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Tour looks to protect coral and sponge

By Gina Clark
The Northern View

The B.C. branch of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) hopes to bring attention to B.C.'s coldwater coral glass sponge reefs with their speaking tour hosted by Dr. Manfred Krautter, which comes to Prince Rupert on November 14.

The goal of the speaking tour is to raise awareness of the glass, sponge reef and little-known coldwater corals in B.C. waters and to generate greater demand for better protection of these important ecological features.

"Although discovered in Hecate Strait in 1989, the sponge reefs still have not received permanent protection" said Megan Baker, conservation intern with CPAWS.

"Few people in B.C. are even aware of the existence of corals in our waters, let alone their importance to the health of our ecosystems."

The importance of the glass sponge reefs lies in the fact that they are found nowhere else in the world, and they currently have no permanent protection from damage by human activity.

"Fifty per cent of the Hecate

Strait sponge reefs have been destroyed by fishing trawlers and research indicates that they may never regenerate" said Baker.

"We need to ensure that they receive permanent protection as Marine Protected Areas under the Oceans Act."

They are important to Prince Rupert because the Hecate Strait glass sponge reefs are closely located to the city.

"The people of Prince Rupert have an excellent opportunity to demand permanent protection of the sponge reefs that are in their backyard," said Baker.

"If Prince Rupert locals want there to be fish in the water for their children, conservation of critical habitat like corals and sponge reefs is essential."

Prince Rupert's stop on the tour will be at The Coast at 7:30 p.m.