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OC Beaches Get Clean Bill of Health for Summer

(Santa Ana, CA) —Orange County residents aren't the only ones who've been working to get fit for the summer season—the coastline has been watching its waste-line too.

Today, the environmental non-profit Heal the Bay released its annual "Beach Bummer List" ranking California's most polluted shorelines – without a single Orange County beach listed. This year marks the first time in six years that stubborn list-dweller Poche Beach in South Orange County hasn't appeared on the list.

Poche Beach's clean bill of health is thanks to the combined efforts of the County's OC Watersheds agency, city of San Clemente, OC Parks, OC Waste & Recycling, the South Coast Water District and the city of Dana Point. The beach is located where Dana Point and San Clemente meet, near a flood-control channel plagued by high bacteria levels.

"This year's report card is welcome news," said Supervisor Patricia Bates, whose district includes Poche Beach. "We have been very committed to discovering why certain beaches had poor water quality and took some very creative steps to fix the problems. Orange County's beaches are a beacon for residents and tourists, and we want to keep them clean and inviting."

The biggest part of that effort was building a \$3 million urban-runoff treatment facility, which began construction in 2007 and went online in 2009. However, when water released from the facility pooled on the beach before entering the sea, it attracted seagulls and other birds. Their droppings reintroduced bacteria into the water.

Next, outdoor speakers broadcasting ultrasound were used to discourage the birds. When that didn't work well enough, the County went Medieval on them, hiring a falconer to deploy hawks and falcons to scare away the gulls. More recently, two lifelike plastic coyotes were perched overlooking the pond to act as silent bird bouncers.

For more information on Heal the Bay's "Beach Report Card," please visit:
<http://www.healthebay.org/our-work/2014-beach-report-card>

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