2012 End of Summer Beach Report Card:

Oregon and Washington

Executive Summary

This year marks Heal the Bay's third annual End of Summer Beach Report Card® (BRC) for Oregon and Washington. The End of Summer Beach Report Card provides beachgoers with an overview of essential water quality information by grading 188 monitoring locations throughout Oregon and Washington. The data analyzed for this report was collected from Memorial Day through August 22, 2012.

This BRC is based on the routine monitoring data provided by Oregon Health Authority and Washington's Department of Ecology, and would not be possible without their cooperation. These agencies collect and analyze marine water samples for bacteria that indicate pollution from numerous sources, including fecal waste. The better the grade a location receives, the lower the risk of illness to beach users. The report is not designed to measure the amount of trash or toxins found at beaches.

This summer, all of Oregon's 11 regularly monitored locations received A grades. While 41 beaches were monitored throughout the summer in Oregon, only 11 beaches were monitored frequently enough (at least weekly) to be considered for this report. Washington beaches also exhibited excellent water quality with 96% of the 177 monitoring locations receiving A and B grades.

Two recent proposals from the United States Environmental Protection (USEPA) may have a devastating effect on beach water quality programs throughout the entire country in the coming year. First, beach water quality monitoring programs throughout the country may be in jeopardy, as the Administration's proposed budget for 2013 zeroes out all BEACH Act grant funding. As a result, this could be the last summer that beach monitoring designed to protect public health occurs in the Pacific Northwest. Many states, including Oregon and Washington rely heavily on federal funding in order to develop and implement beach monitoring and notification programs. Second, the USEPA is proposing new acceptable bacteria levels in recreational waters that miss a critical opportunity to better protect the public from the dangers of swimming in polluted water. In fact, in some respects, the draft criteria are even less protective than the 25-year-old criteria they would replace.

The beachgoers, boaters and recreational water users of the United States deserve functional federal and state recreational water quality programs in order to preserve and improve public

health protection. If implemented, the current proposals will take a huge step backwards in public health protection. As a result, many beachgoers throughout the entire country will be swimming at their own risk.

Beach Breakdown

Washington: The State of Washington exhibited excellent water quality this summer with 96% A or B grades, improving from last summer (89% A or B grades). This year Washington monitored 190 monitoring locations at 59 beaches (typically each beach contains three monitoring locations). Of these monitoring locations, 177 were monitored frequently enough (at least weekly) to be included in this report. Washington monitored 54 fewer locations than in 2011, due to a transition of funds towards source identification and correction projects at historically problematic beaches.

The following counties received all A or B grades for the third consecutive year in a row: Clallam, Grays Harbor, Pierce and Thurston County. Only 7 out of 177 monitoring locations (4%) received fair to poor water quality grades throughout the state (3 Cs, 1 D and 3 Fs).

Poor grades were found this summer at Holmes Harbor's (Freeland County Park in Island County) easternmost monitoring location, which received a failing grade for the third consecutive summer this year. Also, two of the three monitoring locations at Wildcat Cove in Larrabee State Park (Whatcom County) received poor grades (one D and one F). The remaining poor grade in Washington State this summer was at Mukilteo Lighthouse Park (F grade at the northernmost sampling location) in Snohomish County.

Holmes Harbor's Freeland County Park is currently under investigation to determine potential sources of pollution, though high bacteria results may be correlated with the thick beach wrack that inundates Holmes Harbor during mid to late summer. Due to its poor water quality, Washington's Beach Environmental Assessment, Communication and Health (BEACH) program may continue to sample this location throughout the coming fall and winter.

Since 2007, monitoring results from Larrabee State Park Wildcat Cove have exceeded bacteria standards. As a result, two additional monitoring stations located near freshwater discharges were added in 2011. The freshwater drainage locations continue to have consistently high levels of bacteria. Further investigation was performed by Washington's BEACH program, Whatcom County Health District, Washington State Park, and local Surfrider Foundation volunteers to identify possible bacteria sources. Results showed high bacteria counts were originating near a wetland area, commonly used by raccoons and other wildlife. This year, Washington's BEACH program has been working with several partners in Whatcom County in order to implement an education campaign. This campaign will inform the public on the negative association between raccoons and water quality, as well as efforts to keep people from feeding the raccoons and leaving food out.

Poor water quality at Mukilteo Lighthouse Park may be the result of polluted stormwater discharging at its northernmost sampling location. Washington's BEACH program is working with the City of Mukilteo Public Works and their Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination Program. Work is currently underway to identify potential sources as well as determine if the discharge pipe itself may be leaking.

Heal the Bay looks forward to working with Washington in order to highlight and address those monitoring locations that continue to demonstrate poor water quality.

Oregon: The State of Oregon exhibited excellent water quality this summer, earning all A grades for the third consecutive year. Oregon monitored 41 monitoring locations throughout the state this summer, but only 11 (27%) of these locations were monitored frequently enough (at least once a week) to receive a grade in this report. Only two of seven coastal counties in Oregon were monitored on a weekly basis. Heal the Bay looks forward to working with Oregon agencies to increase beach monitoring frequency, as well as number of sampling locations covered by the Beach Report Card.

Proposed Federal Funding Cuts Threaten Existence of Beach Programs

In February 2012, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) released a budget proposal that included eliminating EPA's Beaches Grant Program. Federal funding is critical, as it allows coastal and Great Lakes states to develop and implement water quality monitoring and notification programs. These programs allow state, local health and environmental protection agencies to routinely monitor and track water quality at the nation's beaches, as well as alert the public when bacteria levels in the water are unsafe by posting beach warnings or closing the beach.

Federal grants also help state governments establish and administer programs that inform the public about the risk of exposure to disease-causing microorganisms in the water at our nation's beaches. Swimming in polluted water exposes people to pathogens that can cause gastrointestinal illness, skin rashes and ear, eye and staph infections. The elimination of these BEACH Act grant funds will likely result in a reduction of information about these important public health concerns.

With the loss of this funding, it is likely that many states, including Oregon and Washington, will significantly curtail or eliminate their beach water quality monitoring programs, endangering public health. The loss of federal funding equates to an annual program deficit of $227,000 for Oregon and $267,000 for Washington, the majority of the beach program budget for both states (based on EPA's 2012 Beach Program allocations). Americans rely on water quality monitoring and reporting to ensure that the water we swim, surf and play in is safe. The EPA's plan to cut the Beaches Program is unacceptable and will immediately put the public's health at risk. The public deserves to know that the water is safe when they go to the beach. For more information on EPA's proposed funding cuts or to send a letter directly to EPA asking to restore the BEACH Act Grant Program, please go to www.healthebay.org/get-involved/take-action

EPA's Proposed Recreational Water Quality Criteria Fail to Protect Public Health

The U.S. Congress approved the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health Act in 2000 (BEACH Act), requiring the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) to develop modernized standards for water quality that would protect beach users from illnesses caused by pathogens such as viruses and bacteria. The revisions offer an important opportunity to improve beach water quality and ensure public health protection. However, the draft criteria released by EPA are far less protective of the public health of swimmers than current science and good public policy dictate.

Top Public Health Concerns with EPA's Draft Criteria

1. **Poses unacceptable health risks:** EPA believes it is acceptable for 1 in 28 swimmers to become ill with gastroenteritis from swimming at a beach that just meets EPA's proposed water quality criteria. Additionally, EPA does not adequately consider the risks of rashes and ear, eye and sinus infections – all of which are reported too often by swimmers at U.S. beaches.
2. **Fails to include latest science:** EPA does not base the draft criteria on the most recent and best available science. Numerous high-quality epidemiology studies have been conducted around the world, including at Santa Monica Bay and Doheny Beach in Southern California. Yet these studies have not been used to help develop the new beach criteria.
3. **Masks significant pollution:** The draft criteria only require polluters to take action if more than 25% of the samples taken contain bacteria over acceptable limits. This means polluters could be allowed to discharge to beaches at unsafe levels on one out of every four days without any deterrent. This approach could mask a serious pollution problem and expose families to an unnecessary risk of illness.
4. **Uses improper Averaging:** EPA proposes the use of a seasonal geometric mean up to 90-days. This 90-day averaging will not reveal shorter-term pollution problems, therefore putting the public's health at risk. No one swims on an average day. A more protective approach would be a rolling 30-day geometric mean, which would identify pollution problems on a timelier basis.
5. **Provides no rapid testing methods:** The BEACH Act requires EPA to analyze rapid test methods, which could reduce the time-delay in obtaining information about polluted beaches from the current18-24 hours (for older culture methods) to fewer than four hours, thus providing increased public health protection. EPA's proposal does not recommend rapid methods for use as a stand-alone method, meaning duplicate, slower culture samples would be required where rapid methods are used. The draft criteria do not provide incentives for states to move forward with rapid methods, nor do the criteria require states to implement rapid methods by a certain date – even for the most contaminated and heavily used beaches in the country.

The recreational water quality criteria have not been updated for 25 years and may not be revisited again until years from now, so it is extremely important for EPA to develop standards now that are protective of public health on a national level. Some aspects of EPA's proposal, such as recommending criteria for all recreational waterways, are a step in the right direction. However, most provisions of the proposed criteria are not sufficiently protective of public health.

About the Beach Report Card

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card is based on weekly water quality monitoring data provided by dischargers and health entities. Data is analyzed when it is made available by these entities. Grades are updated every Friday. The report is a comprehensive examination of coastal water quality throughout California, Oregon and Washington. Exact methodology used in determining grades for each location is available online at www.healthebay.org/brc/methodology.

The Beach Report Card can be accessed from any computer, or mobile device at beachreportcard.org.

A free Beach Report Card app (iPhone and Android) provides A through F grades, weather conditions and user tips for more than 650 beach locations in California, Oregon and Washington at the fingertips of those who swim, surf and play at the beach. Links to the app can be found at beachreportcard.org

This report is not designed to measure the amount of trash or toxins found at local beaches. Heal the Bay reminds you not to swim or surf within 100 yards of any flowing storm drain or for three days after a rainstorm. Studies have shown that after a rainfall, indicator bacteria counts at beaches usually far exceed the National Recreational Water Quality Standards.

Table 1

Oregon's County Summer Beach Water Quality 2012							
County	A	B	C	D	F	A-B%	C-F%
Clatsop	8	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Tillamook	3	0	0	0	0	100%	0%

Table 2

Washington's County Summer Beach Water Quality 2012							
County	A	B	C	D	F	A-B%	C-F%
Clallam	24	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Grays Harbor	9	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Island	6	2	0	0	1	88.9%	11.1%
Jefferson	9	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
King	20	0	1	0	0	95.2%	4.8%
Kitsap	30	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Mason	12	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Pierce	27	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Snohomish	16	1	0	0	1	94.5%	5.5%
Thurston	3	0	0	0	0	100%	0%
Whatcom	7	1	2	1	1	66.6%	33.3%

Heal the Bay is a nonprofit environmental organization making Southern California coastal waters and watersheds, including Santa Monica Bay, safe, healthy and clean. We use science, education, community action and advocacy to pursue our mission.

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card is made possible by the generous support of:
The Diller-von Furstenberg Family Foundation
simplehuman®
LAcarGuy
Surf Industry Manufacturers Association (SIMA)
The Grousbeck Family Foundation