

The Daily Item

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High water marks Beaches in Lynn, Nahant, Revere, Swampscott show improvement



State beaches in Nahant and Revere passed 100 percent of local water quality tests in 2014, while King's Beach in Lynn and Swampscott passed 88 percent of last year's tests. The results were the best in four years, according to a report by local advocacy group Save the Harbor/Save the Bay.

But while pleased, the report's authors noted that dry weather contributed to the positive results — a signal that potentially expensive and time-consuming stormwater and/or sewer fixes are needed to maintain the progress, particularly at King's Beach.

“It was a good year overall, and it was a good year for King's; but that's

because it was a dry year,” Bruce Berman, spokesman for Save the Harbor/Save the Bay said Tuesday. “When you look at Tenean (Beach, in Dorchester) or King's, you see big variability year to year which tells you what the problem is, and the problem is the stormwater system, and I think that it's pretty clear from the data.”

Save the Harbor/Save the Bay annually releases a report of water-quality tests from 34 testing sites on public beaches including Revere Beach, Short Beach (in Revere), Nahant Beach and King's Beach. King's Beach includes sampling stations in Lynn as well as in Swampscott.

The water-quality tests determine levels of Enterococci bacteria, an indicator of a disease-causing organism associated with fecal waste. The bacteria levels typically spike following rain, when storm water washes the streets of debris including animal waste and excess storm water can overflow sewer systems.

The Stacy Brook outflow on the Lynn-Swampscott border at King's Beach consistently records high bacterial levels. The Stacy Brook (sometimes spelled Stacey Brook) outflow is the end point of two pipes: one that collects water from stormwater drains across approximately 40 percent of Lynn; and a second that collects stormwater from up to 25 percent of Swampscott.

To address the water quality problems, Lynn completed in 2008 a roughly \$100 million long-term project to rebuild its sewer system and separate pipes carrying domestic sewage and pipes carrying stormwater to treatment. The city also found and corrected several properties that were putting sewage into the stormwater rather than the sewer system. When the stormwater drains overflowed, this sewage would go to the ocean rather than the treatment plant.

The number of system overflows dropped from 30 in 2005 to an average of two to three a year between 2009 and 2011, according to the Final Beach Water Quality Report compiled by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in 2012.

Swampscott has also found and corrected so-called 'illegal' sewer hookups since entering into a consent order with the Environmental Protection Agency in 2007. The town has eliminated some of them, tested more regularly and begun adding hypochlorite to further disinfect stormwater leaving the water treatment facility.

But the town received an Aug. 4 letter from the U.S. Attorney's Office saying Swampscott continues to violate the Clean Water Act. Town Administrator Tom Younger said last month that the town was renegotiating the consent order with the DEP and Department of Justice and that this was based on readings recorded in 2014 at Stacy Brook.

The report released by Save the Harbor/Save the Bay recorded that 28 of 228 daily water samples from three sampling locations at King's Beach in 2014 had excessive bacteria levels — about 12 percent. This is an improvement from the 17

percent of samples with excessive bacteria in 2013, the 14 percent in 2012 and 27 percent in 2012, according to statistics from previous annual reports. But Berman said the variability in the numbers when (most beaches have fluctuated within one or two percentage points except during this last year) indicate that illegal sewer hookups to the stormwater system is the cause of problems at Stacy Brook.

Unfortunately, he said these are difficult and expensive to find and will require Lynn, Swampscott, water testers and the state to collaborate.

Nevertheless, Berman noted that overall, the beaches in Greater Boston are in pretty good health. A beach passing 90 percent of its tests would be considered a healthy beach, he said, and of 15 beaches, only King's and two others had passed less than an average of 90 percent of tests in the past four years.

Vincent said Revere was particularly pleased with another year where it passed 100 percent of its water quality tests.

"Revere Beach is the jewel of our city, and to have water quality that's second-to-none is a feather in a cap," said Vincent on Tuesday.

Revere Mayor Dan Rizzo said

the beach was one of the biggest contributors to the city's economic improvement, with near \$100 million in private investment underway.

"It is my hope that through the efforts and commitment of both the governor and the legislature, Revere Beach, now a National Historic Landmark, will continue to be kept clean, safe and an attractive place for families to visit and utilize as a source of passive recreation," Rizzo said in an email.

As for Stacy Brook, Berman noted the state has been able to address water quality through big steps — such as the construction of Deer Isle Treatment Station — and smaller steps like tracing illegal sewer hookups.

"There's a lot to be proud of here, the beaches are doing really well here," said Berman. "We've shown we have the will and the ability to solve the problems."

Plus, he said cleaning King's Beach was worthwhile.

"I love that beach," he said. "It's a gem."

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