



DEP NEWS RELEASE

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DEP COMMISSIONER MARTIN LEADS VOLUNTEERS, STUDENTS IN BARNEGAT BAY BLITZ CLEANUP *ANNUAL EVENT PART OF CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION'S COMPREHENSIVE WATERSHED RESTORATION PLAN*

(15/P51) TRENTON – Thousands of volunteers, many of them schoolchildren, are joining Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Bob Martin today for the 6th Barnegat Bay Blitz, a day-long cleanup that draws attention to efforts to protect and enhance the bay and its watershed, **which** sprawls over much of Ocean County and part of Monmouth County.

The Blitz demonstrates the Christie Administration's continued commitment to protection and enhancement of Barnegat Bay and allows residents to directly participate in the Governor's comprehensive restoration plan for the bay, furthering region-wide appreciation of this natural asset.

“Governor Christie and I remain committed to the ecological protection, enhancement and science-based solutions needed to restore Barnegat Bay, a unique ecological treasure and important asset to our tourism economy,” said Commissioner Martin, who was joined by DEP management and staff, students and volunteers in picking up trash and debris from diverse locations throughout the bay's 660-square-mile watershed.

Today's cleanup is targeting a wide variety of areas, including wetlands, stream banks, storm water discharge points, schools, trails, docks, areas around bulkheads and the waters of the bay itself.

“The Barnegat Bay Blitz has grown to become a much-anticipated event in the 37 communities within the bay's watershed,” Commissioner Martin said. “This effort, which continued even in the wake of impacts from Superstorm Sandy, is increasing the public's understanding of the bay, its natural resources, its water quality, the ecological challenges it faces, and the course of action we need to follow to see it fully restored.”

“With its continuing commitment to the Barnegat Bay Blitz, Commissioner Martin and the DEP staff continue to grow the bay’s stewardship and the partnerships for its protection, and unequivocally demonstrate that the Barnegat Bay is everyone’s responsibility each and every day,” said Stan Hales, Director of the Barnegat Bay Partnership.

Commissioner Martin is scheduled to start his day in Loveladies, at the Long Beach Island Foundation, where he will be joined by students from Southern Regional Middle School for a marsh cleanup. He is then scheduled to attend the official blitz kickoff at Barnegat Lighthouse State Park, where he is to present the Rain Barrel Challenge Award to students from Jackson Township’s Switlik Elementary School.

In this competition, students apply their artistic talents to decorating rain barrels with a Barnegat Bay-themed message. The barrels are then used to capture rain that can be used in gardens rather than running off into streets and contributing to stormwater pollution.

The Commissioner is also scheduled to travel by boat to the Sedge Island Natural Resources Education Center to meet with researchers who are studying the Sedge Islands Marine Conservation Zone, established by the DEP as part of a multi-disciplinary effort to evaluate the benefit protected zones can have on natural resources such as eel grass, clams, crabs, wetlands and wildlife habitats.

There, he is scheduled to meet with various researchers conducting studies on the state of the bay’s health. He will also meet students from the Ocean County Vocational School’s Marine Academy of Technology and Environmental Science (MATES) to join in a marsh cleanup and to hear about the group’s efforts to protect diamondback terrapins, a unique marsh turtle.

Removal of trash and debris throughout the watershed, which covers all 33 municipalities in Ocean County and four municipalities in Monmouth County, is critical because these materials can otherwise ultimately enter the bay through stormwater discharges, degrading the ecological and scenic value of the bay.

Stormwater also carries other pollutants such as common lawn fertilizers, automotive fluids and silt that degrade wildlife habitat and water quality in the bay and its tributaries. Trash collected today is being turned over to local public works departments for proper disposal and in areas with extreme debris.

The DEP is working with academic institutions and stakeholders on a series of studies, the first-ever broad-based scientific examination of the bay. Study areas include nutrient loading and impacts on water quality, fish and shellfish health, marsh health, and the health of organisms that live in the sands and sediments under water and are critical indicators of ecological health.

“The good news is that we are finding the bay to be surprisingly resilient,” said Commissioner Martin. “The health of benthic organisms that live in bay sediments is very good, but we know we still have a lot of work ahead of us in reducing the flow of nutrients into the bay that cause algae problems and degrade water quality.”

The idea of a cleanup blitz grew from concern and interest by local groups and DEP staff who wanted to help implement the Governor's Comprehensive Action Plan.

"The blitz has become an integral event every year to achieving success with the bay's restoration," said Lynette Lurig, a DEP research scientist who helps organize the cleanup. "There is truly a great deal of untapped potential out there – people who are ready, willing and able to pitch in and help out."

Among the many participants in the day's activities were children from West Windsor Middle School, Switlik Elementary School, Long Beach Island Foundation, ReClam the Bay, the Barnegat Bay Partnership, the New Jersey Environmental Infrastructure Trust, New Jersey Clean Communities Council, Waste Management, Firestone and New Jersey Natural Gas.

Other sponsors include Wawa, Tow Boat USA, Scotts Miracle-Gro, Rowbear Consulting, Ocean Spray, United Water, ShopRite, PS&S Integrated Services, AmeriCorps, the U.S. Coast Guard, Ocean County, ReClam the Bay and the New Jersey Conserve Wildlife Foundation.

Since it was first launched in October 2011, Blitz participants have collected 2,387 cubic yards of trash and recyclables. Individual past Blitzes have attracted more than 5,500 participants.

For more information on the cleanup blitz, the Governor's Comprehensive Plan or how to help protect Barnegat Bay, visit: www.nj.gov/dep/barnegatbay/bbblitz.htm.

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