

Watershed Council collaboration to bring robot, drone to collect litter from beaches, lakes this summer

Environment

By Harbor Light News Staff

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BeBot, a plastics litter collection robot, will be deployed on area beaches this summer to address the plastic pollution crisis affecting the Great Lakes region. (Courtesy photo)

This summer and fall, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council will collaborate with Great Lakes Plastic Cleanup (GLPC), through the generous funding and support from North American energy company TC Energy and Midwest retailer Meijer, to deploy two innovative litter collection devices across Northern Michigan. The BeBot and PixieDrone will be strategically used at multiple sites, marking a significant step in tackling the plastic pollution crisis affecting the Great Lakes region.

GLPC, a pioneering initiative led by Pollution Probe and the bi-national Council of the Great Lakes Region (CGLR), employs cutting-edge technology to swiftly remove plastics from sites across the region. Through this partnership, litter collected will undergo thorough analysis, providing crucial data to safeguard the Great Lakes for present and future generations.

The BeBot is a 100% electric, ecofriendly beach cleaning robot that mechanically sifts sand, rakes seaweed, and levels sandy areas to remove plastic waste and other debris without harming the local environment.

The PixieDrone is a floating, remote-controlled, mobile waste collector. The PixieDrone targets floating waste in all forms: organic, plastic, glass, metal, paper, rubber, etc. This drone can be operated in salt, fresh, and brackish waters.

The Great Lakes, constituting 84% of North America's surface freshwater, sustain water for 107 million residents and diverse habitats for thousands of species, many exclusive to the region. However, the region faces a daunting challenge of waste and plastic pollution. Estimates suggest up to 22 million pounds of plastic enter the Great Lakes annually from various sources, necessitating annual expenditure in the hundreds of millions of dollars to combat.

Jennifer McKay, Chief Policy and Governmental Affairs Director for Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council emphasized the severity of the issue.

"Plastic contamination pervades surface waters, shorelines, sediments, and wildlife across the Great Lakes and their tributaries. Our partnership with the Great Lakes Plastic Cleanup, local communities, and the Petoskey High School Robotic Team underscores our commitment to mitigating plastic accumulation along our beaches and in our waters."

"The opportunity to work with Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council to expand the Great Lakes Plastic Cleanup to the United States, thanks to funding from TC Energy, is an exciting partnership," said Mark Fisher, President and CEO, Council of the Great Lakes Region. "Through this new collaboration, we will be able to capture and clean-up more plastic litter in the Great Lakes, as well as educate coastal communities about how we can work together to reduce, reuse and recycle material waste."

The joint effort between GLPC, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, TC Energy, and Meijer represents a significant stride in combating the region's plastic pollution crisis and fostering a more sustainable future. The BeBot and PixieDrone will be deployed at various locations throughout the Watershed Council's service area until October 2024.

The official launch of the BeBot took place on Monday, June 3, at the City of Petoskey Marina and Tuesday, June 4, at Peninsula Beach in Boyne City. The Pixie Drone will be deployed in July.

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