

East Boston

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Constitution Beach receives high marks on water quality report

By John Lynds

With the unofficial start of summer kicking off this past Memorial Day weekend, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay released its annual report on the water quality at East Boston's Constitution Beach.

According to Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's Annual Beach Water Report Card, Constitution Beach scored 95 percent for the summer of 2017. While the score was one point less than the previous summer Constitution Beach still remains one of the Top 10 cleanest beaches from Nahant to Nantasket and has a six year average score of 94.

Since 2012, the first year Save the Harbor/Save the Bay released its annual water quality report, Constitution Beach has gone from a score of 89 percent to 97 percent in 2013 to 96 percent in 2014. However, in 2015 the beach's score slipped to 89 percent in 2015. This low score for 2015 was the result of contaminated stormwater from frequent summer rains that year. Though total rainfall measured at Boston's Logan Airport was down from 10.21 inches in 2014 to 8.9 inches in 2015, there were more than 30 days of rain during the swimming season.

Constitution Beach rebounded the following year with a score of 96 percent for 2016.

According to Bruce Berman, Director of Strategy & Communications at Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, there was a slight decline in water quality in 2017 compared to 2016.

Berman said the drop in some scores at beaches like Constitution and neighboring Winthrop Beach was not surprising. Like 2015, last year was a relatively rainy swimming season for the Boston Harbor. The seasonal rainfall total was 12.1 inches, which is markedly higher than the 5.3 inches in 2016.

"This variation is why we are reluctant to draw conclusions from a single year's sampling results" said Berman. "Though we understand why it's interesting to see where water quality improved or declined versus the previous year, we urge the public to use the multi-year averages we have provided in comparing relative water quality among beaches."

Berman has long said that there are two ways to fix an urban beach problem. One way is to sever every pipe



A view of Constitution Beach looking north.

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that goes into the beach like the city did in South Boston years ago but that is very expensive.

The other way to ensure cleaner water is for residents to look at their own water and sewer hook ups and make sure they are not old hook ups that lead out into the storm water drains.

Both Lynn and Swampscott have planned improvements to their sewer and stormwater systems, which Berman said he expects will result in significant improvement in water quality on King's Beach when they are completed.

However, things are a lot better than they were 25 years ago when the Deer Island treatment facility was in disarray and broken outflow just off the harbor beaches were pumping 200 million gallons of raw sewage back into the water after heavy storms.

Old combined outfall hook ups would mix stormwater and sewage together after a big storm and pump it out into the harbor.

The Beach Water Quality Report Card is based on an in-depth analysis of thousands of samples taken by the DCR and the MWRA in 2017. The samples were collected at 34 testing sites on public beaches in 9 communities including Eastie, Winthrop, Nahant, Lynn, Revere, Winthrop, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy, and Hull. It is based on methodology developed by Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's Beaches Science Advisory Committee (BSAC), Co-Chaired by Dr. Judy Pederson of MIT's Sea Grant Program.