



The
SeaDoc
Society

August 2005 Update

A Marine Ecosystem Health Program



Can private citizens really help conduct underwater research that will benefit the recovery of threatened or endangered species? Yes! For over three years, the SeaDoc Society has been training recreational SCUBA divers to help count and monitor marine fish and invertebrates in the Pacific Northwest. We think this is important for several reasons:

- **Quality data:** Divers are rated on their identification skills and the data is standardized
- **Scale:** An army of volunteer divers collects important data from sites they routinely visit and provides important data for biologists
- **Scope:** As a group, recreational SCUBA divers log thousands of hours under water—to pay agency personnel to do this would be prohibitively expensive
- **Stewardship:** People are interested in saving what they know, so volunteer monitoring of fish and invertebrates fosters personal ownership for these amazing resources

Trained regional SCUBA divers merely swim throughout a dive site of their choice and record every observed fish species they can identify as well as record their sightings of a suite of pre-determined invertebrate species. The data are submitted to a national database (www.reef.org) and is freely available to private individuals, biologists, and other interested parties.

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Work done by Abby Sine, a 2004 SeaDoc summer research volunteer, showed that the best way to get SCUBA divers involved in accurately counting fish and invertebrates is to give free classes on fish and invertebrate identification. The SeaDoc Society has sponsored four such courses to date and, thanks to a recent grant from the Gould Family Foundation, we have plans for many more. Since the REEF program was started in Washington, recreational SCUBA divers have conducted a total of 2,398 surveys for a grand total of 1,934 hours logged underwater. Interestingly, the three most commonly sighted fish in Washington are striped sea perch, lingcod, and copper rockfish. In the Seattle/Olympia area alone, over 100 species of fish have been sighted. We have some amazing marine resources!

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Recreational divers provide important information on species abundance and distribution, data which have already proven valuable to managers working on the recovery of species like rockfish and abalone. As more and more surveys are conducted over a greater time period, the value of this information will only continue to grow. To learn more about survey methodology and Abby Sine's research please visit www.seadocsociety.org.

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If you would like to attend our next free fish and invertebrate identification class (interesting for beach walkers too!), please let us know by sending an e-mail to Lavonne Hull, lwhull@ucdavis.edu, or by calling (530) 752-3854. Thank you again for all your support. Projects like this would not be possible without private investment by people who care about the future of fish and wildlife populations in the region.

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