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**First Confirmed Maine Landfall of Invasive Red Seaweed Discovered by South Portland Students
Scientists Collaborate with Students to Confirm Finding through GMRI's Vital Signs Program**

PORTLAND, Maine – November 27, 2012 – South Portland High School students have discovered that the invasive seaweed responsible for clogged lobster traps and covered beaches in southern New England has washed ashore in Cape Elizabeth. This is the [first confirmed sighting](#) of *Heterosiphonia japonica* onshore in Maine.

“It’s just really cool to know that a bunch of kids in a marine biology class in high school discovered an invasive species,” said Hannah Gato, one of the South Portland students. “Now we can help do something about it.”

The students discovered the seaweed and reported their find through the Gulf of Maine Research Institute’s Vital Signs program, a science learning and research platform that connects an online community of students, educators, scientists and citizen scientists focused on the study of native and invasive species in Maine.

The students used [Vital Signs’ online tools](#) to map their discovery, share their evidence and photographs, and seek confirmation from species experts around the country.

Robin Hadlock Seeley from Cornell University’s Shoals Marine Lab teamed up with fellow Shoals faculty member Kathy Ann Miller from the University of California–Berkeley to confirm that the South Portland students had correctly identified the invasive seaweed. Scientists from the University of Rhode Island and Northeastern University also heard about the find, reviewed the students’ data, and joined in on the online dialog.

“These students used Vital Signs to turn their observation into an exciting and valuable contribution to scientific research on invasive species,” said Seeley, who has been a Vital Signs species expert since 2008. “The Vital Signs program is ideal for tracking *Heterosiphonia*. That’s a fact.”

The invasive red seaweed has been causing problems along the Rhode Island coastline since 2009 and Massachusetts since 2010. Native to Japan, it achieves extraordinary abundance off the coast of New England, washing ashore in foul-smelling mats and threatening native seaweeds and the species that rely on them.

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Heterosiphonia was first spotted growing in Maine waters near Appledore Island in 2011. Recently, divers located the seaweed at several locations off Cape Elizabeth, including Fort Williams State Park, Two Lights State Park, and Kettle Cove, according to a comment left on the Vital Signs website by Matthew Bracken, assistant professor at the Northeastern University Marine Science Center.

“This is a species that has moved quickly through New England,” Seeley said. “We need to make sure we have students all along the Maine coast signed up for Vital Signs and on the lookout.”

About the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI)

GMRI is a neutral, nonprofit organization that catalyzes solutions to the complex challenges of ocean stewardship and economic growth in the Gulf of Maine bioregion. Based in Portland, Maine, GMRI utilizes a dynamic fusion of science, education, and community to effect change from multiple directions while remaining committed to its core principles of objectivity and collaboration. For more information, visit www.gmri.org.

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