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A hiker prepares to set out on the Paul Getting Memorial Trail at Weedon Island Preserve in St. Petersburg

Photo by Ron Putnam

PA-1

Reduce Human and Pet Waste in Traditional Bay Recreation Areas

ACTION:

Reduce human and pet waste in recreation areas around Tampa Bay.

STATUS:

New action, replacing original action BH-5.

BACKGROUND:

Several traditional recreational areas along the bay, including the Courtney Campbell Causeway in Clearwater and the Gandy Causeway in northern St. Petersburg, are enjoyed by thousands of people and their pets year-round. However, most of these traditional-use beach playgrounds lack bathroom facilities, and studies indicate that bacterial contamination of the water may result from human or dog waste in specific, localized areas.

This action seeks to gain a better understanding of the impacts of human and pet waste from recreation areas on both nutrient loadings and pathogen levels in the bay; to identify priority target areas where impacts are greatest; and to implement solutions. The action encompasses recreational areas directly on the bay, as well as those located on bay tributaries such as the Hillsborough River.

In the case of human waste, the solutions are likely to be construction of restroom facilities served by central sewer. In the case of dog waste, the solution may be a combination of increased enforcement of existing “poop-scoop” ordinances and an aggressive educational program highlighting the connection between fecal matter, stormwater runoff and water quality, and promoting proper disposal of pet wastes.

According to recent research, non-human waste represents a significant source of bacterial contamination in urban watersheds. Genetic studies by Alderiso et al (1996) and Trial et al (1993) both concluded that 95 percent of the fecal coliform found in urban stormwater was of non-human origin. Bacterial source tracking studies in a watershed in the Seattle area also found that nearly 20 percent of the bacteria isolates that could be matched with host animals were matched with dogs. A 1993 USEPA report estimated that, for coastal watersheds of up to 20 square miles draining to small coastal bays, two to three days of droppings from a population of about 100 dogs would contribute enough bacteria and nutrients to temporarily close a bay to swimming and shellfishing.

Several communities around the country have instituted specific public education campaigns aimed at reducing pet waste in stormwater runoff, including Philadelphia, Seattle, Ventura, California and Williston, Vermont.

A study currently underway in Pinellas County on McKay Creek may help to quantify the impact of animal waste on a localized bay segment. Additionally, local health departments also may have monitoring information that would help to identify potential problem areas where untreated human or pet waste is suspected to be a culprit in bacterial contamination.

PA-1**STRATEGY:**

- STEP 1 Evaluate the relative importance of uncontrolled pet and human waste from recreation areas, including tributaries, to overall nutrient loading and pathogen levels in the bay.
Responsible parties: local health departments
Schedule: 2005-2006
- STEP 2 Identify recreational areas on the bay or its tributaries where pet and human waste may result in localized pollution problems.
Responsible parties: local health departments, TBEP TAC and CAC
Schedule: 2005-2006
- STEP 3 Implement a public education and enforcement campaign to reduce pet waste in priority areas and educate the public about the link between pet wastes and local water quality and public health issues.
Responsible parties: local health departments, stormwater departments, TBEP, NPDES Stormwater Committee (coordinated by TBRPC and DOT)
Schedule: Initiate in 2006
- STEP 4 Encourage local governments to construct restroom facilities at recreational beaches now lacking them.
Responsible parties: local governments, local health departments, TBEP (to assist in obtaining funding for the facilities)
Schedule: Ongoing