

If you don't know what's happening, you can't learn from it. While most people can see change above the water (such as a forest clear cut), there aren't many people keeping an eye on the dramatic changes occurring below the surface of the ocean.



And without details on what is happening, how can we know when you need to take action to correct negative trends?

This month, SeaDoc kicks off a project using trained citizen scientists to help study changes in subtidal fish and invertebrate populations. This ambitious multi-year intelligence-gathering effort will use recreational SCUBA divers -- trained and certified by the REEF Environmental Education Foundation as experts in identifying fish and invertebrates -- to get a long-term view of what's happening at multiple sites in the San Juan Islands.

Every fall, trained citizen scientist SCUBA divers will conduct 100 surveys of fish and invertebrates. The results will be immediately accessible on the national REEF database (check it out at [www.reef.org](http://www.reef.org)), which is used by citizens and scientists the world over.

In a more robust way, SeaDoc and REEF will be working to scientifically analyze changes

occurring at these sites annually. This project is made possible thanks to collaborations with REEF, Friday Harbor Labs, numerous volunteer divers and of course SeaDoc donors, including Jeanne Luce, Steve Alboucq, Loren Ceder, Chuck Curry & Molly Davenport, and one other anonymous donor.

SeaDoc has seen big payoffs for intelligence gathering that's been done with birds, marine mammals, shoreline habitat, and air and water quality.

For example, SeaDoc Postdoctoral Fellow Dr. Nacho Vilchis was able to evaluate decades of change in marine bird populations in the Salish Sea and identify population stressors and solutions for recovery. This was possible only because of excellent long-term monitoring by scientists and citizens on both sides of the border.

SeaDoc anticipates their new study will provide crucial data for future scientific insights that will help us heal the Salish Sea.

Photo: *Basket Star* by Ed Bierman via Flickr Creative Commons.