

___ Following the event, submit the [Cleanup Reporting Form](#) to Puget Soundkeeper.

___ If data collection happened, please upload the data directly into the [TIDES database](#) if physical data cards were used. When you input the data into the app and/or TIDES website, please enter your Group Name using the following format:
PSK_"YEAROFCLEANUP"_ICC:-(E.g. PSK_2026_ICC).

___ Return supplies if you borrowed any.

___ Send photos to Puget Soundkeeper. Dropbox or Google Drive link preferred. Email to cleanups@pugetsoundkeeper.org