



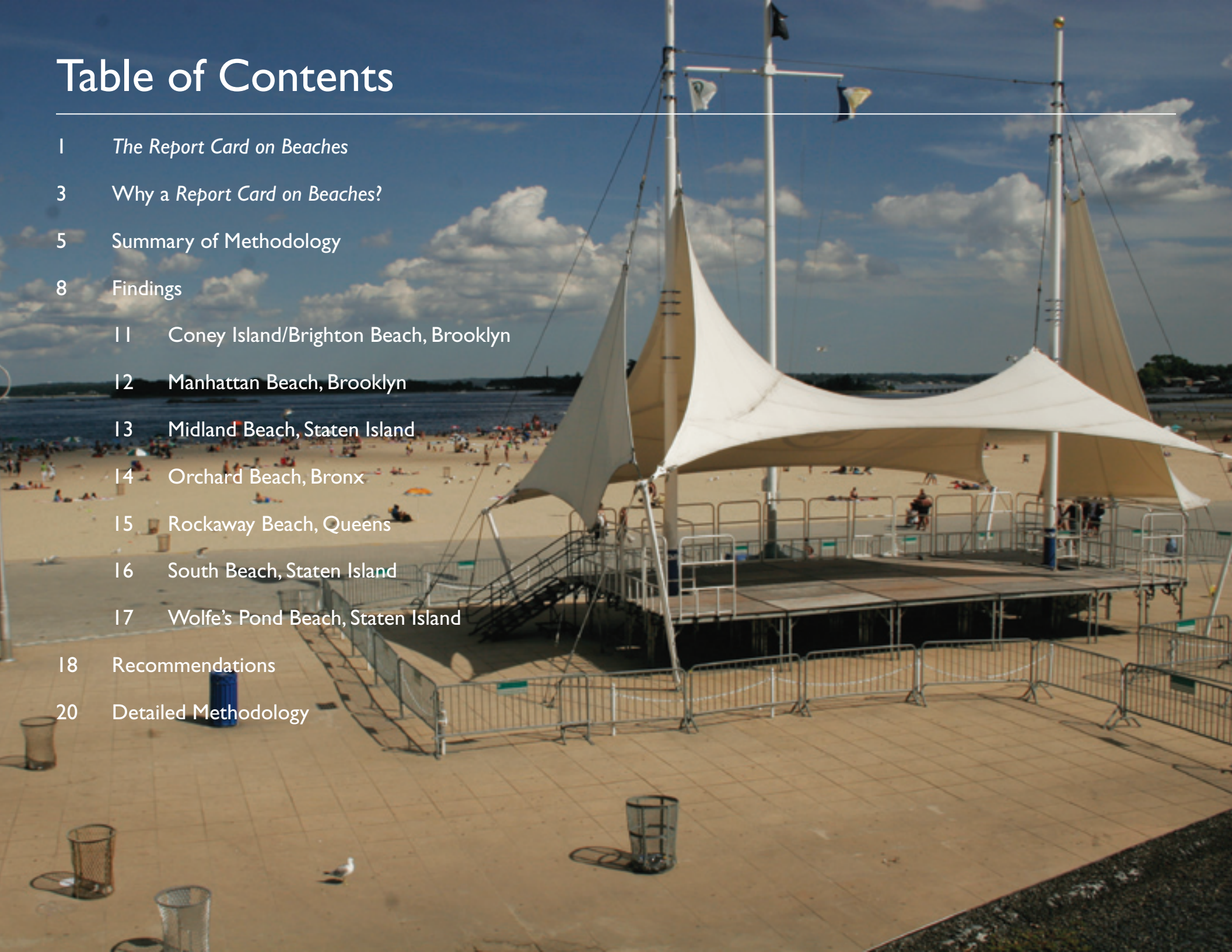
# The 2009 Report Card on Beaches

*An Independent Assessment of New York City's Public Beaches*

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# The Report Card on Beaches

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*The Report Card on Beaches*, a project of New Yorkers for Parks' award-winning *Report Card on Parks*, provides communities with quantitative performance data on the seven public beaches operated and managed by the City's Parks Department. In short, it tells New Yorkers how well beaches are maintained in four key service areas: Shorelines, Pathways, Bathrooms, and Drinking Fountains.

Located in four of the five boroughs, urban public beaches offer relief from the summer heat and provide unique recreational opportunities. *The Report Card on Beaches* is an effort to highlight these important facilities and ensure that New York City's 14 miles of beaches are open, clean, and safe.

In 2007, New Yorkers for Parks released its first *Report Card on Beaches*, designed to track trends in beach conditions, highlight successes, identify consistent challenges, and enhance the open space policy discussion. *The Report Card on Beaches* is the only independent, citywide evaluation of the maintenance of New York City's public beaches.

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## **The Report Card on Beaches has the following goals:**

**1** To provide city residents with an assessment of how each of the seven beaches is performing in comparison to one another.

This easily accessible online information helps communities advocate for improved services for their beaches.

**2** To provide an independent assessment of beach performance from year to year against defined benchmarks of service.

This creates accountability for providing these benchmarks as well as improvements for every beach.

**3** To spark debate among communities, public agencies, and advocates about how best to maintain and improve public beaches in need.

*The Report Card on Beaches* provides a valuable service by identifying those beaches in greatest need, but more importantly, it indicates how we might begin to address that need.

**4** To highlight high- and low-performing beaches, as well as systemic issues, in order to identify and implement best practices citywide.

## **The Report Card on Beaches versus the Parks Inspection Program**

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) evaluates its properties using a nationally recognized comprehensive program, the Parks Inspection Program (PIP). While PIP rates sites from a park management perspective, the survey used in *The Report Card* was designed from the park user's perspective. By listing ratings and feature performance by the beach, *New Yorkers for Parks' Report Card* is intended to provide a comparative analysis of beach conditions as an easy-to-use tool for communities.

In addition, the two inspection programs evaluate park properties in different ways. For example, *The Report Card* evaluates and scores Bathrooms and Drinking Fountains. Although the Parks Department tracks these features through PIP, they do not influence a beach's rating.

Transparency of DPR inspection data has improved since the publication of the first *Report Card on Beaches*. The Parks Department has made PIP ratings much more accessible and easy to use on its website.

New Yorkers can also access beach data through the NYC Department of Health's website. Every summer, the Health Department inspects public beach facilities to ensure that they comply with the health code. They evaluate whether the appropriate number of lifeguards is present and if liquid soap and paper towels are available in beach bathrooms. *New Yorkers for Parks* incorporated several of these standards into our inspection of beaches. The results of Health Department inspections are posted on its website throughout the summer, as well as in an annual report in the fall. The agency also monitors water quality and provides this data online, ensuring that community members are educated about public safety.

While the transparency of data has improved, *New Yorkers for Parks'* community outreach efforts still show that many communities throughout the city are frustrated with the conditions of public beaches. *New Yorkers* rely on beaches for outdoor activities not available elsewhere, and the lack of maintenance and staffing can result in closed shorelines, broken drinking fountains, and littered boardwalks. We must continue to push for sufficient funding and lifeguards as well as innovative maintenance strategies so that New York City's public beaches can reach their full potential.



# Why a Report Card on Beaches?

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Waterfront access in New York City is precious, and the 14 miles of public beaches offer some of the few points along the shoreline where any New Yorker can jump in the water and swim. Beaches also afford opportunities for boating, birding, strolling, surfing, and relaxing. The Parks Department is responsible for ensuring that beaches are clean, safe, and available for public use. *The Report Card on Beaches* highlights and monitors this important component of the Parks Department's inventory, and the results show that our beaches need additional care.

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## Quotes from local communities, taken from the FY 2009 Community District Needs Statements<sup>1</sup>:

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### **Brooklyn Community Board 13, Coney Island/ Brighton Beach**

"Perhaps the most difficult aspect, as of now, is the state of the magnificent Boardwalk, which, as has been explained, has undergone extreme deterioration due to a great many causes... Holes in the wood, along with protruding nails and rotted wood must be corrected as soon as possible lest areas be forced to be roped off. The safety of residents and visitors is of the highest priority."

### **Queens Community Board 14, Rockaway Beach**

"Our over 4 miles of Boardwalk is in desperate need of repair. Many sections are in poor condition and are a hazard. The Parks Department should consider replacing worn out wood with a combination of materials such as concrete, brick and plastic as well as wood. Finally, something must be done to end the lifeguard shortage. Part-time lifeguards should be hired to help out with the shortage. All sections of Rockaway's beaches must remain open. Also, borough-based training and testing should be instituted."

### **Staten Island Community Board 3, Wolfe's Pond Beach**

"The beaches on the south shore of Staten Island need to be cleaned. We spend millions of dollars improving Conference House Park, Lemon Creek Park and Wolfe Pond Park, yet the waterfront is terribly neglected."

<sup>1</sup> Published annually by the NYC Office of Management and Budget and the NYC Department of City Planning.



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# Summary of Methodology

This report is intended to build on the New Yorkers for Parks' *Report Card on Parks* survey implemented in 2003. Below is a summary of the methodology constructed for *The Report Card on Beaches*; a full discussion of the methodology can be found in the "Detailed Methodology" section of this report.

## Survey Population

In constructing *The Report Card on Beaches*, New Yorkers for Parks focused on the seven DPR "beach" properties. All seven beaches included in the Parks Department's Property List were evaluated in the survey. Because of the large size of the beaches, an evaluation of the total acreage of every property was not feasible due to New Yorkers for Parks' limited staff resources. To address this challenge, New Yorkers for Parks used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to divide each beach property into transects 50 yards wide, which corresponds with the Health Department's requirements for life-guard placement along the beach. The project statistician randomly selected 10% of the transects at each beach; the Shorelines and Pathways included in these transects were surveyed. Every Drinking Fountain and Bathroom at the seven beaches was evaluated, whether or not it fell within a randomly selected transect.

## Grading the Beaches

The survey design team defined four Major Service Areas (MSAs) based on those developed for *The Report Card on Parks*. For the creation of *The Report Card on Parks*, a focus group of park experts and community leaders was convened to help define eight MSAs, along with a scale of weights to reflect the relative importance of different indicators. MSAs were weighted on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the most important to a park user's experience). In order to ensure comparison of beach survey results to park survey results, the same MSA weights were used in *The Report Card on Beaches*, with the addition of a weight of "5" for the Shoreline form. A Beaches Advisory Group<sup>2</sup> was convened to assist in the development of the Shoreline form.

The four MSAs were evaluated on maintenance, cleanliness, safety, and structural integrity. Thus, for each of the seven beaches included in the survey, every applicable MSA was assigned a numerical score. A beach's overall numerical score was calculated as a weighted average of these service area scores. Grades for *The 2007 Report Card on Beaches* ranged from 36% to 73%. New Yorkers for Parks translated these scores into

three relative categories: Satisfactory (70% to 79%), Challenged (60% to 69%), and Unsatisfactory (59% and below). The scores for 2009 ranged from 0% to 77%.

Each beach was assigned a numerical score from 0 to 100 in each applicable MSA, based on the proportion of features in those service areas found to be in acceptable condition. This was done using an independently developed survey mechanism that is based on the DPR's Parks Inspection Program. (Those beaches lacking one or more of the MSAs were not penalized.) Letter grades corresponding to these numerical scores comprise the final MSA ratings in accordance with the following conversion table:

| Raw Numerical Grade | Letter Grade |
|---------------------|--------------|
| 97–100              | A+           |
| 93–96               | A            |
| 90–92               | A-           |
| 87–89               | B+           |
| 83–86               | B            |
| 80–82               | B-           |
| 77–79               | C+           |
| 73–76               | C            |
| 70–72               | C-           |
| 60–69               | D            |
| 59 and below        | F            |

Score/Grade associations developed by a focus group of park managers and open space experts for *The Report Card on Parks*.

The survey is designed to fairly rate all features that are or should be available to users visiting a particular beach. By way of example, if a beach has a bathroom facility that is locked or closed without explanation, it will receive a "0" for the Bathroom rating. However, if the beach does not have a bathroom, it will not receive a score for Bathrooms, so a beach will never be penalized for not having a particular Major Service Area. Although New Yorkers for Parks tracked whether a lifeguard was present at a given Shoreline transect, this measure did not impact the beach's grade.

<sup>2</sup> The Beaches Advisory Group was made up of Joel Bansleben, executive director; Coastal Marine Resource Center; Jeanne Dupont, Rockaway Waterfront Alliance; Sean Ghio, director of Project and Performance Management, Connecticut United Way; Don Riepe, Jamaica Bay Guardian.

## Survey Mechanism

To determine a beach's rating, New Yorkers for Parks uses a comprehensive survey mechanism based on that which was developed specifically for *The Report Card on Parks*. *The Report Card on Beaches* survey mechanism includes Drinking Fountain, Bathroom, and Pathway forms that are identical to *The 2007 Report Card on Parks* feature forms; in addition, the survey mechanism includes a Shoreline form developed specifically for this project. Using handheld computers, surveyors complete a survey form for sections of Pathway and Shoreline found within the selected transect at a beach. In addition, every Drinking Fountain and Bathroom along the beach or boardwalk is surveyed, whether or not it is located within the transect. For example, if there are 10 drinking fountains on a beach, a surveyor completes 10 Drinking Fountain forms. Surveyors answer a series of questions on the maintenance, cleanliness, safety, and structural integrity of a feature.

## Survey Work

Finally, New Yorkers for Parks staff conducted the survey Tuesdays through Fridays in August 2008, a high-use season for public beaches. Teams of trained surveyors used measuring wheels and GIS maps to locate and measure each randomly selected 50-yard transect. Handheld computers and digital cameras were used to complete the evaluations. For each MSA evaluated, digital photographs were taken; both survey forms and photos are stored as documentation of survey efforts and results.

## Major Service Areas

## Description

## Weight

### Bathrooms



This MSA evaluates each discrete bathroom or comfort station along the beach or boardwalk.

4

### Drinking Fountains



This MSA evaluates each discrete drinking fountain along the beach or boardwalk.

3

### Pathways



This MSA evaluates each type of walkway or boardwalk at the beach, including wood, asphalt, turf, or concrete.

3

### Shoreline



This MSA evaluates the sand shoreline at the beach, starting from where the water meets the sand.

5



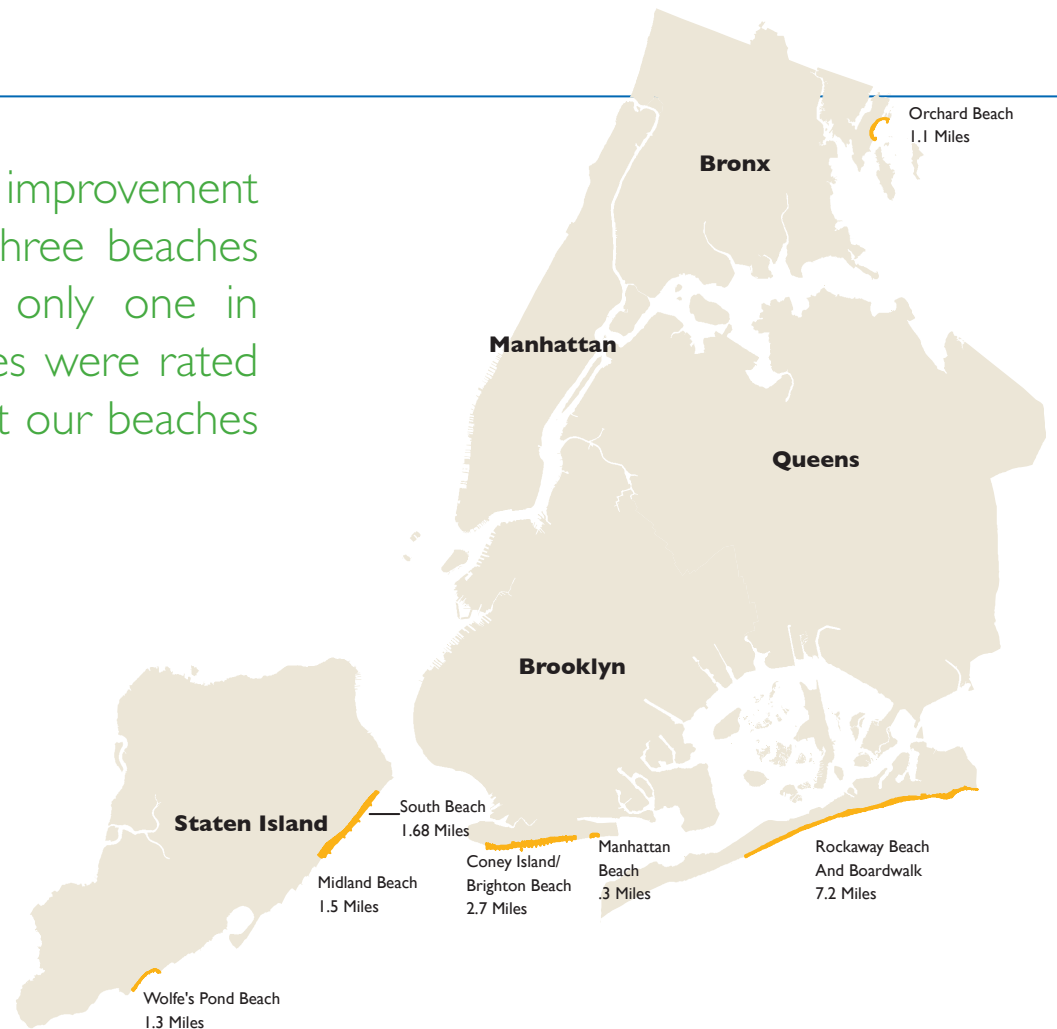


# Findings

Overall, the city's beaches have shown some improvement since *The 2007 Report Card on Beaches*. Three beaches were rated "Satisfactory" this year, versus only one in 2007. However, four out of seven properties were rated "Challenged" or "Unsatisfactory," showing that our beaches still lack sufficient care.

Like 2007, no beach earned a score above "Satisfactory." In addition, the performance of Wolfe's Pond Beach, which slipped in score this year, shows that maintenance needs are still significant in some parts of the system.

The features that improved — Bathrooms and Drinking Fountains — experienced significant percentage increases, while those that declined — Pathways and Shorelines — saw only a slight decrease in score. The improvements were more significant than the deteriorations.



## Beach Ratings:

| Beach Name                         | Borough       | 2007 Ranking   | 2009 Ranking   | Council District | Community Board | Mileage |
|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|---------|
| <b>Coney Island/Brighton Beach</b> | Brooklyn      | UNSATISFACTORY | SATISFACTORY   | 47, 48           | 13              | 2.7     |
| <b>Manhattan Beach</b>             | Brooklyn      | CHALLENGED     | SATISFACTORY   | 48               | 15              | 0.3     |
| <b>Midland Beach</b>               | Staten Island | SATISFACTORY   | CHALLENGED     | 50               | 2               | 1.5     |
| <b>Orchard Beach</b>               | Bronx         | CHALLENGED     | CHALLENGED     | 13               | 10              | 1.1     |
| <b>Rockaway Beach</b>              | Queens        | CHALLENGED     | SATISFACTORY   | 31, 32           | 14              | 7.2     |
| <b>South Beach</b>                 | Staten Island | CHALLENGED     | UNSATISFACTORY | 50               | 2               | 1.7     |
| <b>Wolfe's Pond Beach</b>          | Staten Island | UNSATISFACTORY | UNSATISFACTORY | 51               | 3               | 1.3     |

## Feature Ratings

**Shorelines continue to score poorly, as in 2007.** Broken glass and litter are too common, as are unsafe entrances to the beach and unprotected sand dunes. The Parks Department faces a significant challenge in ensuring that the sand remains clean and free of debris, and strategies must continue to be explored. As in 2007, surveyors found that the Parks Department does a good job of maintaining areas that are staffed by lifeguards and available for public swimming; however, unsupervised areas should be equally well-maintained for pedestrians and others to enjoy.

**Drinking fountains have improved significantly since 2007.** While the feature still performs poorly, many more fountains were in working order this year, increasing the score for this feature by 62%.

**Bathrooms also improved this year.** This improvement can be attributed to more bathrooms being open and available to the public. Challenges that remain include damaged equipment, such as toilets, sinks, and stall doors. Litter and broken glass are infrequently found in beach bathrooms.

**Pathway scores remained steady from 2007.** Cracks and holes in the boardwalks and paved pathways were the most commonly noted negative condition, but this feature remains one of the highest-scoring for beaches.

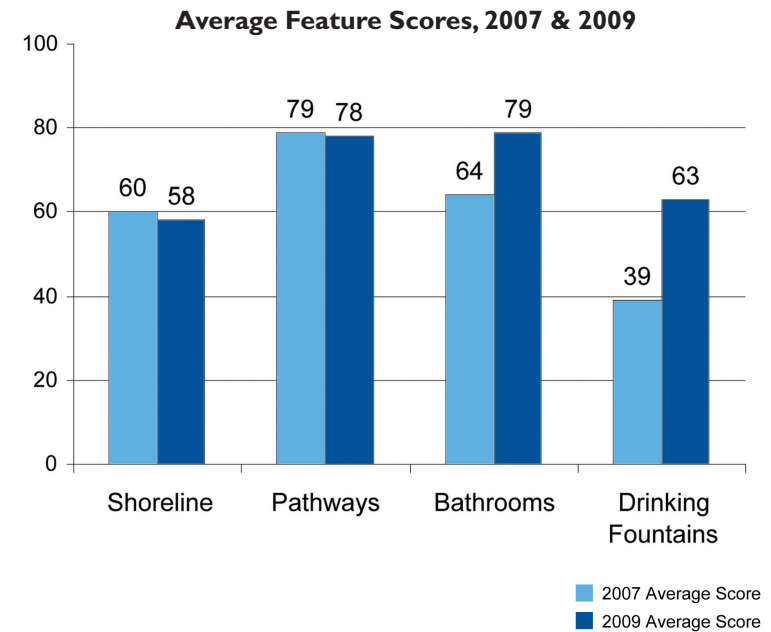
## Beach Ratings

While **Midland Beach**, Staten Island, was the only beach to score “Satisfactory” in 2007, this year three beaches earned that rating: **Coney Island/Brighton Beach, Rockaway Beach, and Manhattan Beach**. Both of Brooklyn’s beaches rated “Satisfactory.”

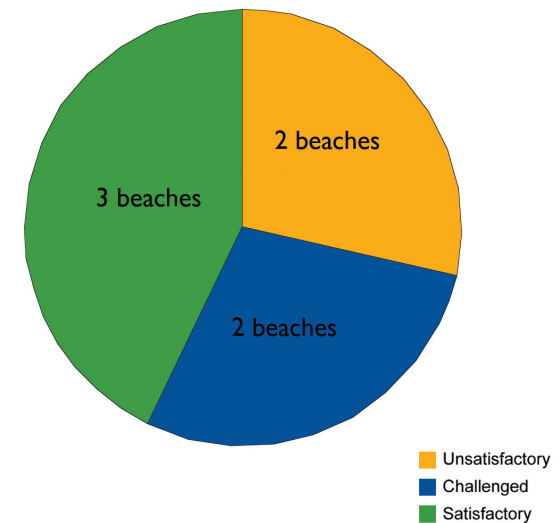
In 2007, two beaches received the lowest rating, “Unsatisfactory”: **Coney Island/Brighton Beach and Wolfe’s Pond Beach**. Again in 2009, two beaches received this rating. Both are in Staten Island: **South Beach and Wolfe’s Pond Beach**.

The highest rated beach in *The 2009 Report Card on Beaches* is **Rockaway Beach**, the only beach in Queens and the largest municipal beach. The lowest performing site is **Wolfe’s Pond Beach** in Staten Island, which was also the lowest-scoring site in 2007 and is one of the smaller city beaches.

**Orchard Beach** is the only beach that received the same rating (“Challenged”) in 2007 and 2009.



## Breakdown of 2009 Beach Ratings





Findings: By the Beach

# Coney Island/Brighton Beach – Satisfactory

Coney Island/Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, showed the greatest improvement out of the seven city beaches between our last survey for *The 2007 Report Card on Beaches* and this year's evaluation. While the beach received an "Unsatisfactory" rating in 2007, this year it earned "Satisfactory."

## Coney Island/Brighton Beach

2009 Ranking **SATISFACTORY**  
2007 Ranking **UNSATISFACTORY**

### Successes

The greatest improvement at Coney Island/Brighton Beach was in the performance of Drinking Fountains. In 2007, too many fountains could not be turned off or turned on or were clogged with debris. These conditions had been remedied when our surveyors evaluated the beach in 2009. Identified challenges were not as severe; the most common unacceptable conditions were needed maintenance, such as sloppy paint jobs, and graffiti or other vandalism. Far fewer Drinking Fountains had leaks or insufficient pressure during the most recent survey. Generally, fountains were free of litter and glass, and the structures and spigots were intact.

The Shoreline rating also improved quite dramatically between *The 2007 Report Card on Beaches* and last year's evaluation. Although the performance was still mediocre in 2009, litter was a less severe problem, affecting only 10% of surveyed areas.



| Feature            | 2007 Score (Grade) | 2009 Score (Grade) |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Shoreline          | 39% (F)            | 70% (C-)           |
| Pathways           | 81% (B-)           | 73% (C)            |
| Bathrooms          | 70% (C-)           | 76% (C)            |
| Drinking Fountains | 32% (F)            | 86% (B)            |

Coney Island's Bathrooms were more frequently open and available for public use in the 2009 report than they were in our *2007 Report Card on Beaches*. This resulted in an increased score for this feature.

### Challenges

Although the Shoreline improved, surveyors still found broken glass in 50% of the surveyed areas. Broken glass is dangerous to beach-goers who frequently walk around without shoes.

The Pathway score declined this year, reflecting a need for maintenance. Missing, raised or sunken sections were the most common problem, with only 30% of Pathways rated "acceptable" on this measure. Roots and weeds as well as areas with cracks or holes were also commonly identified on the boardwalk.

While the Bathroom score improved, sufficient maintenance was still a challenge. In particular, lack of soap, paper towels, and toilet paper were too common, affecting at least half of surveyed Bathrooms. Sloppy, unfinished or needed maintenance repairs affected nearly half of the sites.



Entrances to the beach should be safe and clearly marked. This railing buried in sand is a hazard.



Drinking Fountains at Coney Island improved dramatically since *The 2007 Report Card on Beaches*.



The Coney Island/Brighton Beach boardwalk declined in score this year, exhibiting more damage than in the past.

# Manhattan Beach – Satisfactory

Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn, showed notable improvement between inspections for *The 2007 Report Card on Beaches* and this year's evaluations. The beach's rating moved up one category, from "Challenged" to "Satisfactory," primarily due to the improvement in the conditions of Drinking Fountains on the beach.

## Manhattan Beach

2009 Ranking **SATISFACTORY**  
2007 Ranking **CHALLENGED**

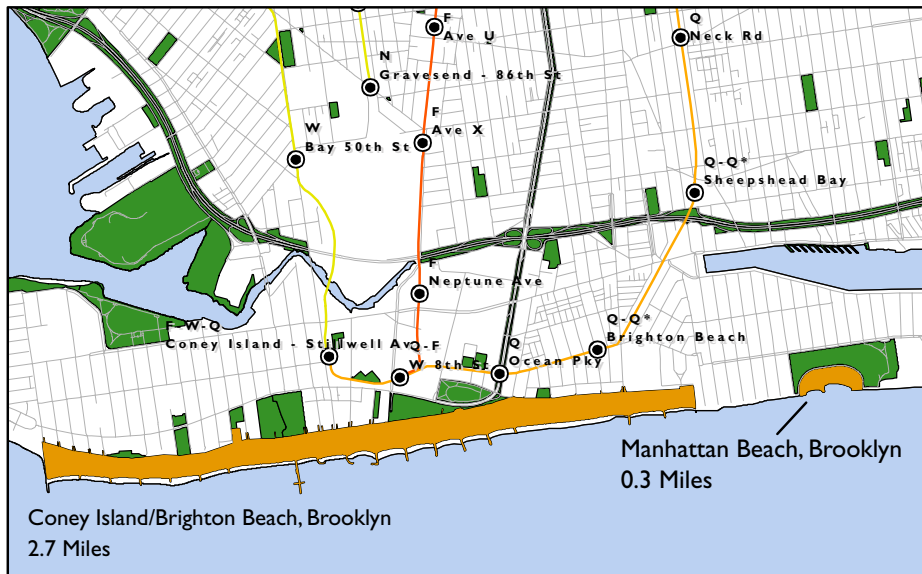
| Feature            | 2007 Score (Grade) | 2009 Score (Grade) |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Shoreline          | 75% (C)            | 81% (B-)           |
| Pathways           | 84% (B)            | 84% (B)            |
| Bathrooms          | 75% (C)            | 79% (C+)           |
| Drinking Fountains | 11% (F)            | 56% (F)            |

### Successes

Drinking Fountains showed a significant improvement in score between 2007 and 2009. In our 2007 report, we noted that 25% of fountains did not provide enough pressure to drink, but in last year's survey, nearly all fountains had sufficient pressure. Unfortunately, the feature still received a failing rating due to debris in the basin, affecting 30% of fountains, as well as needed maintenance.

Pathways were the highest performing feature at Manhattan Beach, with no broken glass, litter, weeds or uneven sections.

Bathrooms and Shorelines both showed slight improvements in score since 2007. The beach was fully staffed with lifeguards, and trash cans were emptied.



Bathrooms were open and available for public use and were generally clean, had soap, and the stall doors locked.

### Challenges

With an overall rating of "Satisfactory," Manhattan Beach out-performed most other city beaches. However, the Parks Department still faces challenges in maintaining Drinking Fountains at the beach. Even with an improved score, the feature still failed.

While the Bathrooms improved since 2007, damaged equipment, including sinks, stall doors, and toilets were too common.

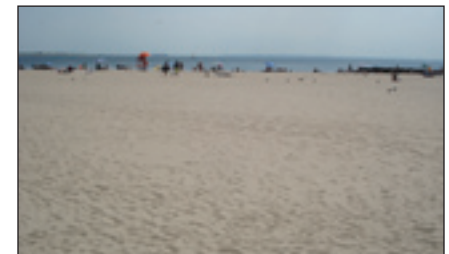
Although the trash cans had been emptied along the Shoreline, broken glass and litter affected 50% of surveyed areas.



While Drinking Fountains improved this year, some issues were still noted, including debris in the basin and needed maintenance.



Aside from small cracks, the concrete Pathway at Manhattan Beach is in good condition.



The expansive Shoreline at Manhattan Beach improved in performance this year.

# Midland Beach – Challenged

Midland Beach, Staten Island, declined in score between inspections for *The 2007 Report Card on Beaches* and this year's evaluations. The beach's rating moved down one category, from "Satisfactory" to "Challenged," due to the unacceptable performance of Bathrooms and Drinking Fountains, and the decline in performance of Shorelines.

## Midland Beach

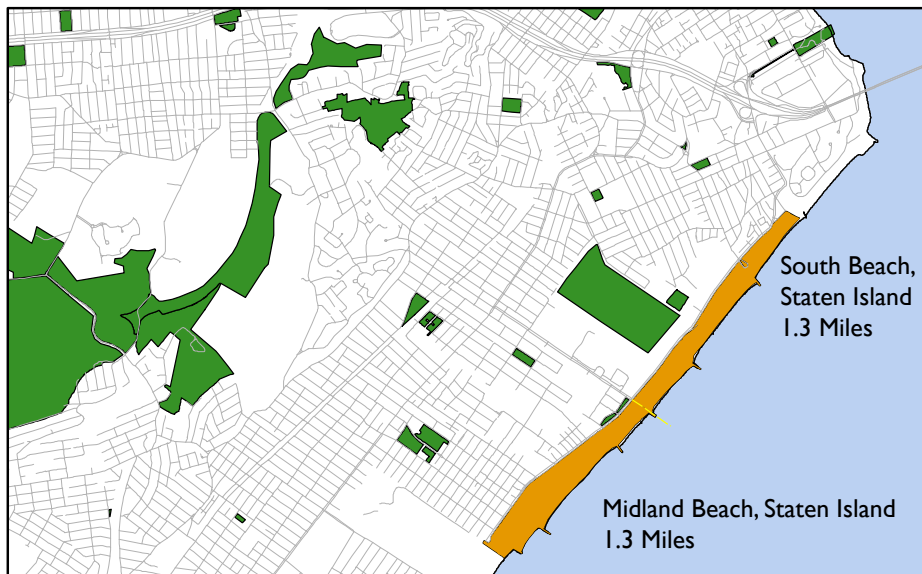
2009 Ranking **CHALLENGED**  
 2007 Ranking **SATISFACTORY**

### Successes

Pathway performance remained steady between 2007 and 2009 inspections. The boardwalk at Midland Beach was free of broken glass and litter, and trash cans along the boardwalk were emptied; however, one area contained damaged benches, and cracks in the pavement were noted.

### Challenges

Bathroom, Shoreline, and Drinking Fountain scores all declined since 2007. Bathrooms suffered from damaged equipment, including toilets, walls and ceilings, windows, and stall door locks. Infrastructure investments are needed to bring these facilities up to speed. Maintenance attention is needed to improve dirty conditions, which were also a problem in Bathrooms.



| Feature            | 2007 Score (Grade) | 2009 Score (Grade) |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Shoreline          | 82% (B-)           | 73% (C)            |
| Pathways           | 77% (C)            | 76% (C)            |
| Bathrooms          | 65% (D)            | 58% (F)            |
| Drinking Fountains | 65% (D)            | 31% (F)            |

Shorelines declined from above-average to average performance. Primary issues found by surveyors were unsafe or unmarked entrances to the beach and litter and broken glass, which affected nearly half of sites.

Drinking Fountains declined more at Midland Beach than at other beaches citywide. Almost 15% of fountains could not be turned on at all, and others contained debris in the basin or leaked. Cracks in the structure and sloppy paint jobs were too common, affecting a third of fountains.



Damaged and missing equipment in Midland Beach's Bathrooms resulted in a low score for this feature.



Beach Drinking Fountains are a challenge for the Parks Department to maintain.



Litter and broken glass affected nearly half of surveyed Shorelines at Midland Beach.

# Orchard Beach – Challenged

Orchard Beach, Bronx, remained steady with a rating of “Challenged” in 2007 and 2009. Performance within this rating improved slightly, with Drinking Fountains improving markedly, Shoreline improving slightly, and Pathways and Bathrooms declining in inspection ratings.

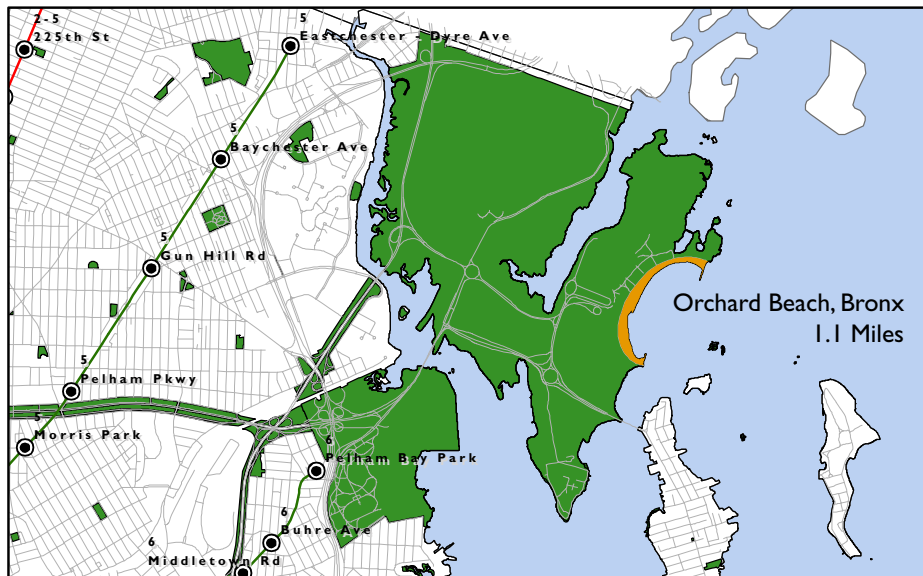
## Orchard Beach

2009 Ranking **CHALLENGED**  
2007 Ranking **CHALLENGED**

### Successes

Pathways and Bathrooms were the highest scoring features at Orchard Beach, although both dipped in score since 2007. Bathrooms generally had working equipment, empty trash cans, and were free of broken glass and litter. Pathways were free of graffiti and benches were in good condition, offering a safe and pleasant place to sit.

The Shoreline at Orchard Beach improved 14 percentage points between 2007 and 2009, but still received a failing score in both evaluations. The improvement can largely be attributed to the few unfinished or needed maintenance repairs along the shoreline; for example, fencing and entranceways showed a need for repair in 2007, which was less frequently noted in 2009.



| Feature            | 2007 Score (Grade) | 2009 Score (Grade) |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Shoreline          | 34% (F)            | 48% (F)            |
| Pathways           | 90% (A-)           | 83% (B)            |
| Bathrooms          | 91% (A-)           | 86% (B)            |
| Drinking Fountains | 45% (F)            | 60% (D)            |

### Challenges

Although the Shoreline score improved overall, litter and glass are still a major challenge. Litter affected every evaluated section of the shoreline.

Drinking Fountains at Orchard Beach improved from the last inspection two years ago but are still unacceptable. Standing water and debris in the basin were common challenges as were damaged structures. Eight percent of fountains could not be turned on, and many needed maintenance.

The Pathways along the beach have deteriorated since *The 2007 Report Card on Beaches*. In particular, cracks and holes affected 75% of the evaluated area, and missing or raised sections were found in half of surveyed Pathways. Litter was also an issue.

Bathrooms declined slightly in score. The most common problems were stall doors that did not lock, damaged windows, and lack of soap or towels.



Bathrooms at Orchard Beach were generally clean, unlocked and open to the public, resulting in an above average rating.



The score for this Drinking Fountain at Orchard Beach was impacted by a loose panel and graffiti.



The wall bordering the shoreline at Orchard Beach is deteriorating and unsafe.



# Rockaway Beach – Satisfactory

Rockaway Beach improved one category since the 2007 beach evaluations, rising from “Challenged” to “Satisfactory.” Although several challenges were noted, the beach was the highest performing in the city out of the seven beaches inspected. Drinking Fountains and Bathrooms improved significantly, while Shoreline and Pathway scores stayed steady.

## Rockaway Beach

2009 Ranking **SATISFACTORY**  
2007 Ranking **CHALLENGED**

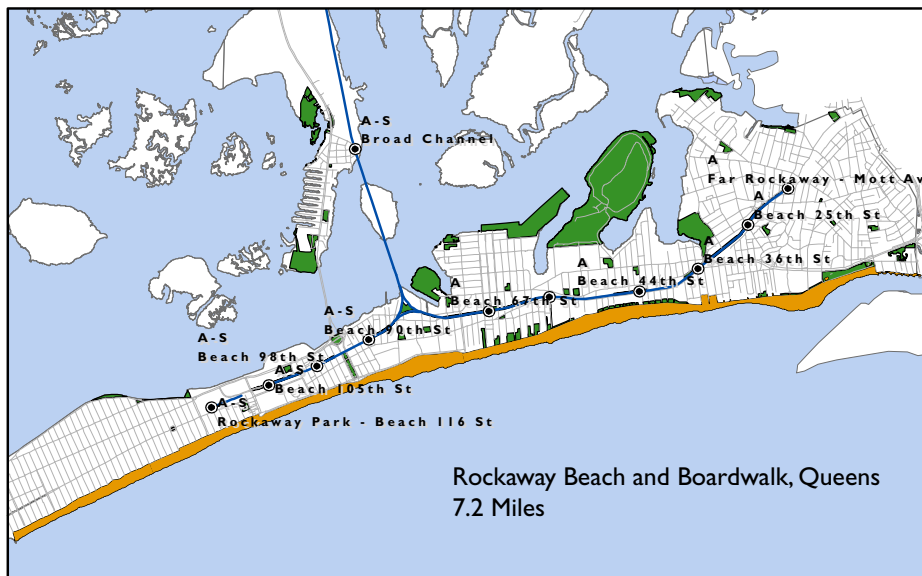
| Feature            | 2007 Score (Grade) | 2009 Score (Grade) |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Shoreline          | 70% (C-)           | 70% (C-)           |
| Pathways           | 75% (C)            | 76% (C)            |
| Bathrooms          | 45% (F)            | 85% (B)            |
| Drinking Fountains | 31% (F)            | 77% (C+)           |

### Successes

Bathrooms improved significantly from failing in 2007 to above-average performance in 2009. All Bathrooms were open and available for public use, unlike in 2007.

Rockaway Beach’s Drinking Fountains improved dramatically since their inspection for *The 2007 Report Card on Beaches*. All fountains could be turned on and off, a great improvement. They performed better than the average score for Drinking Fountains at city beaches, which was 63% (D.)

Pathways at Rockaway Beach showed a steady performance of 76%, with very little litter, broken glass, or damaged benches along the boardwalk.



While nearly 25% of surveyed transects had no lifeguard in 2007, this year that percentage was closer to 15%, a notable improvement.

### Challenges

The Shoreline at Rockaway Beach maintained a mediocre score identical to 2007. Sand dunes were not well protected, the beach was impacted by litter (25%) and broken glass (20%), and not all entrances were safe and clearly marked. Litter particularly seemed to collect along the perimeter of the boardwalk.

On the Pathways, surveyors found cracks and holes, weeds growing through the boardwalk, and uneven or missing sections.

The most commonly identified challenges in Bathrooms at Rockaway Beach were damaged sinks, toilets, and floors and walls. General dirty conditions were also an issue, affecting more than 25% of beach Bathrooms.



Although the Pathways at the beach received an average score, conditions are disparate, with some areas of the boardwalk in excellent condition and some in need of maintenance.



The condition of Drinking Fountains have improved dramatically at Rockaway Beach since *The 2007 Report Card on Beaches*.



Bathrooms at Rockaway Beach were open and accessible to the public this year, unlike during *The 2007 Report Card on Beaches*.

# South Beach – *Unsatisfactory*

South Beach, Staten Island is a beach of extreme performance. Its rating dipped one level since 2007, and the feature scores have diverged, with high-performing features improving and low-performing features declining. The beach is ranked sixth out of the seven city beaches.

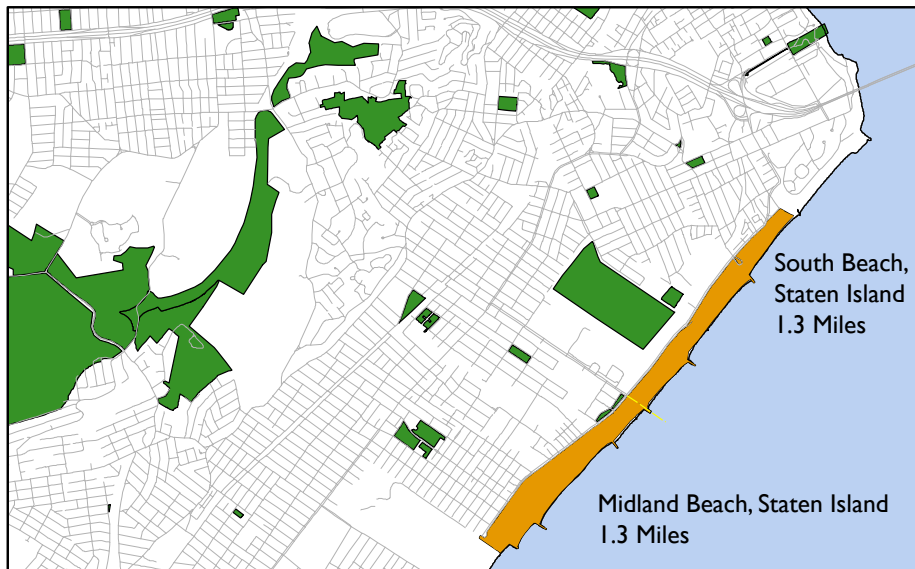
## South Beach

2009 Ranking **UNSATISFACTORY**  
 2007 Ranking **CHALLENGED**

### Successes

Pathways and Bathrooms, both of which performed very well in 2007, improved in 2009. At South Beach, these two features performed higher than any other city beach. Following recent capital improvements, Pathways were in excellent condition with no loose boards, cracks or weeds growing through. The boardwalk was free of litter and broken glass, offering a safe path for walking and biking.

Bathrooms, which were also recently renovated, performed extremely well, with all Bathrooms open and available to the public. All equipment was working and free of damage, such as toilets, stall locks, sinks, walls and ceilings. Safe, clean, and accessible public restrooms are extremely valuable to beach visitors.



| Feature            | 2007 Score (Grade) | 2009 Score (Grade) |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Shoreline          | 36% (F)            | 8% (F)             |
| Pathways           | 90% (A-)           | 94% (A)            |
| Bathrooms          | 91% (A-)           | 94% (A)            |
| Drinking Fountains | 50% (F)            | 50% (F)            |

### Challenges

The Shoreline at South Beach performed very poorly. Too often there was no lifeguard on duty and no signage stating that fact, which endangers beach goers. Litter affected half of the Shoreline, and broken glass was found on 75% of the surveyed area.

Drinking Fountains received an identical score to their 2007 score. The primary issue noted was significant leaking or fountains that could not be turned off.



This Shoreline area of South Beach has no lifeguard and is littered with debris, affecting its performance.



This Drinking Fountain's score was impacted by a steady leak. The fountain could not be turned off.



The recently renovated bathroom at South Beach is in very good condition, free of litter and containing working equipment.

# Wolfe's Pond Beach – *Unsatisfactory*

Similar to 2007, Wolfe's Pond Beach received a rating of "Unsatisfactory" on the 2009 Report Card on Beaches. It was ranked last of the seven city beaches.

## Wolfe's Pond Beach

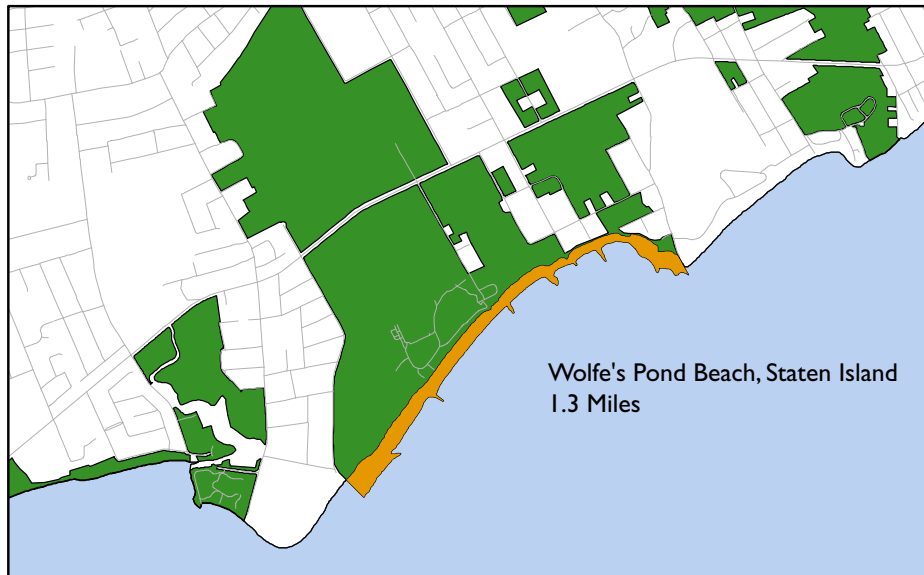
2009 Ranking **UNSATISFACTORY**  
2007 Ranking **UNSATISFACTORY**

### Challenges

Unfortunately, the Shoreline feature at Wolfe's Pond Beach received a failing score again this year. Several surveyed areas were impacted by litter as well as large debris that had been deposited on the beach. Broken glass was also a challenge. None of the areas that were randomly selected for the survey contained signage stating the fact that no lifeguards were present.

Bathrooms performed poorly because the singular Bathroom that is adjacent to the beach was locked and unavailable to the public.<sup>3</sup> This condition is unchanged since the 2007 evaluation.

A follow-up visit to this beach in August 2009, one year after the inspections occurred



| Feature               | 2007 Score (Grade) | 2009 Score (Grade) |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Shoreline             | 38% (F)            | 0% (F)             |
| Pathways <sup>4</sup> | 80% (B-)           | n/a                |
| Bathrooms             | 0% (F)             | 0% (F)             |
| Drinking Fountains    | n/a                | n/a                |

for *The 2009 Report Card on Beaches*, showed that the Parks Department has closed off much of the shoreline with signage, preventing the public from accessing the areas that are unprotected by lifeguards and potentially dangerous due to debris. While this may improve the safety of visitors, it limits access to the beach, even for pedestrians.



This Shoreline is in need of a clean-up to remove the large trash items on the beach.



The bathroom at Wolfe's Pond Beach was locked and unavailable to the public.

<sup>3</sup> In some instances, beach patrons are served by adjacent park bathrooms.

<sup>4</sup> Transects are randomly selected to be surveyed for *The Report Card on Beaches*. If the transect does not include a pathway, then no pathway is surveyed. While the transects randomly selected in 2007 included a paved pathway, those randomly selected in 2009 did not include a pathway.

# Recommendations

**1 Ensure sufficient maintenance funding for beaches by piloting a dedicated revenue plan.**

Beaches require intensive maintenance strategies during the three months per year that they are open for swimming. Seasonal staff members are hired to remove litter and ensure the safety of beach visitors; however, funding for these essential positions is never guaranteed, and for the next few summers, it is significantly threatened due to the economy. This is a good opportunity to pilot a program to fund beaches through other revenue sources. The selected revenue source should be equitably divided among all seven city beaches.

One possible structure is a city-mandated developer contribution to beach maintenance, particularly in the case of the new developments along Coney Island and Rockaway Beach. Developers benefit from locating near amenities like a clean, beautiful public beach and have incentive to support their ongoing maintenance.

New Yorkers for Parks has long advocated for the City to allow the Parks Department to keep the money it earns from concessions on parkland; today that money is directed to the City's General Fund. The city should divide revenue from beach concessions, such as those operated on Coney Island's boardwalk and the restaurant at South Beach, among all seven city beaches using a formula that will provide for equity in services. The National Parks Service employs a model whereby 80% of concession funds stay in the local park and 20% are distributed among the remainder of the system. Testing this model at beaches could inform a larger application of concessions revenue to fund park maintenance in all five boroughs.

**2 Implement a “triage” advisory board for Wolfe’s Pond Park Beach.**

Wolfe’s Pond Park Beach has been the lowest-scoring site surveyed in *The Report Card on Beaches* in the two years of the publication. Bathrooms have not been available for public use during survey visits, and areas of the beach are impacted by litter. In *The 2009 Report Card on Beaches*, surveyors noted that dumping of large objects, such as tires and furniture, is occurring just beyond the areas of the beach staffed by lifeguards at Wolfe’s Pond Beach. For consistently low-performing parks and beaches, a “triage plan” could help to rally support and focus resources from local communities and officials. A committee of community members, parks officials, local elected officials, and other stakeholders should be formed to develop a long-term plan to improve the beach and its usability.

More lifeguards are needed to provide ongoing monitoring, as well as maintenance staff to address the litter and larger-scale dumping issues. Capital resources and staff must be devoted to address these challenges. Our beaches must be clean and safe for all New Yorkers, as well as for birds and other wildlife.

**3 To increase transparency, accountability, and safety, the City should dedicate a website and host a public awareness campaign for NYC beaches.**

Other jurisdictions such as the city of Chicago and North Carolina’s Division of Coastal Management have created special websites for the public to learn more about beaches. With fourteen miles of municipal beaches in four of New York City’s boroughs, there is a wide diversity of offerings at our beaches. The Health Department and Parks Department both conduct separate types of inspections of beaches, and both help operate safe beaches. But it can be difficult for a New Yorker to find the information needed when each agency offers different types of information on their site. The Parks Department offers locations, hours of operation, transportation options, access information, and whether the beach has a concession. The Health Department offers water quality and inspection information.

The City should host a summertime website devoted to beaches, which would unite the information collected and provided by these two agencies. In addition, the website should educate the public about stormwater management, litter, and water quality to ensure that every visit to the beach is safe.



# Detailed Methodology

This section describes in detail the methodology used by New Yorkers for Parks in creating *The Report Card on Beaches*. The methodology is broken down into seven sections:

- Selection of the survey population
- Identification and weighting of major service areas
- Feature forms: structure of the survey instrument
- Assignment of numerical scores
- Conversion from numerical scores to letter grades
- Sample calculation: Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn
- Conduction of the survey

## Selection of the Survey Population

In constructing *The Report Card on Beaches*, New Yorkers for Parks focused on the seven DPR “beach” properties. All seven beaches included in the Parks Department’s Property List were evaluated in the survey. Due to the large size of the beaches, an evaluation of the total acreage of every property was not feasible due to New Yorkers for Parks’ limited resources and rigorous data collection process. To address this chal-

lenge, New Yorkers for Parks used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to divide each beach property into transects 50 yards wide, which corresponds with the Health Department’s requirements for lifeguard placement along the beach and enabled New Yorkers for Parks to track the staffing of the beach. The project statistician then randomly selected 10% of these transects to be surveyed on the “Shoreline” and “Pathways” Major Service Areas (MSAs). Every drinking fountain and bathroom on the seven beaches was evaluated, whether or not it fell within a selected transect.

## Identification of Major Service Areas

In constructing *The Report Card on Beaches*, New Yorkers for Parks used a user-focused approach to choose four major service areas (MSAs) based on those selected for *The Report Card on Parks*. Of the eight MSAs measured through *The Report Card on Parks*, three are included in *The Report Card on Beaches*: Bathrooms, Drinking Fountains, and Pathways. For the creation of *The Report Card on Parks*, New Yorkers for Parks convened a group of 10 community leaders and elected officials to weight the relative importance of each MSA. Participants as well as park users at Brooklyn’s Prospect Park were

asked to rate the MSAs on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the least important to their park experience, and 5 being the most important. Participants also provided feedback on the structure and composition of the MSAs. In order to be able to compare beach survey results to park survey results, the same MSA weights were used in *The Report Card on Beaches*, with the addition of a weight of “5” for the Shoreline form. In constructing the Shoreline feature form, a Beaches Advisory Group was convened to provide feedback on form questions from the user’s perspective. The rankings provided were then averaged and rounded to the nearest whole number to provide a final MSA relative weight figure:

**Figure 1:**  
Major Service Areas and Relative Weights

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Shoreline               | 5 |
| Bathrooms               | 4 |
| Drinking fountains      | 3 |
| Boardwalks and pathways | 3 |

Participants in *The Report Card on Parks*’ ‘First Focus Group’ included Councilmember Joseph Addabbo, Jr., former

Chair, Parks Committee, New York City Council; Matt Arnn, United States Forest Service, Director, Metropolitan Initiative, NYC; John Ameroso, Cornell Cooperative Extension, New York City; Skip Blumberg, Friends of City Hall Park; Frank Chaney, Community Board member; Jim Dowell, Riverside Park Fund, Manhattan Parks and Green Space Coalition; Susan Marraccini, Turnaround Friends, Inc.; Martin Olesh, Friends of Cunningham Park; Robert Pasqual, Queens Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces; and Gene Russianoff, Senior Attorney, New York Public Interest Research Group.

Participants in the “Beaches Advisory Group” included Joel Banslaben, Chair, Surfrider NYC and Executive Director, Coastal Marine Resource Center; Jeanne Dupont, Rockaway Waterfront Alliance; Sean Ghio, Director of Project and Performance Management, Connecticut Policy and Economic Council; and Don Riepe, Jamaica Bay Guardian and American Littoral Society.

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### Feature Forms: Structure of Survey Instrument

The structure of the survey instrument replicates that of *The Report Card on Parks*. New Yorkers for Parks staff, in cooperation with statistical consultants from the firm of Ernst & Young, developed question forms for *The Report Card on Parks* with which to evaluate the MSAs found in each park. Individual questions were designed to measure the performance of the MSAs in each of the following categories:

- Maintenance;
- Cleanliness;
- Safety; and
- Structural Integrity.

Whenever possible, the form questions were adapted from DPR's own internal evaluation mechanism, the Parks Inspection Program (PIP). The form questions for the Shoreline form were adapted from established *Report Card on Parks* feature forms, including the "Waterbodies", "Natural Areas", and "Lawns" forms, as well as research on beach evaluations conducted by other groups. During the construction of *The Report Card on Parks*, a second focus group was convened to provide relative weights to individual feature forms on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the least important to their park experience, and 5 being the most important. Next, the focus group was asked to designate each of the individual form questions as 'priority' or 'routine.' Priority ratings

refer to those conditions of a park feature necessary for its safe use. Finally, the focus group rated questions tagged as routine on a scale from 1 to 5. The survey design team followed this same protocol for the Shoreline feature form, relying heavily on the results of focus group research used in the creation of *The Report Card on Parks*. Participants in the 'Second Focus Group' included four park and advocacy experts: Mark Caserta, Director, Waterfront Park Coalition, New York League of Conservation Voters; Susan Craine, Consumer Advocate, New York Public Interest Research Group; Neysa Pranger, Coordinator, Straphangers Campaign; and Paul Sawyer, Executive Director, Friends of Van Cortlandt Park.

### Assignment of Numerical Scores

Each completed form was assigned a numerical grade between 0 and 100. Any beach feature receiving an 'unacceptable' rating on any priority question was assigned a form grade of zero. However, in the large majority of completed forms, beach features received only 'acceptable' ratings to all priority questions. In these cases, the calculation appears as follows:

Let A denote the sum of the relative weights of routine survey questions receiving "acceptable" ratings. Let B denote the sum of the relative weights of routine survey questions receiving either "acceptable" or "unacceptable" ratings.

Each form's final numerical score is then 100 times the quotient or A divided by B. No form score was assigned a beach which lacked any given feature; in this way no beach was penalized for not having any of the survey's 4 feature types.

All non-priority questions were scored as *acceptable*, *not acceptable* or *not applicable*. Following the guidelines of the focus group, each applicable form question was assigned a weight of one to five. Scores were calculated as the weighted ratio of questions scored acceptable to those scored acceptable or unacceptable. This number was then multiplied by 100 to give a final form score.

Forms of four types were averaged to give four MSA scores. No MSA rating was assigned to a beach which lacked any given major service area; in this way no beach was penalized for not having any of the survey's four major service area types.

Each beach's raw score was calculated in a similar fashion. MSAs present for any given beach were weighted following the guidelines of the focus groups. These weighted figures were then averaged to give an overall beach score.

### Conversion of Numerical Scores to Letter Grades

To maintain consistency and comparability, the grade conversion system for

*The Report Card on Beaches* is based on that of *The Report Card on Parks*. During the creation of *The Report Card on Parks*, a fourth focus group was convened to determine the assignment of letter grades to raw scores, consisting of park managers and open space experts. Participants were brought to three parks in Manhattan and asked to provide a letter grade for the park based on a brief description of the MSAs and a tour of the park. These letter grades were consistent with the raw number scores for the parks and resulted in the raw score/grade assignment chart. Grades for *The Report Card on Beaches* ranged from 0% to 77%. New Yorkers for Parks translated these scores into three relative categories: Satisfactory (70% to 79%), Challenged (60% to 69%), and Unsatisfactory (59% and below).

**Figure 2:  
Conversion from Raw Scores  
to Letter Grades**

| Raw Scores   | Letter Grade |
|--------------|--------------|
| 97-100       | A+           |
| 93-96        | A            |
| 90-92        | A-           |
| 87-89        | B+           |
| 83-86        | B            |
| 80-82        | B-           |
| 77-79        | C+           |
| 73-76        | C            |
| 70-72        | C-           |
| 60-69        | D            |
| 59 and below | F            |

'Fourth Focus Group' participants included Jerome Barth, Director of Operations, Bryant Park Restoration Corporation; Charles McKinney, consultant, former administrator, Riverside Park; and Andy Stone, Director, NYC Programs, Trust for Public Land.

**Sample Calculation —  
Manhattan Beach**

Figure 3 shows actual surveyor responses for Manhattan Beach in Brooklyn. Figures 3 and 4 below include a summary of form data and the subsequent MSA and beach score.

**Figure 3: Summary of Manhattan Beach Form and MSA Data**

| Form               | Form Scores  | MSA Score |
|--------------------|--|-----------|
| Shoreline          | 100, 63  | 81        |
| Bathrooms          | 79, 79   | 79        |
| Drinking Fountains | 100, 100, 100, 100, 100, 100, 86, 82, 82, 39, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0 | 56        |
| Pathways           | 89, 78   | 84        |

**Figure 4: Calculation of Raw Score and Letter Grade — Manhattan Beach**

| MSA                     | MSA Score times Weight       |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Beaches                 | 81 * 5 = 406 (with rounding) |
| Bathrooms               | 79 * 4 = 317 (with rounding) |
| Drinking Fountains      | 56 * 3 = 167 (with rounding) |
| Boardwalks and Pathways | 84 * 3 = 251 (with rounding) |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>1141 (with rounding)</b>  |

This total, 1141, was then divided by the sum of the weights of the four MSAs. This sum is 15, so that the Manhattan Beach raw score is then 1099/15 = 76.1.

Applying this numerical score to the relative categories listed on the previous page, it can be seen that a score of 76 corresponds to a rating of "Satisfactory."

**Conduction of the Survey**

Survey work for *The Report Card on Beaches* took place Tuesdays through Fridays in July and August 2008 from the hours of 10 AM to dusk. New Yorkers for Parks trained 5 surveyors (all staff members) to complete the survey work. New Yorkers for Parks senior staff held one full-day training session

during summer 2008 to train surveyors in the following techniques: use of the handheld computers, delineation of beach features and transects, use of maps, measuring wheels, survey forms and standards manual, and procedures for documenting features with digital cameras. The training session included the step-by-step review of beach

surveying, collection of data according to defined standards, proper photo documentation, safety procedures, and procedures for storing data in the *Report Card* database upon completion of survey.

In the field, surveyors completed a feature form for each pathway and shoreline feature that was included in the selected transect. In addition, every drinking fountain and bathroom located on the beach or boardwalk was evaluated. For example, for every drinking fountain on a beach, a 'Drinking Fountain' form was completed so that on a beach with ten drinking fountains, a surveyor would complete ten 'Drinking Fountain' feature forms. If five transects were randomly selected for a given beach, five 'Shoreline' forms were completed for those transects.

In addition to the completion of the survey forms, surveyors took extensive digital photographs to support and complement survey results. All survey findings and feature forms receive an identification number and are correlated to a series of photographs documenting conditions for each beach in the survey. Survey results and photo documentation are stored in a central database. When photo documentation did not correlate with results or did not adequately illustrate beach conditions, the beach was re-visited and re-evaluated by surveyors.





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