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June 28, 2014 12:01AM

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OUR OPINION: South Shore must protect its greatest natural resource

Say what you will about Duxbury Beach – and people have lots to say about the regular federally mandated closures due to the threatened piping plover population – but that beach is flawless.

The privately owned beach is strictly managed by the Duxbury Beach Reservation to great success. There's little to no litter. Dogs are seldom unleashed and when they are, officials quickly correct the owners. Rowdy parties are not tolerated and there are few incidents of public drinking. Again, when such circumstances arise, patrols out of the harbormaster's office quickly address the issue.

Of course this kind of vigilance is partially made possible through grants the Duxbury Beach Reservation makes to the town. But it's more than that. The citizens of Duxbury take pride in their shore and it shows.

Residents know that a large part of their town's value rests in its coastline. It helps improve real estate prices, tax revenue and quality of life. That's why so many volunteer to care for their beach. It's a community-wide effort and everybody bears the fruits of the collective labor.

So why do other coastal cities and towns allow their beaches to be treated with so little regard?

As we've reported over many years, Quincy's Wollaston Beach has long had its water and sand contaminated with fecal matter. It's hard to believe that six years and millions of dollars later after the state and city have attempted to improve it, pollution is still at crisis levels at the state-owned beach. Apparently, there's a lack of will on the part of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation and the City of Quincy to correct it. While there was an outcry from residents bemoaning the loss of what could be a magnificent gem in the heart of Quincy after our June 3 front page article, "Water – and the sand – still dangerous at Wollaston Beach," we've had no response from officials at DCR or from Quincy.

Readers report that conditions there go beyond fecal contamination and report widespread human generated litter, dog waste and open drug use. One woman, a resident of Wollaston Beach, said that the crowds that regularly congregate there now make her feel unsafe to walk alone. The State Police are the primary enforcers of the state-owned beach but the Quincy police can patrol as well. We encourage both to be more active in the area.

Residents can do their part by picking up after themselves – and their dogs – and reporting illegal behavior to police – both state and Quincy police. It's your beach, own it.

In Scituate, it appears as though after the Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator Patricia Vinchesi declared much of Humarock Beach private – a point that's widely contested and rightly so – the town has largely washed its hands of it. What was once a clean, well-patrolled beach is now regularly dotted with litter, unleashed dogs and beachgoers who can be seen openly drinking alcohol in public.

A different kind of issue threatens Cohasset. This week, a four-year-old boy playing at Cohasset's Sandy Beach found a needle and others have reportedly been discovered. While police say the source of the needles is yet to be determined, to the town's credit, it quickly posted a warning sign and trained lifeguards to search the beach each morning and trained them in safe disposal of the "sharps." Even more important, Cohasset police are actively involved in monitoring the situation.

The same is true in Weymouth where police encourage the public to call them when dirty hypodermic needles are found, very often on beaches. The police then track the calls so that they can beef up patrols in those areas. The police and Mayor Sue Kay are very open about the heroin epidemic plaguing the town and residents have cooperated to keep their beaches safer and cleaner. We commend both towns their efforts.

While we don't expect all of the South Shore's coastal communities to rise to the same level of vigilance that Duxbury exercises with its beach, we would encourage everyone to rally their community to more actively protect what is our region's greatest natural resource.

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