# Marine Debris Program 2009 : COMPLETED PROJECT SUMMARY

**Project Title: Fishing Communities in Action: Reducing Marine Debris in Puerto Rico**
**Grantee: University of Puerto Rico at Aguadilla**
**Location: The program covered approximately 5,500 meters of coastline and all 78 municipalities of Puerto Rico.**
**Award Amount: $ 65,617**

## Results

- Reduce the amount of derelict fishing gear found on the coast of Puerto Rico.
  - **78 participants from 13 fishing cooperatives** participated in the project. 47 undergraduate students volunteered for the project formed 13 groups for a competition to collect marine debris.
  - The project also held 59 coastal and creek clean up events.
  - Approximately 610 volunteers participated in the 59 events.
  - A total of **151,416 pounds of marine debris** was collected of which **18,352 pounds** of it was **derelict fishing gear**.
- Reduce the creation of derelict fishing gear found on the coast of Puerto Rico.
  - 39 plastic drum containers and 20 PVC monofilament containers were placed at 13 fishing cooperatives to collect derelict fishing gear.
- Increase the knowledge in the community about the sources, impacts, and solutions to the problem of marine debris.
  - 114 talks and educational activities were presented to 5,614 attendees.
  - Public service announcements were run 36 times on radio, TV, and in the newspaper.

## Summary of Accomplishments:

The project consisted of an incentive program in which 13 groups of commercial fishers and undergraduate student volunteers from seven units of the University of Puerto Rico teamed up with members of the community to raise awareness on the problems caused by marine debris and to recover derelict fishing gear, and other marine debris items, from fishing hot-spots in Puerto Rico. Commercial fishers were trained to remove marine debris from the coastal environment. A total of 59 cleanups, in addition to daily routine marine debris removal, took place during the project period. A total of 76 tons of marine debris were recovered and disposed of by competitors and other volunteers. Also, 20 monofilament-recycling containers and 39 plastic drums were installed at each fishing coop for the storage of marine debris. Groups of fishers organized educational activities, related to marine debris, on their communities. A total of 29 educational activities (> 1,000 attendees) took place. A group of trained undergraduate student volunteers, from the UPR delivered 85 talks on the problem of marine debris, to 5,614 individuals. There was as a significant increase in the number of correct answers on the post-talk tests suggesting that there was an increase in knowledge of marine debris. Several groups of participant fishers have continued to organize cleanups with our undergraduate students and have continued educating their communities on the negative effects of marine debris.

## Lessons Learned:

The most enriching experiences came from working with anglers from 12 points on the coast of Puerto Rico. We learned about the problems these workers face regarding government regulations and the large amount of marine debris they encounter. As a result of this their fishing gear and motors get tangled and damaged quite often. From the types of marine debris we processed during this project we could conclude that most of it did not come from local sources. A systematic study of marine debris for the wider Caribbean area is needed. Sometimes it was relatively hard to deal with some stubborn fishers who did not like the procedures and were not responsible when it came to deadlines and reporting. Three participating fishing coops opted out of the competition during the first month but the rest were highly motivated and very diligent. Visiting the fishing coops, every month, for weighing and characterization of the recovered materials was easier than expected. Having a strict monthly monitoring schedule and maintaining constant communication with the fishers was very important. A stipend for at least 5 students would free some of the time some of our volunteers were spending working. I think that fishers should be given the opportunity to contribute to marine conservation, through incentive programs such as this one. Their knowledge of the coastal waters and their constant presence in this system makes them very good stewards and guardians of the coastal environment.