

# The Boston Globe

YEAR OF THE BEACH | GLOBE EDITORIAL  
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## Still a gem despite the jets

A DOZEN JETS sat on the runway across from Constitution Beach on the hottest day of the summer, shimmering in the haze. Every few minutes the high-pitched whine of the taxiing queue gave way to the roar of a jet at takeoff, impossibly close overhead. Just behind the beach entrance, Blue Line trains rumbled and screeched into the Orient Heights station, adding to the urban cacophony. Jellyfish as big and round as pizzas dotted the sand. The scene at East Boston's public beach was, in a word, surreal.

"I can't imagine there's many beaches in the country that offer this," said Eddie Deveau, pointing to the planes stacked on Logan's runway 4/22, which he estimated as "a nine iron or maybe a three wood" golf shot away from the shore. Deveau, a lifelong resident of East Boston, is with the volunteer Constitution Beach Association, one of the informal "friends groups" that have kept attention focused on the often-neglected urban parks. Asked about the jellyfish, Deveau shrugged. "Last year it was the geese we kept hearing complaints about. I'm never surprised by what I find down here."

For all its, shall we say, unique attributes, Constitution Beach is a small gem for East Boston, long

the neighborhood with the least amount of open space of any section of the city. The half-mile stretch of sand leading to the Orient Heights Yacht Club has been improved immensely in recent years, with the addition of sun shelters, a large gazebo, playground equipment, and a new \$1.5 million bathhouse. The views and salty breezes enhance the neat section of homes where the streets are named for English poets -- Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge.

Of course, this being East Boston, neighbors still find plenty to complain about, not least the proximity of Logan Airport, with its noise and fumes. On Wednesday morning two "regulars" sitting in lawn chairs on the neatly trimmed grass ringing the beach complained that the sand was dirty and too hard, the bathhouse didn't include showers, the walkways were warped and uneven, there was no concession stand. South Boston's beaches got better sand, they alleged. They wouldn't give their names.

With the mercury already rising into the 90s before 10 a.m., a lone swimmer braved the surf. A toe test proved the waters clear and crisp, but until the lifeguard employed by the state Department of Recreation and Conservation arrived to post the blue flag

indicating bacterial levels were low enough for safe swimming, a visitor couldn't be sure. The regulars complained that the flags' appearances are spotty and not much help anyway, because they only show the previous day's results. "What's the sense?" asked one of the deeply bronzed women.

Wendy Fox, a spokeswoman for DCR, agreed that the water purity tests require 24 hours for results and that efforts by research scientists to devise a faster test were some distance away. Until then, a certain amount of "let-the-swimmer-beware" would have to prevail. Such caution is a good idea at Constitution Beach, which had the worst record for "red flag" days of the Boston beaches last year.

Fox also said it has been at least 10 years since the sand at Constitution Beach was "renourished," and there are no immediate plans to do so again. But she said it's the same sand used in South Boston.

Efforts to revitalize the 14 public beaches DCR manages from Lynn to Hull depend on getting people who were driven away by years of neglect to try visiting again. The Metropolitan Beaches Commission, created by the Legislature last year to advocate for the beaches, estimates that a

million residents live within a half-hour's drive of the 15 miles of shoreline under DCR control. The East Boston beach has ample free parking and is accessible by public transit.

Many friends groups have found that bringing programs to the beaches helps draw new visitors. Constitution Beach is on the upswing in this regard. A farmer's market is held there on Saturdays in the summer. Tenacity, a non profit working with the City of Boston, offers a free tennis and

reading program for kids age 7 to 15 on weekdays. The playground equipment and sprinklers were getting a good workout last week. Deveau is hopeful that next year some local non profit will bid for rights to operate a concession stand from the lifeguard building near the bathhouse.

Keeping Constitution Beach in shape -- trash picked up, grass mowed, groups of noisy teenagers dispersed, dogs leashed -- requires vigilance by supporters. Luckily, in a way, East Boston's experience

fighting airport expansion and related ills has given the neighborhood the political savvy to "get loud," as Deveau put it, when necessary.

Most locals scorn the name Constitution Beach as an invention of the state, and will only call it by its traditional name, Shea's Beach, with a few old timers referring simply to Orient Heights beach. Whatever its name, the East Boston beach is a precious populist resource on hot days, and every day. ■