



**New Yorkers for Parks**  
***The 2009 Report Card on Beaches – Executive Summary***

**New York City's Local Beaches**

*The 2009 Report Card on Beaches* is New Yorkers for Parks' survey of all seven city beaches operated by the New York City Parks Department. A project of the award-winning *Report Card on Parks*, New Yorkers for Parks conducted independent inspections of beaches, with each one receiving a rating based on performance. The first *Report Card on Beaches* was issued in 2007, and overall, though improvements were noted, this year's results show that New York City's 14 miles of public beaches still need additional maintenance attention.

The ratings for the beaches surveyed are as follows:

<b>Borough</b>	<b>Beach Name</b>	<b>2007 Rating</b>	<b>2009 Rating</b>	<b>Mileage</b>
Brooklyn	Coney Island/Brighton Beach	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	2.7
Brooklyn	Manhattan Beach	Challenged	Satisfactory	0.3
Staten Island	Midland Beach	Satisfactory	Challenged	1.5
Bronx	Orchard Beach	Challenged	Challenged	1.1
Queens	Rockaway Beach	Challenged	Satisfactory	7.2
Staten Island	South Beach	Challenged	Unsatisfactory	1.7
Staten Island	Wolfe's Pond Beach	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	1.3

For this report, New Yorkers for Parks inspects four key service areas: Shorelines, Pathways, Bathrooms, and Drinking Fountains. Surveyors evaluated a sample of Shorelines and Pathways along with every Drinking Fountain and Bathroom on the beach. Since 2007, Bathrooms and Drinking Fountains improved in performance, while Shorelines and Pathways declined; however, the improvements in performance were more significant than the declines.

*The Report Card on Beaches* provides easily accessible information to beachgoers, elected officials, the media and advocates, and it sparks debate on park and beach policies and conditions citywide. As this year's *Report Card on Beaches* illustrates, there is a disparity among beach properties, with a beach user's experience heavily dependent on the beach they choose to visit.

**Other key findings include:**

- Three beaches improved in score, two declined, and two stayed the same since 2007.
- Three beaches were rated "Satisfactory" this year, versus only one in 2007. In addition, the beaches that improved in score experienced a larger percentage change in score than those that performed more poorly – meaning that the improvements were more significant than the declines.
- The features that improved – Bathrooms and Drinking Fountains – experienced significant percentage increases. Those that performed more poorly – Pathways and Shorelines – saw only a slight decrease in score.
- However, like 2007, no beach earned a score above "Satisfactory." The performance of Wolfe's Pond, which slipped in score this year, exhibits that maintenance needs are still significant in some parts of the system.
- The highest rated beach in the 2009 *Report Card on Beaches* is Rockaway Beach, the only beach in Queens and the largest municipal beach. The lowest performing site is Wolfe's Pond Beach in Staten Island, which was also the lowest scoring site in 2007 and is one of the smaller city beaches.



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- While Midland Beach, Staten Island was the only beach to score “Satisfactory” in 2007, this year three beaches earned that rating: Coney Island/Brighton Beach, Rockaway Beach, and Manhattan Beach. Both of Brooklyn’s beaches rated “Satisfactory.”
- In 2007, two beaches received the lowest rating, “Unsatisfactory”: Coney Island/Brighton Beach and Wolfe’s Pond Beach. Again in 2009 two beaches received this rating. Both are in Staten Island: South Beach and Wolfe’s Pond Beach.

**Recommendations**

To improve conditions of city beaches, New Yorkers for Parks offers these recommendations:

1. Ensure sufficient maintenance funding for beaches by piloting a dedicated revenue plan. Beaches require intensive maintenance during the three months per year that they are open for swimming. Seasonal staff members are hired to remove litter and ensure the safety of beach visitors; however, funding for these essential positions is never guaranteed, and for the next few summers, it is significantly threatened due to the economy. This is a good opportunity to pilot a program to fund beaches through other revenue sources. The selected revenue source should be equitably divided among all seven city beaches. Examples to be explored include a city-mandated developer contribution to beach maintenance, particularly in the case of the new developments along Coney Island and Rockaway Beach; and the distribution of revenue from beach concessions, such as those operated on Coney Island’s boardwalk and the restaurant at South Beach, among all seven city beaches using a formula that will provide for equity in services. Testing these models at beaches could inform a larger application of dedicated revenue to fund park maintenance in all five boroughs.

2. Implement a “triage” advisory board for Wolfe’s Pond Beach. Wolfe’s Pond Beach has been the lowest scoring site surveyed in *The Report Card on Beaches* in the two years of the publication. Areas of the beach are impacted by litter and debris, and bathrooms have not been available for public use during survey visits. In the *2009 Report Card on Beaches*, surveyors noted that dumping of large objects, such as tires, is occurring just beyond the areas of the beach staffed by lifeguards. For consistently low-performing parks and beaches, a “triage plan” could help to rally support and focus resources from local communities and officials. A committee of community members, Parks representatives, local elected officials, and other stakeholders should be formed to develop a long-term plan to improve the beach.

3. To increase transparency, accountability, and safety, the City should dedicate a website and host a public awareness campaign for NYC beaches. Local governments across the country have created special websites for the public to learn more about beaches. With fourteen miles of municipal beaches in New York City, there is a wide diversity of offerings at our beaches; however, there is no information on the Parks website regarding which areas of each beach are staffed with lifeguards and safe for swimming. In addition, the Health Department and Parks Department both conduct separate types of inspections of beaches, and both help operate safe beaches. But without a centralized website, it can be difficult for New Yorkers to find the needed information. The City should host a summertime website devoted to beaches, which would serve as a clearinghouse for information collected and provided by these two agencies. In addition, the website should educate the public about stormwater management, litter, and water quality to ensure that every visit to the beach is safe.



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Methodology

*The Report Card on Beaches* survey was designed from a beach user's perspective through focus group and "best practice" research. For the 2009 *Report Card on Beaches*, surveyors evaluated all seven City-operated public beaches on measures of maintenance, cleanliness, safety and structural integrity. Teams of trained surveyors used handheld computers and digital cameras to complete the evaluations in August 2008, a high-use season for public beaches. In constructing *The Report Card on Beaches*, New Yorkers for Parks focused on all Parks Department "beach" properties, which are between .3 and 7.2 miles (Manhattan Beach and Rockaway Beach, respectively.)

Due to the large size of many of the beaches, the shorelines were divided into 50-yard transects, which roughly corresponds with lifeguard placement. Ten percent of shorelines and pathways were randomly selected for inclusion in the evaluation. In addition, every drinking fountain and bathroom along the beach was inspected. This results in a sample that is indicative of beach conditions throughout New York City.