Maine To Expand Monitoring at Coastal Swimming Beaches

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Until now, each town involved in beach monitoring has had to create its own system for monitoring and notification. Now, with a grant sought from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Maine hopes to provide municipalities with more guidance on how best to monitor beaches and notify potential swimmers. Funding will come through the federal BEACH (Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health) Act which was signed into law October 10, 2000. The Act seeks to reduce disease among users of recreational waters by improving water-quality testing at beaches and ensuring better public notification when problems are found.

The Maine Coastal Program and Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) plan to form a steering committee that can assess existing forms of beach use and sampling methods and develop recommended protocols for monitoring and notification. Steering Committee members will come from the Maine State Planning Office, Maine Department of Human Services, Maine DEP, Department of Marine Resources, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and other interested parties. For more information, please contact Todd Janeski at the Maine Coastal Program: 207-287-1482 or Todd.Janeski@state.me.us.

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The Center’s teaching laboratory, housed in the newly relocated and renovated Laudholm Farm creamery building, accommodates 28 students at a time. Even before the building’s dedication on September 29, groups had begun using the Center’s lab for summer camp programs, teacher trainings and an entomological survey. Middle and high school students are testing water samples from the Little River and Webhannet River estuaries—part of an extensive water quality-monitoring program that students and volunteers have run since 1991. “The new Coastal Ecology Center gives students an opportunity—not just to process their water samples—but to learn more about how the research process works,” says Brian Doyle, a teacher at Noble Junior High School in Berwick.

The Reserve plans to expand the Center’s offerings beyond students and teachers—providing ecological training for town planning officials, code enforcement officers, community volunteers and local conservation organizations. “The labs provide a hands-on teaching tool,” says Deut, “where community leaders can see first-hand how local land-use decisions affect water quality—for example, how lack of setbacks and forest buffers could contribute polluted runoff.”

By next spring, the large exhibit hall will hold interpretive displays on coastal watersheds, estuarine ecology and the process of science. A large glass window, looking into the Center’s research laboratory offers visitors a literal and figurative “window into research.”

The Reserve’s research staff, long confined to cramped quarters, is thrilled with the well-equipped Center and the world of possibilities it offers. The Reserve can now accommodate many more research follows and assistants, as well as visiting scientists. “The Center is a natural gathering place for many of our conservation and community partners,” Research Director Michele Dionne explains. “Since we’re involved in numerous cooperative research initiatives, the facility here benefits many other local and regional groups.”

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Evan D. Richert, AICP
Director, Maine State Planning Office

Kathleen Leyden
Director, Maine Coastal Program

Maine Coastal Program
State Planning Office
38 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333
207-287-3216
1-800-662-4355
207-287-6489 (FAX)

www.state.me.us/spo/mcp/mcp.htm

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Editing and Layout
Headwaters Writing and Design
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Maine DEP is launching a new phase of stormwater protection, helping to reduce the hazards that nonpoint (runoff) pollution sources pose for water bodies throughout the state. "Stormwater can cause flooding," explains DEP's stormwater coordinator David Ladd, "and it can increase the spread of pollutants such as oil, pesticides and fertilizers."

To reduce these threats, the DEP will develop standards that regulate construction sites over one acre in size; require municipalities to improve stormwater at their industrial sites (such as public works facilities); and require municipal stormwater control programs in 20 larger communities that the Census Bureau defines as urban areas. The DEP will also develop criteria that bring additional municipalities into the program, particularly those whose surface waters do not meet water-quality standards due to urban runoff.

Maine's DEP is preparing a report to the State Legislature that will recommend improvements in evaluating aquaculture lease applications. "We are seeking ways to make the process more accessible and more efficient: current applicants often must wait 18 to 24 months for a final decision. DMR plans to make its recommendations to the Marine Resources Committee by late December. For more information, contact Andrew Fish (207-624-0554; andrew.c.fish@state.me.us)."

DEP officials recognize the growing interest in developing sustainable methods of shellfish harvesting and are looking for ways to help promote these practices. "We will be working with the DEP to create a model strategy," says Larry Nadeau, Public Works Director for the City of Saco which plans to adopt the new guidelines. "We need to take care of our local waterways and this effort will help us do what we were entrusted to do. Protecting water bodies is a win-win approach, allowing us to make meaningful ordinances that work for the community and meet regulatory requirements."

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GoMOOS High-tech Buoys Mark New Era in Oceanographic Data

The Gulf of Maine Ocean Observing System (GoMOOS) recently launched ten data buoys in the Gulf from Nova Scotia to Gloucester, making regional real-time observations readily available for the first time. By visiting the GoMOOS web site (www.gomoos.org), people can get hourly reports from any of the ten locations—finding out the visibility off Cape Elizabeth, for example, or the current speed and direction in the channel between Owls Head and Vinalhaven. Data from GoMOOS buoys isn’t just for oceanographers: this information makes navigation easier and safer for mariners. In extreme cases, such as search and rescue operations, it may even make the difference between life and death.

Every hour the solar-powered buoys send readings to the mainland, reporting on a range of oceanographic information: wind speed and direction, visibility, water temperature, current speed and direction, air temperature, water salinity, nutrient levels and underwater sounds. Other data will be gathered in the future as needed.

What distinguishes GoMOOS from existing ocean observing systems is its regional scale and accessibility. Scientists and students will use the buoys to better understand the Gulf of Maine ecosystem, generating information that can help improve fisheries management, protect marine habitats, predict weather and mitigate natural hazards. In addition, the buoys provide a public service for coastal residents and visitors. Their hourly reports can help commercial fishermen decide when and where to go and can alert recreational boaters to sudden weather changes. Captains and pilots navigating large vessels also rely on the buoys to operate more safely (see sidebar).

GoMOOS began in Maine because the state relies so heavily on the Gulf for transportation, fishing, recreation and tourism. Initially, the project grew out of the Governor’s “Jobs From the Sea” initiative and the state’s desire to maximize the Gulf of Maine’s economic potential. State Planning Office Director Evan Richert, now President of GoMOOS, led the effort from an idea that started with scientists at Bigelow laboratory: The Regional Association for Research on the Gulf of Maine (RARGOM), and the Island Institute’s Five-year Penobscot Bay Project. The Maine Coastal Program provided crucial early support, realizing that long-term data provided by GoMOOS would help guide coastal management decisions.

Already the project has broadened to an international partnership involving government, research, nonprofit and commercial interests from Nova Scotia to New Jersey. While GoMOOS is a pilot project, it will likely become integrated into a larger network of observing systems.

“There’s a lot of momentum to do this nationally,” says GoMOOS lead scientist and oceanographer Neal Pettigrew. “We have both the burden and the privilege to be the first to try.”

Initial funding to launch GoMOOS came primarily from an $8,000,000 grant made by the Office of Naval Research. Maine’s congressional delegation is working to include a sum for the annual operating budget (estimated at $3,000,000) in upcoming Federal budgets.

The future direction of GoMOOS, a nonprofit entity, will be set by its board of directors, which includes research scientists, fishermen, captains, business people, and employees of state government and nonprofit organizations. The GoMOOS office in downtown Portland is staffed by Chief Executive Philip Bogden, a former oceanographer at the University of Connecticut, Executive Assistant Aimee Giles, IT Project Manager Jason Thaxter, and Director of Policy and Planning Josie Quintrell. Plans for the future, Bogden says, include monitoring a broader range of data and overhauling the website to make information more accessible to a wide range of users.

For more information, visit www.gomoos.org or call (207) 773-0423.
News from the Land For Maine’s Future Program

An LMF grant is helping to preserve Tinker Island, a 430-acre landmark in Blue Hill Bay.

Proceeds from Maine’s recent $50 million Land Bond are supporting a range of important coastal projects, several of which are nearing completion. Land for Maine’s Future Program (LMF) grants will help to fund four coastal access projects and two conservation and recreation projects.

Coastal water access:

- Petegrow Beach in Machiasport (see photo at right), an all-side boat launch, has long been used for coastal access. Recognizing that this private parcel might not remain open to the public, the town of Machiasport submitted a proposal to ensure its purchase. Both the town and Department of Conservation are providing matching funds toward the acquisition.

- The Town of Pownal will use its LMF grant to purchase a double lot along the tidalwater section of the French Stream. Providing opportunities for carry-in boat access and shore-based angling, the Department of Conservation will provide additional support.

- On the tidal section of the Kennebec River, the City of Gardiner and Gardiner Rotary Club successfully sought funding for an expanded waterfront park. The new acquisition, which links the park to other state-owned lands along the Kennebec, provides badly needed parking, a new site for launching carry-in boats (separate from the existing ramp), handicapped fishing sites, and an extended riverfront trail.

- Public access to the Tidal Falls in Hancock will be ensured through an LMF grant that enabled the local land trust, Frenchman Bay Conservancy, to purchase a conservation easement on the property.

Conservation and Recreation Sites:

- An LMF grant will help Maine Coast Heritage Trust acquire the northern half (280 acres) of Tinker Island in Blue Hill Bay, ensuring continued public access for picnicting, hunting and beachcombing.

- With funding support from LMF, the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust will secure one-half mile of pristine shoreline with public access in the Long Marsh section of Harpswell.

As these “first round” coastal projects move toward completion, a new round of proposals has arrived with more opportunities for coastal protection. The LMF Board will select finalists from that round at their January 2002 meeting.

Coastal Ecology Center

(continued from first page)

The new Maine Coast Ecology Center was designed and constructed to minimize its environmental impact and maintain the aesthetic integrity of the historic Laudholm Farm. The footprint for the new building incorporated the farm’s former milkhouse, which was restored and converted into the teaching laboratory.

The Center uses energy-efficient compact fluorescent lights and a combination of radiant in-floor heating (in which warm water flows through tubes embedded in concrete slab) and hot water fan coils. Incoming air used to ventilate the Center goes through an “energy recovery ventilator” which recovers waste air from the building and uses it to warm or cool the incoming fresh air.

Contractors used formaldehyde-free adhesives and paints and stains with low levels of volatile organic compounds to maintain indoor air quality. Windows are of double-pane insulated glass with low-E glazing and the plumbing is equipped with low-flow features.

Many of the Center’s building materials are recycled. The insulation comes primarily from recycled newsprint while the antique hemlock beams in the exhibit area were recovered from an old barn. Job-site recycling helped minimize the waste of materials such as metal, cardboard, drywall and wood. Even the Center’s carpet will eventually be returned to the manufacturer and recycled for use in a new carpet.

The Reserve’s research program generates science-based information to help sustain or restore habitats and resources of the Gulf of Maine—particularly its salt marsh estuaries and watersheds. Staff members work alongside graduate fellows, Americorps volunteer leaders, undergraduate interns, visiting scientists and citizen volunteers on a diverse array of research projects—many of them done in collaboration with outside partners. Roughly 25 studies are underway currently, involving more than 75 researchers from 25 academic institutions and 19 resource management groups. The following projects represent a small sampling of the research work happening at the Maine Coastal Ecology Center.

Estuarine water quality is monitored continuously at several stations with automated instruments and bi-monthly at 15-20 stations through the WET volunteer monitoring program. Water-quality data have helped to identify several bacterial “hot spots” and open areas safe for shellfish harvesting.

Coastal conservation strategies are being formulated through a collaborative program in which research staff facilitate communication among 18 partner groups and compile needed GIS resources.

Salt marshes, some of the most vulnerable coastal habitats, are being assessed in multi-year studies that examine plant responses to physical and hydrologic disturbance, and the patterns of sediment accretion and erosion that result from short-term natural events (such as storms) and human activities (like dredging and tidal restrictions).

Habitat value for fish, shellfish and birds is assessed through a combination of long-term monitoring and short-term experiments.

The new Center for Coastal Ecology was designed and built to minimize its environmental impact. It fits into the existing historic architecture at Laudholm Farm, part of 400 undeveloped upland acres and 1,200 acres of tidal marsh that constitute the Wills National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Taking the Environment into Account

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Maine Coastal Program

November 2001

We could all use some good news these days and there is plenty to share in this edition of Maine Coastline! New data, facilities and grant funds are helping us better understand and manage coastal resources in Maine and throughout the region.

The launching of the Gulf of Maine Ocean Observing System (GoMOS) may represent the most important technological development in coastal and ocean research for many years. Existing real-time data available from the Gulf of Maine and its nearshore embayments will greatly improve our ability to manage ocean and coastal resources, and will help to launch new marine research and development initiatives.

The capacity for regional ecological analysis also received a boost this fall, with the opening of the Maine Coastal Ecology Center at the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve. Now top-notch professionals and student researchers can better assess the Gulf of Maine ecosystem and determine how human activities are affecting coastal environments. The Maine Coastal Program has a strong partnership with the Reserve and helped fund dynamic new coastal watershed exhibits that will soon be installed at the Center. Please stop in to see the new facility and explore the Reserve’s extensive trail network: it is well worth the trip.

The Coastal Program is extending its work on habitat restoration and will soon have a restoration coordinator on staff, thanks to a generous grant from the National Marine Fisheries Service. The Coastal Program has a strong partnership with the Reserve and helped fund dynamic new coastal watershed exhibits that will soon be installed at the Center. Please stop in to see the new facility and explore the Reserve’s extensive trail network: it is well worth the trip.

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Each participating municipality will be asked to reduce pollutant discharge to the ‘maximum extent practicable’ through a combination of public education and outreach, detection and elimination of illicit discharges, control of construction site runoff, and municipal pollution prevention measures. “We look forward to working with DEP to create a model strategy,” says Larry Nadeau, Public Works Director for the City of Saco which plans to adopt the new standards. “We need to take care of our local waterways and this effort will help us do what we were entrusted to do. Proactive measures offer a win-win approach, allowing us to make meaningful ordinances that work for the community and meet regulatory requirements.”

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The Maine Coastal Program represents a partnership of local, regional and state agencies that work collaboratively to enhance management of the state’s diverse coastal resources. Housed at the State Planning Office, Coastal Program staff work extensively with governmental agencies and community organizations such as local land trusts and regional economic development groups. Planning and outreach focus on such issues as watershed management, development issues, fisheries management, water quality monitoring, marine education, citizen stewardship, coastal hazards, marine infrastructure and habitat protection.

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