

## **Maine's Changing Beaches: Priorities for Beach Users**

### **Speakers:**

**Connie Garber, Transportation Director, York County  
Community Action Corps  
John White, Kennebunk resident and beach monitor  
Linda Lyman, Kennebunk Dog Advisory Committee**

This session featured 3 speakers discussing how some issues of concern for beach users are being dealt with by their towns. Each of the speakers focused on how one specific issue has been successfully addressed by employing cooperative efforts between all concerned parties.

### **Connie Garber**

Ms. Garber provided information on the "Shoreline Explorer," a trolley and shuttle service connecting the towns of Kennebunk, Kennebunkport, Wells, Sanford, Ogunquit, and York. This service is designed to reduce traffic congestion and to reduce the need for parking in the downtowns and beaches by allowing residents and visitors alike to park in outlying areas and take a very convenient means of public transportation to many locations in these coastal towns. This system is a cooperative effort between various private and public groups to interconnect several localized trolley and bus services into one unified system that will make access to beaches and their surrounding communities much more convenient. To confirm that the system is serving its purpose, riders are asked to complete surveys and to give feedback via the system's website [www.shorelineexplorer.com](http://www.shorelineexplorer.com). There is also a DVD available that takes "riders" on a virtual tour in order to better plan their actual trip.

Ms. Garber mentioned that the greatest challenge to developing the Shoreline Explorer was getting the separate groups together at one table but with some perseverance, everyone's cooperation was the key to establishing this system. Funding, of course, is always an issue but the local Chamber of Commerce has committed funding for 3 years and the Maine Department of Transportation has made a commitment for funding beyond that.

### **John White**

Mr. White, spoke to the issue of water quality on Southern Maine beaches and how pollution has an effect on visitors. Mr. White has been involved with water quality testing for many years and has seen major improvements in river water quality over his lifetime. This is significant for beaches because evidence indicates much of the pollution at beaches is actually caused by rivers upstream of the beach carrying pollutants down to the coast. He did have a concern, however, about the timeliness of reporting beach closing or water pollution information to the public. Mr. White stated that there is often a lag of a few days between testing water quality conditions and delivering the message to beach users. This, he claims, causes bad feelings with visitors who plan on beach

vacations only to find that an advisory may be posted at the beach once they arrive. The local Chambers of Commerce receive the brunt of the complaints when this happens. His hope is that faster water quality testing methods can be instituted so visitors will be given beach advisories in a more timely fashion.

### **Linda Lyman**

Ms. Lyman is active in educating dog owners about Kennebunk's *dogs on the beach* laws through her work with the town's Dog Advisory Committee. Her inspiration for this work is to be certain that dog owners will continue to have access to the town beaches by reducing conflicts with non-dog owner beach users. She mentioned that various studies have shown dogs are not a major source of pollution at beaches. Even so, in order to prevent laws banning dogs from the beaches, owners must comply with local ordinances. To accomplish this Kennebunk has instituted a few creative techniques.

One of the methods employed by the town is the printing of pamphlets entitled *Welcome Dogs on Kennebunk Beaches* which is distributed anywhere in town frequented by dog owners such as pet stores, veterinary offices, etc. This pamphlet clearly and concisely lists the Town's ordinances regarding dogs on the beach. In addition to this pamphlet, the Town has created numerous, large, attention-getting posters which also clearly state the Town ordinances. These posters are displayed at entrances to the Town beaches.

Another innovative technique instituted by Kennebunk is the establishment of a team of volunteers who patrol the beaches and sidewalks around the beaches to be sure dog owners are being responsible and obeying the laws. These volunteers also monitor interactions between dog owners and non-dog owners on the beach. At the first sign of a confrontation, they intercede to diffuse the situation before it can escalate into a major problem. For dog owners who do not bring their own bags to pick up after their pets, the town provides dispensers with plastic bags in order to encourage people to clean up after their dogs. According to Ms. Lyman, the proof that these efforts have paid off is the extremely low number of complaints to Town authorities about dogs on Kennebunk's beaches.

At the conclusion of this session, there were several points brought up by members of the audience in the "Question and Answer" period.

- Providing access to beaches for the general public must be a priority for governments. This includes providing parking, paths to the beach, and facilities for large numbers of people if trolley service is being provided.
- Water quality is a major concern to beach users.
- Communities must find a balance between the needs of beach property owners and the needs of the general public.
- We need to accept a *pay as you go* mentality so that a larger proportion of the costs of maintaining beaches will be paid by those using the beaches rather than by the general public.

- We need to have cooperation and good communication between all interest groups.
- We must treat beach water quality control as a regional watershed issue, not a local one, as so much of beach water quality is related to the quality of the rivers flowing into the beaches.