

Water WoRDs

Updates from the Water Resources Division

Fall is here, but we're still feeling beachy in the WRD

Kids may be back in school and there has been a definite chill in the air, but in the WRD, we're still thinking about days spent at the shore---and we aren't alone! Over 200 others met for the 12th Annual Great Lakes Beach Conference on Michigan's beautiful Mackinac Island earlier this month to catch up on the latest research and improvements for Great Lakes beaches. Conference highlights included successful ideas to keep geese off public beaches, rapid tests that detect pollution, and a specially-trained dog named Sable that can sniff out human sewage.

With nearly 3,300 miles of shoreline, the Great Lakes State is home to more freshwater coastline than any state (or similar geopolitical unit) in the world. Through our BeachGuard system, the WRD partners with local health departments to make water quality data accessible online so anyone interested in visiting their favorite Michigan beach can check current conditions. We think BeachGuard is a great tool for planning a trip to the shore. You can [check beach monitoring data at BeachGuard](#) yourself, or check out a new beach "app" called MyBeachcast.

The people of the WRD have worked for decades on issues that enhance the quality of Michigan's beaches, but we recognize that to effectively demonstrate results, we'd need a better platform to explain what exactly we're working toward. So a few years ago the WRD set out to establish some goals. And wouldn't you know it? The first identified outcome in the [WRD's "Measures of Success"](#) document is that our beaches will always be open. Always. We're working toward 2014, when we aspire to see 100% of the Great Lakes and inland lake beaches monitored in BeachGuard safe for swimming. Every day.

The WRD is beginning to tally up beach monitoring data reported in BeachGuard for 2012. The initial review of data shows that of 1,245 public beaches, 430 beaches were monitored in 2012. BeachGuard shows that 105 beaches (24% of the monitored beaches or 8% of all beaches) reported advisories or closures. Although the WRD realizes this is not great news (and nowhere near our goal for 2014 discussed above), we are seeing an



Oval Beach, Allegan County
(photo credit Felicia Fairchild)

improvement from 2011.

The WRD and local partners are continuing to identify and eliminate known pollution sources at our beaches by working together to leverage resources. Please check out the Watershed Center of Grand Traverse Bay's Facebook page to see improvements at Bryant Park in Traverse City. The WRD is also partnering with the Conservation Fund to improve New Buffalo City Beach and with the Chippewa County Health Department to improve Sherman Park Beach and Four Mile Beach on the St. Marys River.

Our friends in the DEQ's Office of the Great Lakes also attended this month's conference to discuss ways local units of government and non-profit organizations can partner with the Coastal Management and Area of Concern (AOC) Programs housed with the Office of the Great Lakes.

For the Coastal Management Program, the next opportunity to suggest creative solutions for beach health will arise in January 2013 with a request for proposals for Coastal Zone Management Grants. These grants are intended, in part, to encourage local level efforts to protect/restore beach health and water quality.

The Area of Concern Program has eight AOCs with Beach Closings identified as an impairment. This impairment does not physically require a 'beach' but rather a water body within the AOC that does not meet state water quality standards for E. coli. Interested groups can work with the AOC Program in three ways:

1. Learn about the management actions for an AOC by contacting the state coordinator;
2. Help the local Public Advisory Councils develop management actions to restore the AOC; and
3. Design and conduct sampling efforts in those AOCs with a Beach Closing impairment.

We in the WRD hope that our fellow Michiganders spent some time at one (or more) of our beaches this past summer and further hope that those days created wonderful memories and perhaps new or continued family traditions. We're going to keep our thinking caps on throughout the year and work with our colleagues across the state to assure that Michiganders' beach adventures continue - and expand - in summers yet to come.



Pt. Betsie, Benzie County



Lake Lansing, Ingham County

What do you do in the WRD?

Meet Shannon Briggs

Dr. Shannon Briggs has been with the WRD for 14 years. With a Ph.D. in pharmacology and toxicology, Shannon oversees the WRD's Beach Monitoring Program. On a day-to-day basis, she works with contacts at local health departments, research institutions, and U.S. EPA to both evaluate the health of Michigan's beaches and identify sources of any microbial pollution that may affect public health, and ultimately, the use of a beach. Over the years, Shannon has kept the WRD up-to-speed on the latest techniques for tracking microbes through DNA matching as well as new tools for real time monitoring of water quality conditions at our beaches.



Shannon Briggs

WRD Question of the Week

Did you use BeachGuard or MyBeachcast this summer?

Send a message to Nicole Zacharda at zachardan@michigan.gov and tell us what you think. We will compile reader ideas and comments to share with WRD staff and inform future posts.