

Join Thousands in Annual September Great Lakes Cleanup

Thousands of Adopt-a-Beach™ volunteers turn out each September to pick up trash – more than 15,000 pounds of it during last year’s September cleanup -- record their findings, and perform simple water quality tests to gauge the water’s health.

This year’s dry summer means no huge trash washups from sewage overflows and flooding. Yet volunteers turning out this Sept. 15 for the Alliance’s annual September Adopt-a-Beach™ Event in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin will have no shortage of work cleaning up Great Lakes beaches.

Sporadic overflows that hit the shores of the Great Lakes make headlines, but evidence of a more continuous assault is also hard to miss: beaches littered with street trash, food waste and other items regularly ferried through storm sewers and left behind by beachgoers.

As the Alliance works to educate beachgoers about the impacts of beach litter and stormwater runoff in the Great Lakes, both forms of pollution are in the spotlight. “We use the information we collect, so volunteers can feel good about solving a long-term problem,” says Jamie Cross, Alliance Adopt-a-Beach™ Manager. “You make an impact the day of the event, and the Alliance goes beyond that -- analyzing data to share with local officials and working with communities to fix their infrastructure.”

That infrastructure can be as simple as providing trash cans with lids at the beach, or addressing a stormwater outfall pipe that may be responsible for poor water quality readings. This September, adopters will hand out petitions asking Congress to maintain funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, a key federal loan program that helps communities finance sewer system improvements. A new Alliance study reported that in 2011 alone, 18.7 billion gallons of this foul cocktail was released into the lakes by the basin’s seven largest dischargers.

“We have solutions in the pipeline, but communities need funding support to fix their problems,” says Cross, noting Grand Rapids, Mich. achieved a significant reduction in CSO discharges and protected Great Lakes beaches using funds from the CWSRF to help finance the separation of storm and sanitary sewers there in the 1990s.

“Our volunteers are on the front lines dealing with the fallout from these outdated sewer systems,” she says. “Working to keep this sort of pollution out of the Great Lakes to begin with means less mess to clean up later -- and healthier lakes for all.”

To get involved in the September Adopt-a-Beach™ cleanup and register online, see www.greatlakesadopt.org. Note that dates and times for cleanups may vary depending on location.

For more information on the Alliance’s year-round Adopt-a-Beach™ Program, see www.greatlakes.org/adoptabeach. For more on Combined Sewer Overflows in the Great Lakes and the CWSRF, see our report at: www.greatlakes.org/CSOreport

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Formed in 1970, the Alliance for the Great Lakes is the oldest independent Great Lakes organization in North America. Our mission is to: conserve and restore the world's largest freshwater resource using policy, education and local efforts, ensuring a healthy Great Lakes and clean water for generations of people and wildlife. More about the Alliance for the Great Lakes is online at www.greatlakes.org.