

**Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee
March 6, 2014**

TO: Chair and Members of Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed
Jane Fraser, Planning & Infrastructure

DATE: February 7, 2014

SUBJECT: Blue Flag Beach Update Report

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

1. Regional Council September 27, 2011, Item 11.2.1 – Blue Flag Beach Candidacy
Motion: that Halifax Regional Council declare the Halifax Regional Municipality as a Blue Flag candidate community and is committed to meeting the outstanding criteria at Birch Cove Beach.
2. Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee September 8, 2011, Item 7.1.2 – Blue Flag Beach Candidacy
Motion: That the Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee:
 1. Forward a report containing the originating information report and briefing note overviewing the Blue Flag program and the following recommended motion to Regional Council:
“That Halifax Regional Municipality declare its candidacy as a Blue Flag candidate community and is committed to meeting the outstanding criteria at Birch Cove Beach”.
 2. Direct staff to work with Environmental Defence to assess whether the water quality results at Black Rock and Dingle/Flemming Park Beaches meet Blue Flag criteria.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Section 3.5.3 of the Terms of Reference of the Environment & Sustainability Standing Committee, “Other related activities in the area of water resource management as identified by the Standing Committee and approved by Regional Council.”

BACKGROUND

On September 27, 2011, Regional Council declared HRM a Blue Flag Community, in support of the candidacy of Birch Cove Beach for a Blue Flag, and directed staff to assess whether water quality results at Black Rock Beach and Dingle Beach meet Blue Flag Criteria.

This report provides the Committee with an update on staff activities and their outcomes, pursuant to the September 2011 directions of Regional Council and the Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee.

DISCUSSION

Birch Cove Beach:

In May 2013, HRM received an official letter from Environmental Defence confirming that Birch Cove Beach had been awarded a Blue Flag for Birch Cove Beach; the official Award Letter is provided in Attachment 1.

Birch Cove Beach was a high quality beach prior to Blue Flag certification and received the following enhancements to meet Blue Flag standards (see Attachment 2 for a full list of Blue Flag Beach Criteria):

- Three new signs at beach (See Attachment 3)
- Flag pole
- Outdoor drinking fountain
- More bins for waste disposal

2013 was a successful season at Birch Cove Beach. Water quality remained safe for swimming all summer long so the beach remained open for 66 consecutive days - from June 27 through August 31. Water quality also met Blue Flag criteria all summer long and the beach was visited by 207 people, on average, every day during the 2013 season. The visitor count is comparable to recent seasons, which ranged from 162-249 from 2010-2012. Environmental Defence conducted an unannounced beach visit for inspection purposes during the beach season and the resulting Control Report (see Attachment 4) was overwhelmingly positive.

HRM also delivered, directly or through partners, seven environmental education activities leading up to and during the summer. These activities included:

- Blue Flag training for HRM lifeguards;
- Hosting a Family Earth Fun Day (Adventure Earth Centre);
- Discover Your Watershed event (Clean Nova Scotia);
- Blue Flag environmental messages delivered through summer day camp curricula (Findlay Community Centre); and
- Public notices about the Blue Flag program (HRM grand parade e-newsletter, HRM Naturally Green newsletter, Canada Green Building Council (Atlantic Chapter) newsletter).

Staff submitted HRM's annual application for a Blue Flag at Birch Cove Beach in January 2014.

Black Rock Beach and Dingle Beach:

In 2011, water quality at these beaches was perceived by HRM staff to be the greatest potential obstacle to meeting Blue Flag criteria at Black Rock and Dingle Beaches, due to observed impacts from occasional wastewater discharges and/or overflows.

Further to Council direction in 2011, HRM compiled water quality data from 2010 through 2013 for both Black Rock and Dingle beaches to assess whether or not these beaches met Blue Flag criteria for water quality. The data was entered into a standard Blue Flag data summary table for statistical assessment, and Environmental Defence advised HRM that water quality at both beaches meets current Blue Flag water quality standards as identified in the 2013 Blue Flag Criteria.

Despite satisfactory water quality, both Black Rock and Dingle beaches experience numerous closures each season, making them unavailable to the public. These closures are almost exclusively based on precautionary closures following heavy rain events, resulting in overflows of certain wastewater pumping overflows exceeding one hour. A summary of closures at these beaches is given below in Table 1.

Table 1 - Beach Closure summary for Black Rock Beach and Dingle Beach, 2010-2013:

	# Days 2013	# Days 2012	# Days 2011	# Days 2010	# Days (Avg.)
Black Rock	18	11	11	21	15.25
Dingle	14	11	11	24	15

Visitor usage at Black Rock beach and Dingle beach is quite modest, with approximately 1000 and 1160 total visits recorded, respectively, over the entire summer of 2013. This total yields a daily average beach visitor count of 19 and 16 persons, respectively. Similar visitor turnout was recorded in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

Due to the frequency of beach closures, low visitor usage, and negative public perception associated with beach closures, staff does not intend to apply for Blue Flag certification at either of the Black Rock Beach or Dingle Beach at this time.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report. Annual dues of \$1,000 are payable for each beach that is awarded a Blue Flag. Should Regional Council direct staff to work towards achieving Blue Flags at Black Rock, Dingle, and/or other beaches in the future, capital and operating expenses will be given in a supporting staff report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Blue Flag program provides for community engagement through the requirement to hold a minimum of five environmental activities during each year, the active management of a dynamic web page, and high quality signage at participating facilities. Membership in HRM's Beach Committee includes a representative from the Clean Nova Scotia Foundation.

ATTACHMENTS

- A1. Birch Cove Beach Award Letter 2013
- A2. Blue Flag Beach Criteria 2013
- A3. Blue Flag Signage at Birch Cove Beach
- A4. Birch Cove Beach Control Visit Report 2013

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/commcoun/index.html> then choose the appropriate Community Council and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by: Cameron Deacoff, Environmental Performance Officer, 902-490-1926

Original Signed

Report Approved by: Richard MacLellan, Manager, Energy & Environment, 902-490-6056

Original Signed

Report Approved by: John Henry, Acting Manager, Community Recreation & Culture, 902-490-4734



May 21, 2013

Cameron Deacoff
Environmental Performance Officer
Halifax Regional Municipality

Dear Cameron,

On behalf of Blue Flag Canada and Environmental Defence, I would like to congratulate you on attaining the Blue Flag award for Birch Cove Beach in 2013! We are excited to be working with you this summer and would be honoured to participate in and help promote a flag raising ceremony at Birch Cove Beach.

On June 4th Environmental Defence will be issuing a news release about Canada's Blue Flag awardees and candidates. We ask that you keep this information embargoed until our announcement is made. If you plan to hold a flag raising event or issue a press release, please let us know and we will be happy to help promote it. The communications manager for Blue Flag is Jennifer Mayville, and she can be reached at jmayville@environmentaldefence.ca or 416-323-9521 ext. 228. Any communications materials that relate to Blue Flag should be reviewed by us in advance.

In 2013 Blue Flag beaches are still required to test for streptococci in addition to E.coli, so we recommend that you make the arrangements to have the five single samples taken, including one pre-season sample. This data will be entered into the 95th percentile spreadsheet. Please refer to the 2013 Blue Flag Criteria for details. If you are in need of assistance in paying for these additional tests, Environmental Defence will be happy to help cover those costs.

I would also like to remind you of the changes that come into effect for the 2013 season:

- Forming a beach management committee will be an imperative criterion – if you do not currently have one, you must commit to forming one in 2013

- Environmental education activities must be promoted on your individual Blue Flag web page
- Blue Flag must be promoted on your municipal website
- Water quality results (E.coli) must be posted on the Blue Flag website within 48 hours of receiving results

If you have any questions, please contact me. Again, congratulations and we look forward to an excellent season.

Sincerely,

Original Signed

Brett Tryon
Blue Flag Coordinator
Environmental Defence

Appendix 2

Blue Flag Beach Criteria 2013 (Summary)

(I) Imperative Criteria– beach must comply

(G) Guideline Criteria– encouraged to increase the standards at the beach but not mandatory

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

1. Information about the Blue Flag program and other FEE eco-label must be displayed. (I)
2. Environmental education activities must be offered and promoted to beach users. (I)
3. Information about bathing water quality must be displayed. (I)
4. Information relating to local ecosystems and environmental phenomena must be displayed. (I)
5. A map of the beach indicating different facilities must be displayed. (I)
6. Code of conduct that reflects appropriate laws governing the use of the beach and surrounding areas must be displayed. (I)

WATER QUALITY

7. The beach must fully comply with water quality sampling and frequency requirements. (I)
8. The beach must fully comply with standards and requirements for water quality analysis. (I)
9. No industrial, waste-water or sewage-related discharges should affect the beach area. (I)
10. The beach must comply with the Blue Flag requirements for microbiological parameter Escherichia coli (faecal coliform bacteria) and intestinal enterococci (streptococci). (I)
11. The beach must comply with the Blue Flag standards for the following physical parameters (I):
 - There must be no oil film visible on the surface of the water and no odour detected. On land the beach must be monitored for oil and emergency plans should include the required action to take in case of such pollution.
 - There has to be an absence of floatables such as tarry residues, wood, plastic articles, bottles, containers, glass or any other substance.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

12. The local authority / beach operator should establish a beach management committee. (G)
13. The local authority / beach operator must comply with all regulations affecting the location and operation of the beach. (I)
14. Sensitive area management (I)
15. The beach must be clean. (I)
16. Algae vegetation or natural debris should be left on the beach. (I)
17. Waste disposal bins/containers must be available at the beach in adequate numbers and they must be regularly maintained. (I)

Appendix 2

18. Facilities for the separation of recyclable waste materials should be available at the beach. (I)
19. An adequate number of toilet or restroom facilities must be provided. (I)
20. The toilet or restroom facilities must be kept clean. (I)
21. The toilet or restroom facilities must have controlled sewage disposal. (I)
22. On the beach there will be no unauthorized camping or driving and no dumping. (I)
23. Access to the beach by dogs or other domestic animals must be strictly controlled. (I)
24. All buildings and equipment of the beach must be properly maintained. (I)
25. Marine and freshwater sensitive habitats (such as Coral reefs or sea grass beds) in the vicinity of the beach must be monitored. (I where applicable)
26. A sustainable means of transportation should be promoted in the beach area. (G)

SAFETY AND SERVICES

27. An adequate number of lifeguards and/or lifesaving equipment must be available at the beach. (I)
28. First aid equipment must be available on the beach. (I)
29. Emergency plans to cope with pollution risks must be in place. (I)
30. There must be management of different users and uses of the beach so as to prevent conflicts and accidents. (I)
31. There must be safety measures in place to protect users of the beach. (I)
32. A supply of drinking water should be available on the beach. (G)
33. A minimum of one Blue Flag beach in each municipality must have access and facilities provided for the physically disabled. (I)

Attachment 3



Figure 1. Blue Flag Signage at Birch Cove Beach – Program Description, Map, Environmental Information & Code of Conduct



Figure 2. Blue Flag Signage at Birch Cove Beach – Water Quality Information & Events



Control Visit Report for 2013: Birch Cove Beach

By signing the Blue Flag commitment, the Halifax Regional Municipality has promised to comply with the Blue Flag imperative criteria at Birch Cove Beach. National control visits are conducted during the bathing season to confirm that these criteria are being met. Control visits may be either announced or unannounced.

An unannounced national control visit was conducted on August 31st, 2013 by Brett Tryon, Blue Flag Program Manager for Environmental Defence.

Birch Cove Beach was very clean and well maintained. The information boards were impressive, with lots of information about the Blue Flag program, the watershed and the surrounding habitat. Lifeguards were on duty, and we were pleased to see that they were supervising the area near the dock, which was suggested in the 2012 control visit report. The water quality results were easy to find and were up to date.

Although the water quality results were posted, the events section on that sign was not updated. This could be due to the fact that the control visit was at the end of the bathing season, and the educational activities had already taken place. It is however, a good idea to post events that happen throughout the year. That could include both activities occurring at the beach as well as activities happening in the community such as lectures or nature walks.

It has been a pleasure working with HRM, and we congratulate you on a successful first Blue Flag season. We will send further instructions for the 2014 application procedure. If you have any questions, please contact Brett Tryon btryon@environmentaldefence.ca 416-323-9521 ext.238.