

# President Clinton signs B.E.A.C.H. Bill into Law

HR 999, the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health Act of 2000 (B.E.A.C.H. Bill) sponsored by Congressman Brian Bilbray (R-CA) was signed by President Clinton on October 10, 2000. The B.E.A.C.H. Bill establishes consistent nationwide standards for beach water quality monitoring, testing and notification. The B.E.A.C.H. Bill was written with assistance from Surfrider Foundation National Legal Issues Team member, Gary Sirota, Esq. Congratulations to all Surfrider Foundation members who communicated with their government representatives in support of this historic bill.

"This is the most sweeping legislation ever regarding national ocean water quality testing. Surfers have become the indicator species and this is a personal achievement that our members and beach users in general will benefit from. After all, we wear that water every day," said Surfrider Foundation's Executive Director, Christopher Evans.

The B.E.A.C.H. Bill amends the Clean Water Act to require ocean, bay and Great Lakes states to adopt minimum, health-based criteria for water quality, comprehensively test recreational beach waters for pathogens and notify the public when contamination levels make beach water unsafe for swimming, surfing and other activities. It also authorizes \$30 million annually in federal grants to help coastal states develop and implement effective water quality monitoring and public notification programs. By establishing incentives through grants to state and local governments, the B.E.A.C.H. Bill puts the authority and the accountability in the hands of those who know their beaches best. Currently, only eleven states comprehensively test their beach waters and notify the public when contamination occurs.

It was this lack of any national standard that inspired Surfrider Foundation to establish its Blue Water Task Force volunteer water-quality testing program in 1991. This program helped shed light

on the often-overlooked water quality problems in our coastal areas and provided the public with valuable information about the health of their local beach. Over the last several years, the Surfrider Foundation and its 50 grassroots chapters in 16 coastal states has worked with a coalition of groups, including Natural Resources Defense Council, Center for Marine Conservation, and American Oceans Campaign on making the B.E.A.C.H. Bill a reality.

States and various localities that tested their beach waters in 1999 posted 6,100 beach closings and advisories due to the presence of bacteria and viruses from polluted stormwater and runoff, overburdened sewage treatment facilities and malfunctioning septic systems. Contact with contaminated beach water can result in a variety of illnesses, ranging from gastroenteritis and hepatitis to various ear, nose and throat infections.

Besides bringing all states up to EPA standards, the law will require the EPA to upgrade these criteria, and to develop new criteria, based upon the most recent scientific studies. Under the law, states set up comprehensive monitoring and notification programs in order to provide up-to-date information on the condition of all beaches. The EPA will be required to post information about beach closings on its website to make the public aware of what condition exist before they make a trip to the beach.

"Beachgoers won't have to hesitate before going for a dip. They'll know what they're getting into when they go for a swim," said Elizabeth Sturcken, President of the Surfrider Foundation.

The B.E.A.C.H. Bills (S. 522, introduced by Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and H.R. 999, introduced by Representative Brian Bilbray (R-CA)) establish a common-sense, national approach to the problems of inconsistent beach water quality testing and public notification. The bills: establish national beach water quality criteria, improve beach water monitoring programs, and ensure prompt public notification of contamination. ■

## FIRST PERSON

Wed. Oct 11, 2000, Washington DC 1:30 pm....

I was sitting in my office when I received a call from Capitol Hill. "Hey, come on over to the Senate Reception Room at the Capitol Building today at 3 pm. Sen. Smith and Rep. Bilbray want to meet with Surfrider reps while other Senators sign the B.E.A.C.H. Bill surfboard." Sounded like a great idea as we'd just found out that President Clinton signed the HR 999 version of the B.E.A.C.H. Bill into law on Tuesday night. A moment of celebration was definitely in order. After excusing myself from work—kind of like the blue-flu when the surf is head high and glassy—I headed to the Capitol building.

The Surfrider B.E.A.C.H. Bill surfboard had about 105 signatures from U.S House of Representative members from their passage of the B.E.A.C.H. Bill last year, and now it was time for the Senators to step up and sign on to the historic icon. The board, destined to be placed in the International Surfing Museum in Huntington Beach, will forever archive this achievement orchestrated by Surfrider and other enviro non-profits to make sure all surfers and beach-goers are consistently and properly advised about beach water quality.

Fortunately, Ed Mazzarella (Chapter Director) and Chad Nelsen (Environmental Director) from Surfrider HQ in San Clemente were on their final leg of an East Coast Chapter tour, so they joined Terrance Melcher and me, founders of the Capitol Chapter, while we hung out in the Capitol getting U.S. Senators to take time from their final votes of the 106th Congress to sign our BEACH bill surfboard. What a great way to spend a beautiful fall afternoon in Washington. Ed and Chad were stoked to have timed it just right to be in town to see this event go down. More Senator signatures were expected, with President Clinton's signature being the final "jewel on the crown" - and then its off to Huntington Beach.

The other tourists inside the Capitol looked at us rather strangely with this B.E.A.C.H. Bill surfboard under our arms and Senators walking up to sign it—yeah, they knew it was a special event but little did they know how hard we all worked to get the B.E.A.C.H. Bill passed into law! It was really great to meet Sen. Lincoln Chaffee from Rhode Island—son of the famous Sen. John Chaffee, another champion for the environment who passed away too soon. Sen. Lincoln Chaffee signed the surfboard with a "hang ten" exclamation under his name! Rep. Bilbray and staff were all on hand to help celebrate this environmental milestone for clean beach waters.

I am so stoked to be a member of the Surfrider Foundation clan - a family that works and plays hard in Mother Ocean's backyard.

Aloha and Mahalo to everybody who supported this effort!

Darryl Hatheway  
Federal Policy Analyst  
Washington DC-Capitol Chapter



Above from left: Terrance Melcher, Surfrider Capitol Chapter member; Chad Nelsen, Surfrider Environmental Director; Sen. Bob Smith (R-NH), Chairman of the EPW; Brian Bilbray (R-CA); and Ed Mazzarella, Surfrider Chapter Operations Director; hidden: Darryl Hatheway, President of the DC Surfrider Chapter, pose with the B.E.A.C.H. Bill surfboard. Right: Eat your heart out, Mr. Smith.



## STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT CLINTON

**Today, I am pleased to sign the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health Act, which significantly strengthens efforts to make America's beaches clean, safe and healthy.**

**America's coasts are not only a natural treasure—they are also the number one destination for vacationing families, making their health vital to our nation's tourism industry. Yet each year, pollution forces thousands of beach closures or health advisories. The Beach Act will ensure that in the future fewer families arrive at the beach only to discover that it is too polluted for fishing or swimming. It requires states to adopt enforceable standards for water quality, regularly test coastal waters for health-threatening pollution, and notify the public of unsafe conditions. In addition, it provides assistance to states to carry out these efforts.**

**This Act builds on my Administration's strong efforts to ensure healthier beaches and cleaner coastal waters, greater protection for endangered and threatened marine species, sound fisheries management, and support for marine protected areas. I urge Congress to fully fund ocean and coastal conservation programs for the coming fiscal year so that communities around the country may enjoy healthy beaches and clean waters for years to come.**