

*great city,
great beaches...*



MARIE CURTIS PARK EAST · SUNNYSIDE · HANLAN'S POINT · GIBRALTAR POINT · CENTRE ISLAND · WARD'S ISLAND · CHERRY WOOD BINE KEW · BALMY BLUFFER'S PARK · ROUGE

TORONTO BEACHES PLAN January 2009



MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR



Revitalizing Toronto's waterfront is a priority for all Torontonians. Ensuring that our beaches are clean and accessible is essential to making that revitalization happen. As places to play and enjoy nature, they contribute to and enhance the quality of life in Toronto. Because of the tremendous importance of beaches, it's not surprising that Toronto is so focused on creating great public spaces along the waterfront and making our beaches more swimmable.

As Founding Chair of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, I know that communities within this region are taking steps to improve their beaches. As Canada's biggest city, we must lead by example. I'm proud that Toronto was the first community in Canada to certify its swimming beaches under the international Blue Flag program. The Blue Flag has now been raised at six of our 11 beaches. This is a great start, but we shouldn't be satisfied until all of our beaches are certified – and until every beach is open for swimming every day during the summer.

We've made great progress over the past five years in improving Toronto's beaches. The Toronto Beaches Plan lays out the actions needed to make our beaches cleaner, safer, more usable, more accessible and greener. It's a broad agenda, ranging from water quality to amenities to programming. It will help create a modern waterfront that the people of Toronto will be proud of, and one you'll want to visit and enjoy time and time again.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Miller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mayor David Miller



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- INTRODUCTION 5**
- The Importance of Swimmable, Quality Beaches 6
- The Policy and Program Foundation for Great Beaches 7
- Toronto’s Swimming Beaches, from West to East 8
- Current Conditions 10
- Key Challenges and Opportunities 14
- Recent Accomplishments 15

- A PLAN FOR GREAT BEACHES 17**
- Vision 17
- Overall Objectives 17
- Strategy 17
- Actions 18
 - Beach Water Quality 18
 - Maintenance and Operations 19
 - Facilities and Amenities 20
 - Programming 21
 - Education and Communications 21
- Great City, Great Beaches: The Toronto Beaches Plan 23
- Photo Credits 24



Almost two-thirds of Torontonians feel that beaches are very important to the quality of life in Toronto.

INTRODUCTION

Toronto is a great city on a Great Lake. Beaches are a key feature of Toronto's waterfront parks which contribute significantly to the quality of life in the city. In turn, swimmable beaches are often used as an indicator of Toronto's environmental performance and quality of life. While the state of the City's beaches has improved markedly over the past five years – a fact recognized internationally by the awarding of six Blue Flags – a comprehensive approach to waterfront revitalization requires additional beach improvements.

The Toronto Beaches Plan identifies actions to further improve Toronto's six Blue Flag swimming beaches, to bring five other beaches up to the international Blue Flag standard, and to potentially create a new swimming beach. These measures will complement other continuous service improvements now underway at or planned for the City's 11 swimming beaches.

To set the context for action, the plan discusses the importance of swimmable, quality beaches and outlines the policy and program foundation for great beaches in Toronto. Recent accomplishments, current conditions and key challenges and opportunities are reviewed. The plan then defines a vision of great swimming beaches in Toronto, a strategy for achieving that vision, and 27 actions – organized around the themes of beach water quality, maintenance and operations, facilities and amenities, programming, and education and communications – that will give life to that strategy.



THE IMPORTANCE OF SWIMMABLE, QUALITY BEACHES

Swimmable beaches are often cited as an indicator of Toronto's environmental performance and quality of life. The International Joint Commission declared our beaches to be an "impaired beneficial use" of the waterfront in 1987, when it identified Toronto as one of 42 Areas of Concern around the Great Lakes where efforts were needed to restore environmental quality. The Toronto Community Foundation uses beach postings as one of four ways to monitor Toronto's environment, while the Toronto City Summit Alliance uses beach postings as the sole means of measuring water quality along Toronto's waterfront. The Mayor has committed to helping clean up Lake Ontario to make Toronto's beaches more swimmable, as part of a clean, green and beautiful waterfront.

A quality swimming beach, however, depends on much more than just clean beach water. In Toronto, a Blue Flag – the international eco-label for quality beaches – is awarded only if an individual beach meets 27 criteria relating to water quality, environmental management, safety and services, and environmental education. These criteria include having the beach open for swimming for at least 80% of the season, collecting litter and recyclables, having lifeguards present, providing access for people with disabilities, and providing information about beach ecosystems.



The Blue Flag Program

The Blue Flag is a voluntary eco-label awarded to over 3,200 beaches and marinas in 37 countries across Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, New Zealand and Canada. The program began in France in 1985 and was expanded Europe-wide in 1987 to encourage beaches to comply with the EU Bathing Water Directive. Internationally, the program is administered by the Foundation for Environmental Education in Denmark (www.blueflag.org). The national Blue Flag operator for Canada is Environmental Defence (www.blueflag.ca).

The Blue Flag is given to beaches and marinas that meet a specific set of criteria concerning water quality, environmental management, safety and services, and environmental education. The program is designed to raise environmental awareness and increase good management practices among tourists, local populations and beach and marina operators. It has become a symbol of quality recognized by tourists and tour operators and is used to promote awarded beaches and marinas.

THE POLICY AND PROGRAM FOUNDATION FOR GREAT BEACHES

Toronto has a strong policy foundation for creating a beaches plan. The City's Official Plan states that "increased public enjoyment and use of lands along the water's edge will be promoted by ensuring that future development and actions on the part of both the public and private sectors will improve water quality and the quality of beaches." Several Council-adopted plans support this goal. They include:

- Wet Weather Flow Master Plan (WWFMP) and Toronto and Region Remedial Action Plan, which aim at improving water quality for body-contact recreation in the lake and reducing the need for beach postings.
- Our Common Grounds, the Parks, Forestry & Recreation Strategic Plan, which sets a target for improving park user satisfaction and calls for a Parks Renaissance Program to revitalize the City's aging park infrastructure.
- Toronto Green Development Standard, which defines ways to improve the environmental performance of the City's facilities.

The City government and its public sector partners have many other programs and projects that affect beach conditions and use:

- Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation operates and maintains all recreation-related beach facilities and amenities, and leads some beach habitat restoration projects.
- Toronto Water manages stormwater discharges and combined sewer overflows affecting beaches, and takes beach water samples during the swimming season.
- Toronto Public Health reviews beach water quality tests and determines if a beach should be posted against swimming.
- Toronto Police Service Marine Unit operates the beach lifeguard service.
- Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) leads waterfront habitat restoration and erosion control projects and undertakes waterfront park development projects.
- Canadian Wildlife Service, a branch of Environment Canada, manages Canada geese along the Toronto waterfront.
- Environment Canada's National Water Research Institute leads research on microbial sources of beach pollution in Toronto.



Beach Management as a Toronto Tradition

The City of Toronto's first recreation program for children – the "free bathing service" – dates from 1897. This project consisted of supervised free bathing stations and ferries. As many as five stations were located each summer along the waterfront and the Don River. The first opened at Sunnyside in the former Parkdale Pumping Station in 1897. The ferries, which ran through the 1927 season, transported mostly boys to the more isolated sites.

From 1921, the Toronto Transportation Commission's "free bathing car service" gave children access by transit to the free bathing ferries and (until 1950) the Sunnyside Free Bathing Station. The TTC's privately run predecessor, the Toronto Railway Company, launched this project about 1916.

In 1920, the newly formed Toronto Life Saving & Police Patrol Service opened its first three "protected bathing areas" on the waterfront. At least 428,000 swimmers were cared for in 1927, and all of the popular beaches were marked out and guarded. For many years, the beach lifeguard service was operated by the Toronto Harbour Commission.

During this formative period, the Parks Department operated bathing stations for a fee at beaches on Toronto Island. Beach water quality was not formally monitored at that time.

Toronto's Swimming Beaches,



MARIE CURTIS PARK EAST BEACH ~ Located at the mouth of Etobicoke Creek near the foot of Forty-Second Street, this small beach was established in 1959. Marie Curtis has some of Toronto's worst beach water quality due to pollution from Etobicoke Creek. The potential for relocating the beach from the east to the west side of the river is noted in the Arsenal Lands Master Plan Addendum, including Marie Curtis Park West (2007). Most users of this beach are drawn from the adjacent Long Branch community.



SUNNYSIDE BEACH ~ Located between the Humber River and Sunnyside Bathing Pavilion, this long, narrow beach has been a city-wide destination since the 1890s. The beach abutted the rail corridor until lakefilling in the 1910s pushed the shoreline southward to its current location. Sunnyside is protected by an offshore breakwall which helps control erosion and provides calm water for rowers and paddlers. Key amenities include Sunnyside Bathing Pavilion (1922), Gus Ryder Sunnyside Pool (1925), several concession stands (including the former Joy Oil Gas Station, now under restoration) and ample parking. Sunnyside is severely impacted by pollution from the Humber River; Canada geese are also a factor. Combined sewer overflows and stormwater discharges have largely been controlled by the Western Beaches Storage Tunnel (2002) and the Ellis Avenue & Colborne Lodge Drive Stormwater Management Facilities (2007).



HANLAN'S POINT BEACH ~ Located on the west shore of Toronto Island Park, this long beach includes a clothing optional area – only the second of its kind in Canada – that was piloted in 1999 and made permanent in 2002. Like the other three Island beaches, Hanlan's is not impacted by combined sewer overflows, stormwater discharges or river flows and generally has excellent water quality. Hanlan's was first awarded a Blue Flag in 2005. The beach is backed by a significant sand dune system extending from Toronto City Centre Airport to Gibraltar Point. Dune restoration work has recently been carried out in this area by the City and its community partners.



GIBRALTAR POINT BEACH ~ Located on the southwest shore of Toronto Island Park, this small, secluded beach was established in 2007 – and was first awarded a Blue Flag that same year. Although recent tests indicate that Gibraltar Point has the finest water quality of any Toronto beach, this part of Toronto Island is threatened by severe coastal erosion. Remedial work is being designed by the TRCA. The beach is backed by an exceptional stand of eastern cottonwoods. The Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts is nearby.



CENTRE ISLAND BEACH ~ Located on the south shore of Toronto Island Park, this site has been used for public bathing since 1888 and is surrounded by park amenities. It is the only Island beach protected by an offshore breakwall. Like Hanlan's, Centre Island is a very popular destination that draws users from across the city, though it often has had poorer water quality, in part due to a large gull population. After maintenance dredging around the breakwall improved water circulation and water quality in front of the beach in 2007, Centre Island was awarded a Blue Flag.



WARD'S ISLAND BEACH ~ Located on the southeast shore of Toronto Island Park away from major park facilities and activity areas, this is one of the quietest beaches on the Island. It was first awarded a Blue Flag in 2005. Ward's is backed by a small dune system. The Island residential community is a few minutes' walk away.

from West to East

CHERRY BEACH ~ Located on the north shore of the Outer Harbour at the foot of Cherry Street, this beach was formalized with the provision of a lifesaving station and a washroom/changeroom in the early 1930s. It was first awarded a Blue Flag in 2005. Like Woodbine, Cherry features ample parking, is located on the Martin Goodman Trail and receives TTC bus service during the beach season. The west side of the swimming beach is popular with kiteboarders. A designated off-leash dog area is located along the beach's western boundary.



WOODBINE BEACH ~ Located east and west of the foot of Woodbine Avenue, this beach straddles Beaches Park, Woodbine Beach Park and Ashbridge's Bay Park. Public swimming facilities were first provided in this area in 1897; access was improved with the opening of Beaches Park and its boardwalk (1932), the Woodbine Bathing Station (1937) and Ashbridge's Bay Park (1977). A lakefill headland at Ashbridge's Bay Park traps sand moving westward from the Scarborough Bluffs, making Woodbine one of Toronto's most expansive and most popular beaches. It consistently has the best water quality of any Toronto mainland beach (assisted by a stormwater/CSO detention tank installed in 1990) and was first awarded a Blue Flag in 2005. Picnic areas, a full-service restaurant, a beach volleyball concession and ample parking are key amenities.



KEW-BALMY BEACH ~ Located between Silver Birch and Leuty avenues in Beaches Park and Balmy Beach Park, this narrow beach abuts the boardwalk and the Martin Goodman Trail. Water quality improved with the installation of a stormwater/CSO detention tank in 1994; other remedial works are planned for this area. The Leuty Lifesaving Station (1921), an icon of the Eastern Beaches, is located at the west end of the site. Kew-Balmy is separated from Woodbine Beach by a designated off-leash dog area south of Kew Gardens.



BLUFFER'S PARK BEACH ~ Located east of the foot of Brimley Road, this large beach traps sand against a lakefill arm of Bluffer's Park (1983). The Scarborough Bluffs provide a dramatic backdrop for this site. Water quality has historically been poor, though no combined sewer outfalls or stormwater discharges directly impact the beach. After microbial source tracking studies identified wildlife as the primary source of bacterial pollution, intermittent streams draining across the beach were intercepted in 2008 using a constructed dune and wetland system.



ROUGE BEACH ~ Located at the mouth of the Rouge River at the east end of Lawrence Avenue, this small beach was a commercial attraction until Rouge Beach Park was created in 1974. Water quality has generally been poor due to upstream pollution in the Rouge watershed and to large numbers of Canada geese in the Rouge Marshes. The beach is shared with the West Rouge Canoe Club, which operates children's camps during the summer. The river mouth spit is a popular fishing site.



CURRENT CONDITIONS

Toronto's lakefront spans 157 kilometres of shoreline, with 24.4 kilometres made up of sand and cobble beach. Over 97% of the beach is owned or operated by the City and the TRCA. 18.9 kilometres of "wild" beach are not supervised by lifeguards or monitored for beach water quality, have few facilities and limited access, and are typically used for walking and bird watching. The remaining 5.5 kilometres of supervised beach, designated for swimming at 11 sites, are the focus of this plan (fig. 1).

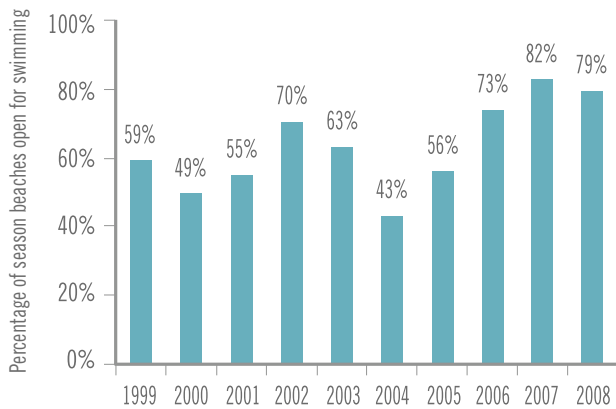
The number of days that swimming beaches are "open" – when they are not posted against swimming by the Medical Officer of Health due to E.coli levels above the

provincial standard – is a good indicator of beach quality and, more specifically, of beach water quality. Summary numbers from 1999 to 2008 display a cyclical rise-and-fall in beach openings (fig. 2). Rolling five-year averages during this period show a steady improvement in overall beach performance, from 51% open in 1999-2003 to 67% open in 2004-08. The yearly change from 2004 to 2007 is impressive: total beach openings were up 39 percentage points, reaching a record high of 82% open in 2007. This can be attributed partly to the weather – 2007 was Toronto's driest summer since 1959 – and partly to improved water management. The slight dip in 2008 likely reflects Toronto's wettest summer since 1937.

FIGURE 1. Toronto's Designated Swimming Beaches, 2008



FIGURE 2. Overall Time Toronto Beaches were Open for Swimming, 1999-2008



Toronto's 11 swimming beaches can be grouped into three categories according to their beach water quality (fig. 3). Six beaches (Woodbine, Cherry, Ward's Island, Centre Island, Gibraltar Point and Hanlan's Point) fly the Blue Flag, which requires that individual beaches have water quality which enables them to be open for at least 80% of the swimming season. Another two beaches (Kew-Balmy and Bluffer's Park) are close to the Blue Flag threshold. Based on recent beach water sampling results, Kew-Balmy will likely be awarded a Blue Flag in 2009; Bluffer's may qualify in 2010. The remaining three beaches (Sunnyside, Rouge and Marie

Curtis) are located near the mouth of major river systems resulting in poor beach water quality and are regularly posted against swimming.

The microbiological state of beach water is not the only condition which varies amongst Toronto's swimming beaches. Considerable variation exists across the waterfront in terms of the physical and aesthetic quality of beach water, facilities and amenities, and programming (fig. 4).

FIGURE 3. Toronto Beach Postings Compared to Blue Flag Water Quality Criterion, 2005-2008

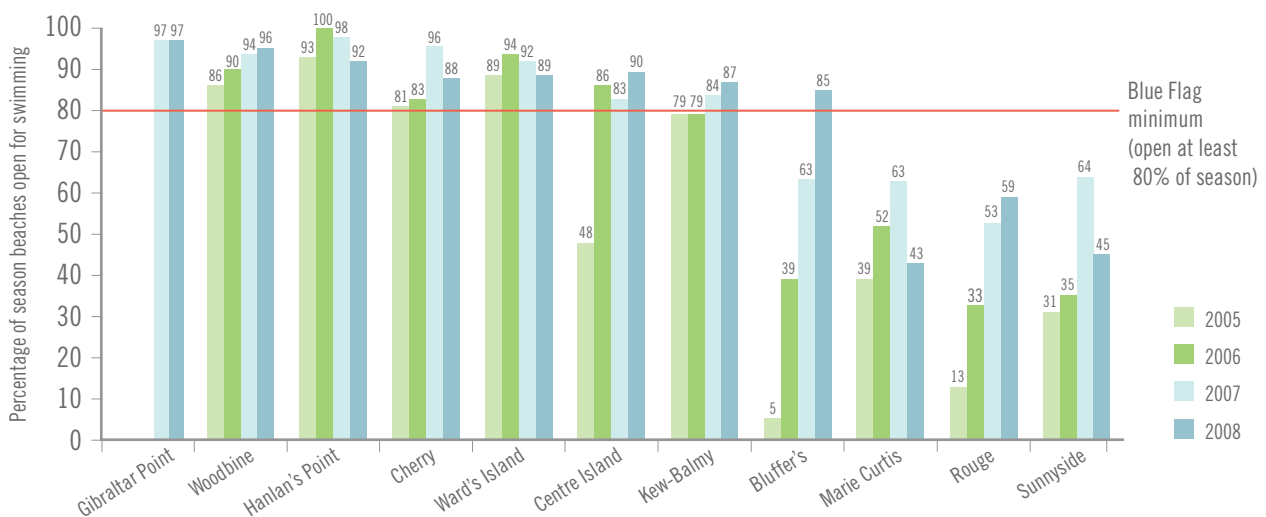


FIGURE 4. Current Conditions at Toronto's Swimming Beaches

	MARIE CURTIS	SUNNYSIDE	HANLAN'S POINT	GIBRALTAR POINT	CENTRE ISLAND	WARD'S ISLAND	CHERRY	WOODBINE	KEW-BALMY	BLUFFER'S	ROUGE
BEACH WATER QUALITY - MICROBIOLOGICAL											
posted against swimming less than 20% of beach season	✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
presence of nuisance algae	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
pollution from birds and animals	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
BEACH WATER QUALITY - PHYSICAL & AESTHETIC											
lake bottom	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
presence of floating debris and lakeweed	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
FACILITIES & AMENITIES											
washrooms & changerooms	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
access for users with disabilities	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
showers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓
overall beach signage	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓
lifeguard stands	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
parking lot	✓	✓	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓
access by transit, cycling, walking	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓
availability of shade	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
availability of concessions	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓
minor beach infrastructure (tables, benches, BBQs)	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
PROGRAMMING											
environmental education activities	✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓
management of different users/uses to prevent conflict and accidents	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓

✓✓✓ GOOD ✓✓ MODERATE ✓ POOR



Monitoring Water Quality at Toronto's Beaches

Toronto's swimming beaches are monitored for microbiological water quality by the Medical Officer of Health in accordance with the Ontario Beach Management Protocol. The purpose of this monitoring program is to identify beach water that is likely to pose an elevated risk to human health due to high concentrations of pathogenic micro-organisms in the water and to warn bathers against swimming in contaminated waters.

Ontario's standard for recreational water quality is 100 E.coli per 100 ml of water – higher than standards set by Canada (200 E.coli per 100 ml) and the U.S. (235 E.coli per 100 ml). Toronto takes samples every day during the swimming season, far more than Ontario's once-weekly requirement. According to Environmental Defence, "Toronto far exceeds the Ontario protocol, resulting in one of the most stringent recreational water quality testing programs in the world."

This approach enables Toronto Public Health (TPH) to identify unsafe conditions and take protective measures more quickly, such as posting the beach against swimming. Trends can also be determined which, coupled with weather data, can be used to predict probable E.coli levels and water quality at a given beach.

Using current methods and technologies, a 24-hour gap exists between beach water sampling and the receipt and posting of lab results. To better protect beach users, TPH now issues a 24-hour "no swimming advisory" after a heavy rainfall at beaches affected by river discharges. To reopen beaches in a more timely manner, a beach may be deemed safe for swimming when E.coli levels (sampled 24 hours ago) are slightly above the provincial standard of 100 E.coli per 100 mL of water. This action is only taken when the E.coli level trend over two or more consecutive days is decreasing and weather conditions and forecasts indicate this trend will continue. Results appear on a new TPH website at www.toronto.ca/beach.



KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Beach use in Toronto has long been undermined by negative public perceptions of water quality. Uneven service levels in terms of beach maintenance and amenity provision have also contributed to dissatisfaction.

Water Pollution Water quality is highly variable across Toronto's swimming beaches. Toronto's most-frequently posted beaches – Sunnyside, Marie Curtis and Rouge – are severely impacted by pollution from nearby river discharges. On an annual basis, the largest source of E.coli to the lake is from the city's streams. The entire watersheds of the Humber, Etobicoke Creek and the Rouge will require eliminating combined sewer overflows and, more importantly, controlling and treating all storm runoff to a much higher standard than currently exists, if we are to meet recreational water quality criteria near the mouths of urban rivers and eliminate excessive algae along the nearshore of Lake Ontario. According to the WWFMP, improving beach water quality at Toronto's river-impacted swimming beaches depends on watershed-wide action and will take longer than 25 years. Interim solutions at these sites should be identified.

E.coli Sources Nature itself can be a source of E.coli bacteria. Recent studies have shown that E.coli and other indicator organisms can be differentiated between human and non-human sources. Using these methods, Environment Canada found that E.coli at Toronto beaches where no obvious sanitary sewage inputs exist is largely contributed by birds and other wildlife. This has important management implications: Canada geese feces are no longer just an aesthetic problem, but a factor in beach postings. Other E.coli sources or reservoirs are dog feces, wet foreshore beach sand, submerged sediments, and algal blooms.

Beach Amenities and Maintenance On the land side, beach maintenance has improved greatly over the past few years, but many facilities are not in a good state of repair. Toronto's beach

infrastructure is at least 40 years old. Physical improvements will be an important way to increase beach use. Aging park infrastructure (like washrooms and changerooms) and a shortage of amenities (such as showers and food service) undermine the attractiveness and usability of Toronto's beaches. Old construction rubble on the lake bottom makes swimming and wading unpleasant at several locations. On the green front, opportunities exist to make beach infrastructure, maintenance and operations more environmentally sustainable.

Lifeguards Lifeguards are a highly valued safety service at Toronto's beaches. Lifeguards and rescue personnel are provided from June to Labour Day. Recent public opinion surveys found that extending lifeguard hours during very hot weather would represent a significant service improvement. To promote design excellence on Toronto's beaches, new lifeguard stands could be designed and installed.

Climate Change The increasing frequency and severity of summer storms has required staff to remove larger amounts of shoreline debris more often from swimming beaches. Rising levels of beach use attributed to hot weather have also increased beach cleaning demands.

Public Access With the exception of Toronto Island, access to beaches is generally good by car but often difficult by transit, foot and cycle. Increasing opportunities to reach the beach by foot, bicycle or transit should reduce reliance on private autos and limit demands for additional car parking. Beaches should be for everyone, yet disabled users have little or no access to the water's edge or into the lake.

User Conflicts Conflicts have developed between waterfront users at City beaches. Safe swimming and wading has been affected by the rise of personal water craft and kiteboarding and by near-shore power boat moorings. Increased numbers of dogs on swimming beaches have also been noted. Opportunities exist



to resolve conflicts and avoid accidents by better separating various waterfront uses and users and through improved education and regulatory enforcement.

Education and Promotion As Toronto moves to certify additional Blue Flag beaches, new environmental education activities and projects specifically related to beach/coastal history and ecology are required to retain our Blue Flag accreditation. These efforts will increase public stewardship of our beaches, raise awareness of water quality issues and improve overall environmental literacy among Toronto’s residents and visitors.

Creating a more positive image of Toronto’s beaches requires improved communications. While Toronto Public Health provides excellent information about swimming beach water quality at www.toronto.ca/beach, a more comprehensive approach is needed to better inform potential users about beach opportunities. The City should capitalize on its Blue Flag awards and promote its beaches to visitors from inside and outside the city. Adding beaches to Toronto’s portfolio of attractions and reaching European tourists already familiar with the Blue Flag program are untapped opportunities.

RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Toronto began the process of certifying its swimming beaches through the Blue Flag program in 2003. In the past five years, many beach improvement initiatives have been undertaken to address some of the challenges and opportunities:

- Toronto became the first community in Canada to fly the Blue Flag. Toronto was awarded four Blue Flags in 2005 and received another two in 2007.
- A dune and wetland system was created at Bluffer’s Park Beach to intercept and divert the flow of intermittent

streams, which has dramatically improved beach water quality.

- Maintenance dredging was undertaken at Centre Island Beach to enhance lake-water circulation and improve beach water quality.
- Storm sewer outfalls discharging to the west of Sunnyside Beach are now intercepted by the Ellis Avenue & Colborne Lodge Drive Stormwater Management Facilities project.
- WWFMP projects have been initiated to control or eliminate stormwater discharges and combined sewer overflows that affect Marie Curtis Park East, Bluffer’s Park, Kew-Balmy and Woodbine beaches.
- An environmental assessment to control erosion at Gibraltar Point has been completed and detailed design of offshore protection and a sand management plan has begun.
- A new beach maintenance program has been implemented, resulting in more frequent litter picking, washroom cleaning, beach grooming and collection of waste and recyclables.
- To reduce E.coli loading from bird feces, a “Don’t Feed the Birds” public education campaign has been mounted in all City waterfront parks. The Canada geese management program has been enhanced, and border collies are used by the City to herd geese and gulls off swimming beaches.
- Beach wheelchairs are available for free short-term loan at Woodbine Beach to enable park visitors with disabilities to reach the water’s edge.
- Waterfront Toronto’s Lake Ontario Park Master Plan proposes beach upgrades across the north shore of the Outer Harbour and along the Eastern Beaches.



BEACH INFORMATION

Morning Water Temperature

Latest E-Coli count
Less than 100 is within acceptable range

UV Index
Greater than 7 is high

 **LIMIT OF SUPERVISED SWIMMING AREA**
SWIM BETWEEN FLAGS

 **LOW HAZARD**
NATURAL WATERFRONT,
LIGHT WIND AND WAVES
LIFEGUARD ON DUTY 

CAUTION MODERATE HAZARD
ROUGH WATER
and/or
STRONG CURRENT
and/or
STRONG OFFSHORE WIND
LIFEGUARD ON DUTY 

 **DANGER HIGH HAZARD**
EXTREME WAVE ACTION
and/or
CURRENTS
and/or
HIGH E-COLI LEVELS
SWIMMING NOT RECOMMENDED
LIFEGUARD ON DUTY 

NO FLAG NO LIFEGUARD ON DUTY

A PLAN FOR GREAT BEACHES

VISION Pushing Toronto’s swimming beaches to the next level is the goal of the Toronto Beaches Plan. Our lakeside beaches will be safer, cleaner, more usable, more accessible and greener than they are today. Opportunities to swim and wade at supervised beaches will continue to be distributed equitably across the waterfront. All swimming beaches will fly the Blue Flag, hosting a range of recreational uses with the necessary supporting amenities, while ensuring that the natural environment is protected, enhanced or restored.

OVERALL OBJECTIVES

In Toronto, a great swimming beach will have:

- Beach water quality that allows swimming and wading to take place every day during the beach season, is communicated to users in a timelier manner, is rigorously monitored for sources of pollution, and is supported by safer and more comfortable lake bottom conditions.
- Maintenance and operations that offer extended beach lifeguard protection during very hot weather, provide cleaner washrooms and changerooms, reduce fouling by birds, animals, nuisance algae and floating debris, and respond better to storm debris and higher levels of use attributed to climate change.
- Facilities and amenities that are in a good state of repair, attractive, environmentally sustainable, accessible to people with disabilities, more easily reached by transit, foot and bicycle, offer more and better shade opportunities, and generally support a highly satisfying beach visit.
- Programming that reduces potential conflicts between different waterfront user groups, enables visitors to learn about beach ecosystems and issues, encourages community stewardship to restore natural features, and brings more children from non-waterfront neighbourhoods to the beach.

- Education and communications that make beach conditions and regulations more understandable to users, increase local awareness of the Blue Flag program and beach improvement initiatives, and attract tourists to Toronto’s beaches.

STRATEGY

To achieve this vision, the Toronto Beaches Plan proposes a five-point improvement strategy:

1. Commit to bringing all of Toronto’s swimming beaches to the Blue Flag standard as quickly as possible.
2. As short-term priorities, take steps to bring beaches with poor beach water quality to the Blue Flag standard.
3. Undertake other improvements relating to beach water quality, maintenance and operations, facilities and amenities, programming, and education and communications. Actions will target specific beaches based on need or opportunity.
4. Request the provincial and federal governments to support local efforts to improve beach conditions in Toronto and across the Great Lakes.
5. Over the longer term, make additional improvements to achieve zero beach postings and thus exceed the Blue Flag standard for beach water quality, relying primarily on continued implementation of the Wet Weather Flow Master Plan (WWFMP).

ACTIONS

Actions to put this strategy into practice are organized around the themes of beach water quality, maintenance and operations, facilities and amenities, programming, and education and communications. Many actions affect all beaches; some are targeted to specific locations. How the actions are applied will depend on individual beach circumstances.

Beach Water Quality

OBJECTIVE Beach water quality that allows swimming and wading to take place every day during the beach season, is communicated to users in a more timely manner, is rigorously monitored for sources of pollution, and is supported by safer and more comfortable lake bottom conditions.

ACTIONS

1. Undertake a pilot project at Sunnyside Beach to enclose a portion of the swimming area to make it more swimmable and provide water that meets Ontario's recreational water quality standard.
2. Initiate a public planning process, involving consultation with the local community and TRCA, to achieve better beach water quality at the following sites:
 - a) Marie Curtis Park East Beach: This site is impacted by pollution from Etobicoke Creek. The feasibility of deflecting the creek's discharge away from the beach, relocating the beach to the west side of the creek, or relocating the beach to Colonel Samuel Smith Park will be investigated.
 - b) Rouge Beach: This site is impacted by pollution from the Rouge River and the lake bottom tails off quickly into deep water. The feasibility of relocating the beach as part of the development of Port Union Waterfront Park Phase 2 will be investigated.
 - c) Colonel Samuel Smith Park: The feasibility of creating a new swimming beach that will either replace the current Marie Curtis Park East Beach or serve as an additional (12th) swimming beach will be investigated.
3. Request the provincial government to review methods to assess beach water samples for E.coli more quickly and enable beach postings to better reflect actual conditions experienced by swimmers.



4. Implement the use of permeable pavements, bioswales, soakaway pits and other stormwater controls to reduce or prevent runoff from beach parking lots and adjacent park areas from affecting beach water quality.
5. Reduce animal-related E.coli loadings at swimming beaches through the following measures:
 - habitat modification to discourage Canada geese;
 - increased Canada geese relocation and egg oiling;
 - increased use of City dog patrols to herd geese, gulls and swans off swimming beaches; and
 - increased public education campaigns and by-law enforcement.
6. Continue to work with Environment Canada to undertake microbial source tracking studies to understand beach water contamination sources, and apply findings to beach maintenance practices and remedial works.
7. Request the federal government to examine methods to reduce beach fouling by nuisance algae through the control of zebra and quagga mussels, including reduced lake-wide concentrations of phosphorus under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

Maintenance and Operations

OBJECTIVE Beach maintenance and operations that offer extended beach lifeguard protection during very hot weather, provide cleaner washrooms and changerooms, reduce fouling by birds, animals, nuisance algae and floating debris, and respond better to storm debris and higher levels of use attributed to climate change.

ACTIONS

8. Request the Toronto Police Service to extend lifeguard hours during Extreme Heat Alerts at selected Blue Flag beaches if these sites are not posted against swimming.
9. Review the existing operating arrangement between Parks, Forestry & Recreation, Toronto Water, Toronto Port Authority and Harbourfront Centre to better manage floating debris and lakeweed across the waterfront. This includes obtaining the necessary equipment, operating resources and permits to improve this service.
10. Develop a financing plan to address park maintenance pressures resulting from increased beach use and shoreline debris attributed to climate change.



Facilities and Amenities

OBJECTIVE Beach facilities and amenities that are in a good state of repair, attractive, environmentally sustainable, accessible to people with disabilities, more easily reached by transit, foot and bicycle, offer more and better shade opportunities and generally support a highly satisfying beach visit.

ACTIONS

11. Install new lifeguard stands, based on the results of an international design competition, at all swimming beaches.
12. Develop a financing plan to upgrade beach amenities not captured by state of good repair audits (e.g., picnic shelters, benches and tables). As a priority, an integrated outdoor shower/drinking fountain/bottle fill-up tap should be provided at every swimming beach.
13. Develop a strategy to retrofit or rebuild beach facilities to meet the Toronto Green Development Standard and improve the environmental performance of Toronto's beaches.
14. Expand the installation of post-and-ring bike lockups to every swimming beach.
15. Identify opportunities to use trails to better connect communities to beaches.
16. Conduct shade audits at swimming beaches and implement effective shade measures using a combination of natural and constructed shade, public messaging related to solar ultraviolet radiation risks and sun-smart behaviour, and encouraging beach concession operators to offer personal sun protection products. Installation of a seasonal shade canopy at a Blue Flag beach will be considered as a pilot project.
17. Investigate erosion and lake bottom conditions at selected beaches in consultation with TRCA and implement remedial measures (e.g., sand nourishment, substrate sorting and cobble/rubble removal) to improve swimming and wading.
18. Conduct accessibility audits of facilities and amenities at swimming beaches and implement measures to improve beach access for visitors with disabilities.



Programming

OBJECTIVE Beach programming that reduces potential conflicts between different waterfront user groups, enables visitors to learn about beach ecosystems and issues, encourages community stewardship to restore natural features, and brings more children from non-waterfront neighbourhoods to the beach.

ACTIONS

19. Make physical improvements to better manage beach users and uses to prevent conflict and accidents. This includes demarcating swimming and boating areas and defining areas for rigging and launching kiteboards and beaching personal water craft.
20. Extend year-round regulation of dogs to all swimming beaches and physically separate swimming beaches from adjacent designated off-leash dog areas.
21. Develop new environmental education programs to meet Blue Flag criteria.
22. Develop a strategy to bring children from non-waterfront neighbourhoods to the beach as part of City recreation programs. The initial focus will be on summer camps operating in Toronto's Priority Neighbourhoods.

Education and Communications

OBJECTIVE Education and communications that make beach conditions and regulations more understandable to users, increase local awareness of the Blue Flag program and beach improvement initiatives, and attract tourists to Toronto's beaches.

ACTIONS

23. Revise existing interpretive materials to address beach ecology and water quality issues.
24. Consolidate messaging for regulatory, directional and information signage at key locations at each beach.
25. Prepare an on-line guide to exploring Toronto's beaches for promotion to beach visitors and education program leaders.
26. Implement a communications strategy to increase local awareness of the Blue Flag program, steps being undertaken to improve beaches, and what residents can do to help improve beach water quality at home and at the beach.
27. Liaise with Tourism Toronto and the Ontario tourism marketing and travel trade staff, media relations personnel, and tour operators to promote Toronto's beaches as a tourism attraction.







GREAT CITY, GREAT BEACHES: THE TORONTO BEACHES PLAN

Successful implementation of the Toronto Beaches Plan will be indicated by fewer days that beaches are posted unsafe for swimming, the awarding of additional Blue Flags, and higher levels of user satisfaction at swimming beaches and the waterfront parks in which they are located. Closing the gap between Toronto's leading and lagging beaches is a priority, though steps also need to be taken to improve conditions at current Blue Flag sites.

Improving the quality of Toronto's beaches is a shared responsibility requiring action by many City divisions, agencies and partners. At the local level, the key public agencies are Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation, Toronto Water, Toronto Public Health, Toronto Police Service Marine Unit and the TRCA. The directions in the Toronto Beaches Plan need to be incorporated into the waterfront park plans and projects of the City of Toronto, Waterfront Toronto and the TRCA. At Environment Canada, continued support from the Canadian Wildlife Service and the National Water Research Institute will help ensure Toronto's success. Individual citizens and community organizations also have important advocacy and stewardship roles to play.

Action beyond the City of Toronto's boundaries will also affect the condition of our beaches. Existing forums, such as the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, will be used to advocate for basin-wide improvements in water quality and a healthy Lake Ontario. Continued implementation of the Toronto and Region Remedial Action Plan means pushing for watershed strategies and actions to address beach pollution, including stormwater management, spills management, and urban and rural best management practices. Cooperation from "upstream" municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area will be needed to meet the targets required by the Remedial Action Plan to delist the Toronto region as a Great Lakes Area of Concern. In turn, delisting will mean that we have made great strides toward making great beaches for a great city.

Photo Credits

Cover: Woodbine Beach / George Leet, 2007

Page 3 (left to right): Woodbine Beach / John Davidson, 2007; Cherry Beach / John Davidson, 2007; Woodbine Beach / John Davidson, 2007; Woodbine Beach / George Leet, 2007

Page 4: Woodbine Beach / George Leet, 2007

Page 6 (left to right): Woodbine Beach / Lisa Boynton, City of Toronto, 2007; Woodbine Beach / John Davidson, 2008

Page 7: Sunnyside Free Bathing Station / William James, 1907 (City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, Item 219)

Page 8 (top to bottom): Marie Curtis Park East Beach / Lou Wise, Toronto & Region Conservation Authority, 2006; Sunnyside Beach / John Davidson, 2008; Hanlan's Point Beach / George Leet, 2007; Gibraltar Point Beach / George Leet, 2007; Centre Island Beach / George Leet, 2007; Ward's Island Beach / John Davidson, 2007

Page 9 (top to bottom): Cherry Beach / John Davidson, 2007; Woodbine Beach / John Davidson, 2008; Kew-Balmy Beach / John Davidson, 2007; Bluffer's Park Beach / George Leet, 2007; Rouge Beach / Wayne Reeves, City of Toronto, 2007

Page 11: Ward's Island Beach / George Leet, 2007

Page 13: Sunnyside Beach / George Leet, 2007

Page 14 (left to right): Sunnyside Beach / George Leet, 2007; Hanlan's Point Beach / George Leet, 2007; Sunnyside Beach / John Davidson, 2007; Sunnyside Beach / John Davidson, 2007

Page 15 (left to right): Ellis Avenue Stormwater Management Facility near Sunnyside Beach / Wayne Reeves, City of Toronto, 2008; Woodbine Beach / Jose San Juan, City of Toronto, 2008; Woodbine Beach / John Davidson, 2007; Woodbine Beach / Jose San Juan, City of Toronto, 2008

Page 16: Bluffer's Park Beach / George Leet, 2007

Page 18: Bluffer's Park Beach / George Leet, 2007

Page 19 (left to right): Woodbine Beach / Jose San Juan, City of Toronto, 2008; Woodbine Beach / George Leet, 2007

Page 20: Centre Island Beach / George Leet, 2007

Page 21 (left to right): Centre Island Beach / John Davidson, 2007; Gibraltar Point Beach / George Leet, 2007

Page 22: Woodbine Beach / John Davidson, 2008



Printed on recycled paper.

08-R-43-630