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FIRST BARNEGAT BAY BULKHEAD BLITZ TARGETS REMOVAL OF YOUNG SEA NETTLES IN BARNEGAT BAY

CLEANUP EFFORT SUPPORTS CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR IMPROVING ECOLOGICAL HEALTH OF BARNEGAT BAY

(15/P92) TRENTON – In its ongoing efforts to protect the ecological health of Barnegat Bay, the Department of Environmental Protection today launched a pilot project to demonstrate simple steps waterfront property owners can take to help reduce populations of sea nettles, a type of stinging and highly predatory jellyfish that can diminish recreational enjoyment of the bay and create ecological imbalance.



The Barnegat Bay Bulkhead Blitz effort, held in the Silverton section of Toms River, is designed to educate those with docks and bulkheads that helping to keep stinging sea nettles in check is as simple as periodically scrubbing or power-washing the speck-sized polyps that adhere themselves to hard surfaces. These polyps then spawn into buds, which are released into the water in the spring and grow to become sea nettles in the summer.

“Sea nettle populations can become very problematic, especially in areas where the flow of water is restricted, such as

lagoons,” said Dan Kennedy, DEP’s Assistant Commissioner for Water Resources Management. “Research conducted by Montclair University in partnership with the DEP shows that the need to control stinging sea nettles is becoming increasingly important – and that all property owners need to be part of the solution.”

The first-ever Bulkhead Blitz was conceived after the DEP reviewed the results of a three-year DEP-funded research study about the presence of sea nettles in Barnegat Bay as part of the Christie Administration's comprehensive action plan to address the bay's ecological health.

The \$283,000 study, conducted by Dr. Paul Bologna, Director of Marine Biology and Coastal Sciences at Montclair State University, determined that a higher density of sea nettles in the northern areas of the bay could expand southward, as well as into other New Jersey estuaries and coastal waters, potentially posing threats to other marine life. Currently, jellyfish are especially prevalent in Brick, Lavallette and Toms River.

Scrubbing the nettles off hard surfaces at this time of year prevents their full development for the next summer season and help curtail their spread to other parts of the bay.

“Worldwide, jellyfish are becoming more abundant and, in Barnegat Bay, the stinging sea nettle, although historically present, is becoming much more widespread,” said Thomas Belton, DEP Barnegat Bay Research coordinator. “Sea nettles are very tolerant of high nutrients, low dissolved oxygen, higher water temperatures and brackish waters, allowing them advantages over other aquatic animals. Preventative measures can be employed to assist in limiting available habitat for sea nettle settlement, which can help reduce their numbers.”

Lagoons are nutrient-rich and tucked-in waterways, meaning there is minimal tidal flow into and out of them, said Lynette Lurig, a DEP research scientist. Sea nettles, which are voracious eaters and thrive in nitrogen-rich waters, can be plentiful in these areas. Removing polyps now from bulkheads and floating docks in these areas is an important component to stemming next season's jellyfish population, Lurig said.

Property owners in lagoon communities are encouraged to remove floating docks during the winter or clean them using a non-wire scrub brush or by powerwashing manmade bulkheads and docks below the low tide line to remove sea nettles. Detergents or other cleansers are not necessary during the scrubbing process. While today's blitz occurred in Toms River, the DEP plans to eventually expand educational efforts to other areas of Barnegat Bay with high concentrations of polyps.

More information about the sea nettles research project, Dr. Bologna's findings and other work being done to study Barnegat Bay will be presented at a 2015 Barnegat Bay Research Forum on November 17.

The forum, sponsored by the DEP and the Barnegat Bay Partnership, is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Ocean County College, 1 College Drive, in Toms River. For more information about the Bulkhead Blitz program or the November research forum, please email Lynette Lurig at lynette.lurig@dep.nj.gov

To learn more about the Christie Administration's Comprehensive Action Plan to address the Ecological Decline of Barnegat Bay, please visit: www.nj.gov/dep/barnegatbay/

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