

STATEMENT BY WALTER L. MCLEOD, PRESIDENT, CLEAN BEACHES COUNCIL, ON THE RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE GOALS AND IDEALS OF NATIONAL CLEAN BEACHES WEEK, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE HEARING CONDUCTED BY THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, AND OCEANS, JUNE 5, 2007.

I. INTRODUCTION

Madame Chair and Distinguished Members, the Clean Beaches Council (CBC) appreciates the opportunity to appear before this body today, at the beginning of Capital Hill Ocean Week and on World Environment Day. I am here to discuss a topic import to all Americans: the resolution by this Congress to support National Clean Beaches Week and the goals and ideals associated with promoting and preserving out beaches and coastal areas.

My name is Walter McLeod and I appear on behalf of the Clean Beaches Council, a not-for-profit organization that is successful in forging public-private partnerships that work to preserve the earth's coastal environment. The mission of the Council is to promote sustainability through public awareness and voluntary programs, while ensuring a legacy of clean beaches for all generations to come.

The Clean Beaches Council (CBC) has undertaken a national campaign to establish National Clean Beaches Week (NCBW) as an annual celebration. Clean Beaches Week, is held annually from June 29 to July 5, to focus public attention on the importance of beaches in American culture.

II. BACKGROUND

The United States coasts, where the land and rivers meet the sea and great waters, is a special, valuable and complex place. Coastal recreation, maritime commerce, tourism and fishing make the coast a vital part of the American way of life. Without question, we are a nation of beach lovers. Each year approximately 180 million of us make 2 billion visits to ocean, gulf and inland beaches. Today, more than half of the U.S. population lives within 50 miles of a coast.

Coastal recreation and tourism are significant sectors of the U.S. economy that depend heavily on good, sustainable environmental conditions to thrive. Consider the following statistics¹:

- U.S. beaches contributed approximately \$257 billion to the national economy.
- Each year approximately 180 million Americans make 2 billion visits to ocean, gulf, and inland beaches.
- Seventy-five percent (75%) of summer travelers plan to visit beaches.

¹ "The Economic Value of Beaches," presented by Dr. James Houston, USACE, at Sustainable Beaches Summit, Sandestin, FL, March 30, 2004.

- Coastal states receive about 85% of tourist-related revenues in the U.S.

Yet, the public is very discerning when it comes to selecting the beaches it prefers. A recent public survey conducted by National Geographic Traveler magazine and Yahoo! Travel that found, “cleanliness was the most important factor in picking which beach to go to.”²

Indeed, while progress has been made in recent years to protect this great natural resource, environmental conditions along the coast continue to deteriorate. Year after year our beaches become more polluted and eroded. Far too many coastal waters are not safe for recreational activity. Pollution, depletion of fish and other marine resources, habitat loss, erosion, and unsustainable development are threatening beaches nationwide.

National Clean Beaches Week was created to begin the healing of our endangered coasts. Founded in 2004, support for National Clean Beaches Week has grown by leaps and bounds. To date, more than fifty (50) coastal mayors and thirty (30) coastal governors have issued proclamations or resolutions celebrating National Clean Beaches Week. And here, on Capital Hill, nearly one-hundred (100) members of Congress have cosponsored House and Senate Resolutions for National Clean Beaches Week.

III. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Clean Beaches Council is seeking to make National Clean Beaches Week into the “Earth Day” for beaches. We envision National Clean Beaches Week as a weeklong celebration with people recognizing and embracing the benefits of beaches in their lives. We have developed four themes that highlight the importance of beaches to all Americans:

- **Environment:** Beaches provide essential habitats that we share with scores of marine and coastal species. These sensitive beach ecosystems, are also susceptible to degradation and alteration. Marine debris is particularly dangerous as it is ingested or traps more than 250 species of marine life while posing significant health risks to human activity. During National Clean Beaches Week, local organizations partner with CBC to host public service campaigns that promote beach cleanups, dune planting and stabilization, habitat protection, and litter prevention. The public will be strongly urged to “leave no trace” of litter, only footprints at the beach.
- **Dining:** Seafood is extremely rich in protein, vitamin, and mineral content and is medically proven to improve human health. The high concentration Omega-3 fatty acids alone are believed to prevent heart disease by breaking down cholesterol and are thought to lower the risk of cancer. For these reasons, the American Heart Association recommends that all Americans eat seafood at least twice a week. National Clean Beaches Week will encourage all Americans to

² The Associated Press, June 2003.

enjoy the benefits of eating seafood on trips to the beach.

- **Fitness:** Of the 180 million Americans that visit beaches each year, almost all participate in some form of recreation or leisure activity, whether it be boating, swimming, boarding (surf/boogie), fishing, or snorkeling. Such activities make beaches the most popular venue of the tourist industry, which contributes over \$740 billion to the US economy annually. Furthermore, beaches are perfect places for Americans to exercise enjoyably, helping to defuse the obesity crisis facing this country. During National Clean Beaches Week, organizers plan to partner with recreational and tourism associations to encourage beach activities that promote exercise and bring millions of visitors to America's coasts.
- **Travel:** Beaches are a drive-market in the United States. Each year Americans make 2 billion visits to ocean, gulf, and inland beaches. Of those trips, an estimated 85 percent occur by automobile. Highways accumulate pollutants such as zinc and copper dust from brake pads, small toxic particles from tires, and oil and grease. These pollutants, along with atmospheric deposition from fuels and biological pathogens, are collected in storm water and are often washed into the ocean. Organizers for National Clean Beaches Week plan to emphasize smarter ways to travel to and around the coast, including: carpooling, biking, and public transportation.

IV. RESULTS AND CLOSING REMARKS

The 2006 National Clean Beaches Week was truly a success and gave us a promising preview of what can be accomplished when we use this week to promote the public benefits of clean beaches. Nearly 50 coastal communities held official events across the country. Let me share just a sample of these with you now:

- **Milwaukee, WI** - July 5th Cleanups were held at four municipal beaches, hosted by Keep Greater Milwaukee Beautiful. Over 500 volunteers cleaned approximately 4 miles of coastline and collected over 43,500 pounds of trash and debris.
- **Palm Beach County, FL** - Keep Palm Beach County Beautiful and the Sand Sifters coordinated countywide cleanups on July 1st and 5th where thousands of pounds of trash were collected.
- **Huntington, NY** – Hosted a regional beach cleanup and seafood festival spread across several municipalities, coordinated by seafood businesses in partnership with local Boy Scout troops.
- **Dare County, NC** – Local officials held multiple countywide events throughout the week, including a beach cleanup, sandcastle contest, and horseshoe tournament.

- **Brevard County, FL** – On July 5th, Keep Brevard Beautiful hosted an "After Holiday" beach cleanup in Cape Canaveral and Cocoa Beach, Florida where over 130 volunteers removed approximately 4,000 pounds of litter from about 10 miles of beach.
- **Seaside, OR** - Oregon Parks and Recreation Association and the Oregon non-profit group SOLV hosted a pirate themed July 5th "Treasure the Beach Cleanup." Over a hundred people attended and participated in beach safety programs held during the course of the week.
- **Long Beach, California** hosted a July 5th "independence from litter" beach cleanup with over 200 volunteers of all ages. An eco-education rock band called "the Banana Slugs" provided fun-filled and educational lunch-time entertainment for the large group of school-aged young people who came to the beach to volunteer for a day-long clean up.
- **Brunswick, GA** - Keep Brunswick-Golden Isles Beautiful hosted a cleanup where 624 volunteers collected over 1,000 pounds of trash.

Yes, the evidence is emerging – from sea to shining sea. Given the opportunity to learn and contribute Americans are embracing clean beaches week and recognizing the importance of caring for and preserving our beaches and coastal areas for all generations to come. To expand these beneficial activities and the ethic of sustainability, the Clean Beaches Council urges Congress to take the initial steps necessary to support National Clean Beaches Week by passing House Resolution 186.

Respectfully submitted,

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