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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Coast for All: Friends of the Dunes 21st Annual Kids Ocean Day Event
Celebrate Nature Heroes

LOLETA, CA - On the morning of June 2, 750 local students spent their school day being stewards of the coastal dunes during the 21st Annual Kids Ocean Day event at the Mike Thompson Wildlife Area, South Spit of the Humboldt Bay. After spending the day restoring dune habitat and picking up trash, students, teachers, and volunteers formed an aerial art image of marine invertebrates with the message "Coast for All." The aerial art image was designed by Jess Barger and captured by photographer Justin Legge via drone.

Friends of the Dunes organized the Kids Ocean Day event, which took place locally as part of the statewide Adopt-a-Beach program, funded by the California Coastal Commission's Whale Tail Grant Program. Kids Ocean Day is a significant day of action and celebration that aims to empower young individuals to become nature heroes. Humboldt County joined four other locations along the California coast in hosting student-led beach cleanups and awe-inspiring aerial art displays. These events lead up to the globally recognized World Ocean Day, empowering collective efforts to protect and preserve our precious ocean ecosystems.

Prior to the event, students participate in educational classroom presentations that explore the causes and impacts of marine debris, as well as identify possible solutions. Through these educational presentations, students gain a deeper understanding of environmental stewardship. They also learn about restoration efforts in our local dune systems, instilling a sense of responsibility and the power to make a positive impact. Kids Ocean Day serves as a platform to emphasize the significance of individual choices to make a collective impact for our planet.

In addition to Humboldt County's event, Kids Ocean Day events took place in San Diego, Orange County, Los Angeles, and San Francisco throughout May. At the five events held along the California coast, over 5,000 students spent a school day caring for their coast by cleaning up litter. In Humboldt County, students clean up trash and remove non-native, invasive plant species to create space for native plants to thrive, increasing biodiversity.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the California Coastal Act, a landmark environmental law that regulates development, protects public access, and mandates sustainable resource management along California's coastline. The statewide theme, "Coast for All," was selected to underscore the importance of the California Coastal Act in safeguarding public access to California's 840-mile coastline for everyone. The image of three marine invertebrates, a scallop, sand dollar, and moon snail, serves as a reminder that even the smallest ocean creatures play an important role in the health of marine ecosystems. Marine invertebrates are bioindicators, or living organisms that help scientists understand the health of ocean ecosystems. Changes in their populations can warn us when the environment is being harmed.

"We are excited to host another Kids Ocean Day event in Humboldt County, our organization's 21st Annual," said Suzie Fortner, Friends of the Dunes Executive Director. "The purpose of this event is two-fold - on one hand, it's getting hundreds of local kids to the coast to spend a day at the beach, some of whom have never been to an ocean beach despite living near the coast. On the other hand, it engages youth in a day of collaborative action

that benefits coastal biodiversity. These students are passionate about caring for this planet and excited to contribute to tangible, local solutions. It's inspiring to see them work together to accomplish something that wouldn't be possible alone."

"For 50 years now, the California Coastal Act has protected our right to access and enjoy the coast," said Annie Kohut Frankel, Public Education Program Manager for the California Coastal Commission. "The students at Kids Ocean Day are sending the message that preservation of those rights is a shared responsibility across communities, generations, and cultures. Thank you to these incredible students – the next generation of protectors of the coast!"

Participating schools included: Alice Birney Elementary, Blue Lake Elementary, Cutten Elementary School, Garfield School, Jacoby Creek School, Laurel Tree, McKinleyville Middle School, Orleans Elementary, Pacific Union, Sunny Brae Middle School, Trinidad Elementary, Union Street Charter School, Washington Elementary School, and Winship Middle School.

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Photo Credit: *Photos captured via drone by Justin Legge*

Caption: *Ocean Day, held June 2 at the Mike Thompson Wildlife Area, South Spit of the Humboldt Bay*

About Participating Organizations

Friends of the Dunes is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to conserving the natural diversity of coastal environments in northern California through community-supported education and stewardship programs. Projects highlights include the Bay to Dunes school education program, Dune Ecosystem Restoration Team, and the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center. For more information visit friendsofthedunes.org.

This annual event was started by the Malibu Foundation for Environmental Education and the California Coastal Commission in Los Angeles in 1994. With Whale Tail License Plate funding, this program expanded to the North Coast in 2005. The program focuses on reaching children in underserved and inland schools. Our statewide Kids Ocean Day partners include: I Love a Clean San Diego, Orange County Coastkeeper, the Malibu Foundation for Environmental Education, the Marine Science Institute, the California Coastal Commission, and Spectral Q Aerial Art.

The Kids' Ocean Day Cleanup is part of a statewide effort led by the California Coastal Commission, which coordinates Kids' Ocean Day with proceeds from the Whale Tail® License Plate and voluntary donations on the California state tax return to the Protect Our Coast and Oceans Fund. Whale Tail® grants to organizations in San Diego, Orange County, San Francisco, Bakersfield, and Humboldt County enable events to take place at beaches along the California coast, demonstrating a collective commitment to coastal stewardship.