

WINTHROP

SUN TRANSCRIPT

By Transcript Staff | Friday, June 1, 2018

We All Benefit from Clean Beaches

The report released this past weekend by the environmental advocacy group Save the Harbor/Save the Bay (SH/SB) rating the water quality of the beaches in the Metropolitan Boston area once again shows that Massachusetts is a nationwide leader in providing a safe and outstanding recreational resource for its residents.

For those of us who grew up in the Greater Boston area in the period from the 1960s through the 1990s, the SH/SB's annual report card never fails to amaze us.

Boston Harbor had served as the dumping ground for industrial and sewage waste for more than a century and by the 1980s, was on the verge of becoming a "dead zone" both for aquatic life and human activity.

We recall that when we lived on Pt. Shirley in the 1960s, we were forbidden by our parents from swimming on the bayside because of the pollution. Then there was a period in the early 1970s when a new MDC treatment plant made the inner harbor relatively clean. But when that plant failed after a few years (because of the incompetence of the MDC), Boston Harbor returned to its offal state.

However, in 1986 the state created the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (the MWRA), which undertook the enormous responsibility of cleaning up Boston Harbor and surrounding environs, as well as taking steps to ensure the quality of our drinking water.

For most of us in this area, the MWRA is the government body we love to hate because of our high water and sewer bills. But it is axiomatic that you don't get something for nothing and that it takes money to make money.

The reality is that the MWRA has done a remarkable job in making Boston Harbor one of the cleanest urban waterways in the nation and creating a jewel that has more than paid for itself in terms of job creation and spurring economic growth in this area.

The incredible waterfront development in South Boston, East Boston, Revere, and Chelsea would not have been possible if Boston Harbor were still the smelly and foul waterway of a generation ago.

Of particular interest to Winthrop residents, Winthrop Beach ranked seventh of the 15 beaches in the survey, but we had a rating of 97% — which for practical purposes, is about as good as anywhere else. Nantasket Beach, on the tip of the South Shore across the harbor from us, ranked third with a 99% rating.

There are so many factors that affect water quality at a beach, both directly and indirectly, that it can be difficult — and extremely costly — to remedy all of them. We would note for example, that even beaches further down along the South Shore in Cohasset and Scituate (which are not included in the SH/SB report card) are closed after heavy rain events. On the other hand, beaches in South Boston had a 100 percent rating.

One huge effect on water quality comes from dog poop. Tenean Beach in Dorchester ranked dead last in 15th place with a rating of 81%. But that beach also hosts a dog park and SH/SB reported that it helped remove more than a ton of dog waste this spring, which hopefully will improve the water quality for the summer season ahead.

We wish to thank SH/SB for issuing its report. The group's efforts keep our elected officials at the city and state levels on their toes with regard to doing as much as possible to ensure that our beaches are safe and clean.

In addition, it is up to each of us to be environmentally-responsible, especially if we own a dog.