A citizen science program called Nurdle Patrol has recorded plastic pellet concentrations along beaches, lake shorelines, riverbanks, and railroads from volunteers conducting 10-minute surveys. Over 5,000 volunteers have collected over 11,000 surveys at over 4,500 sites across the United States, Mexico, and 16 other countries to help identify possible sources of the plastic pellets (nurdles). Nurdles are small plastic pellets that are the basis of almost everything plastic. Nurdles look like food to animals causing possible intestinal blockage and/or starvation if eaten, and they absorb harmful chemicals in the environment that are known to have negative impacts on fish and wildlife. Other benefits to the Nurdle Patrol program include removal of nurdles from the environment, creating an awareness about the nurdle issue, and using citizen science data in management decisions. This presentation will focus on Nurdle Patrol efforts by citizen scientists, what the data is showing, and future direction of the program in changing policy about plastics reaching the ocean.

Jace Tunnell, Director of the Mission-Aransas Reserve

CROWD SOURCING PLASTIC POLLUTION DATA THROUGH CITIZEN SCIENCE

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Jace Tunnell is the director of the Mission-Aransas Reserve at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute, and founder of Nurdle Patrol. He was the president of the Coastal Bend Bays Foundation from 2016 to 2018, was named Conservationist of the Year in 2017 by the Coastal Conservation Association, and the 2020 Coastal Icon by Texas Sea Grant. Jace currently serves as vice president of the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association that advocates for the 30 Reserves around the country. His conservation efforts include educating the public about plastic pollution, estuarine science, and protection of our natural resources. Jace received a Master’s degree in Marine Biology from Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi in 2001.

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