

The Boston Globe

Report urges help for 14 beaches

Finds neglect, mismanagement

By Raja Mishra

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Massachusetts will squander a natural treasure unless major improvements are made at 14 public beaches stretching from Lynn to Hull, so that sand and surf can once again become part of daily life for thousands of people, warns a report being released today by a commission set up by the Legislature.

The report recommends spending about \$3.3 million more a year on staff and equipment to clean and maintain the 15 miles of coastline, allocating \$1.4 million to buy about 20 new dump trucks and beach-cleaning machines, and appointing a state beach official or unit to oversee the improvements.

Until the latter half of the 20th century, the state-owned beaches were recreational staples in the Boston region, but the public was driven away by water pollution and has not returned despite substantial completion of the \$4.5 billion Boston Harbor cleanup in 2000, according to the report from the Metropolitan Beaches Commission.

The panel, created by state lawmakers last year to study local beach problems, spent the last year holding public hearings and scrutinizing how the Department of Conservation and Recreation has managed the beaches.

The report suggests that a combination of government neglect and mismanagement -- particularly at the Department of Conservation and Recreation -- is to blame. The results include trash-strewn beaches, poor public amenities, and little public interest. But a concerted effort could bring the crowds back to the beaches, especially those among the 1 million who live within a half-hour trip who cannot afford pricier getaways to Cape Cod or the north or south shores.

"For too long, there's been, because of the polluted harbor, a barrier that separated the neighborhoods from the harbor," said state



Trash is a common sight on Revere Beach. A report says 63 new full-time employees are needed to manage area beaches properly. (Dominic Chavez/Globe Staff)

Legislative commission's recommendations



- Spend \$3.3 million a year more on operations and maintenance.
- Create separate division to manage and promote beaches.
- Appoint a state beach official or unit to oversee improvements
- Direct parking, other revenues to each beachfront community.
- Support local nonprofit partnerships/friends groups.

— Beaches studied in the report

SOURCE: Metropolitan Beaches Commission

KATHLEEN HENRIKUS/ JAVIER ZARRACINA/ GLOBE STAFF

Senator Jack Hart, a South Boston Democrat who is cochairman of the commission. "But when I was a kid, every day in South Boston we would get together with neighborhood families and go to the beach. We didn't need the Cape."

The report's authors suggest the beaches could be revived in a way that rivals the rehabilitations of Chicago's lakefront or Coney Island in New York City, while increasing the appeal of living or moving to Boston.

"They have the power to attract people to our region," said Bruce Berman of the nonprofit Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, which consulted on the report. "People really like to live in a place where there are lots of things to do."

Joe Orfant, chief of project design and management at the conservation department, said the agency cooperated closely in the report and would "take a close look at the recommendations."

"We agree that everybody deserves clean beaches," he said in a telephone interview yesterday. "We do need more

resources for the beaches."

The report is similar to one released in 1992 that called for major repairs along a portion of the coastline studied by the new

commission, prompting the Legislature to approve a \$45 million fund that still pays repairs at some beaches from Winthrop to Dorchester.

The 18-member commission, composed mostly of state and local officials, held eight public hearings in beach communities, interviewed

department officials, and studied state government policy and budgets on beaches.

The report says that 63 new full-time employees are needed to manage the beaches properly, at a cost of \$2.8 million annually, on top of the \$1.7 million spent by the conservation department on beach staff. This would enable the department to keep the beaches free of trash and the sand fresh and clean.

Most of the beaches along the 15-mile stretch are manmade and tend to revert to their original state as mudflats or tide pools without constant maintenance.

The report also recommends that the state work to foster community groups that could play a role in keeping the beaches vibrant. One success story cited is the Revere Beach Partnership, which developed a sand-sculpting festival a few years ago that now attracts an estimated 100,000 people in July. But other times, Revere Beach has many of the same problems with trash and disrepair.

While it does not cite crime as a major issue, the report recommends more funding for State Police patrols during peak season, as well as more coordination with police departments that share jurisdiction at some beaches.

Additionally, the report found that water quality problems remain despite the Boston Harbor clean-up, particularly at the five beaches in Lynn, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, and Quincy. Also, the authors found that the flagging system alerting the public to polluted water was often inaccurate. The authors called on state and local officials to work with federal agencies to

improve the flagging system and water quality.

But some lawmakers who served on the commission said some of the funding requests would probably face opposition on Beacon Hill because of a looming \$1 billion budget deficit.

"We may not be able to allocate all the money, but this report is a blueprint for the future," Hart said. "We're going to do all we can to at least get funding for the maintenance piece of the report."

Hart and other lawmakers recently filed a bill that would create an advisory board that would push the issues raised in the report, create a system for neighborhood beach groups to form, and seek management changes at the conservation department. But the bill lacks the staffing and equipment funding at the top of the report's wish list.

"The commission has recognized that this isn't a situation where we can get everything in one budget," said state Representative Anthony Petrucci, an East Boston Democrat who is the commission's other cochairman. "We have to chip away at this. If we can purchase a couple of pieces of equipment here or there . . . I think it will make a difference."

Paul Grogan, president of the Boston Foundation, said that people will return if the beaches are nicer. Rapid population turnover has brought newcomers who see the beaches as grungy compared with Cape Cod and other destinations, he said.

"They've just got to be brought up and kept up to a minimum standard so they can really be promoted as the really incredible amenities they are," Grogan said. "The whole dynamic of the relations between the beach communities and the government has to change."

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Highlights of problems cited during public hearings:

King's Beach and Nahant Beach

Bathhouse and causeway in very poor condition.
Trash on sand.
Smell of algae.

Revere Beach and Short Beach

Dirty sand.
Poor water quality.
Dangerous traffic.

Winthrop Beach

Erosion of sand.
Lack of facilities.
Lack of programs.

Constitution Beach

Poor maintenance.
Trash and dog waste.
Not enough activities.

Carson Beach, L and M Street Beaches, Pleasure Bay, and Castle Island

Lack of parking.
Infrequent trash removal.
Access for strollers and wheelchairs.

Malibu/Savin Hill Beach, Tenean Beach

Contaminated runoff.
Poor upkeep.
Unstable bathhouse.

Wollaston Beach

Poor landscaping and maintenance.
Not enough programs.
Speeding traffic.

Nantasket Beach

Seawall not sustainable.
Trash and litter.
Lack of public transportation access.

SOURCE: METROPOLITAN BEACHES COMMISSION