

making WAVES

NATIONAL
PUBLICATION OF
THE SURFRIDER
FOUNDATION



VOLUME 16 • NUMBER 5
DECEMBER 2000

IN THIS ISSUE:

B.E.A.C.H. BILL
BECOMES LAW

PRATTE'S REEF
REALIZED

HAMMONDS
MEADOW VICTORY

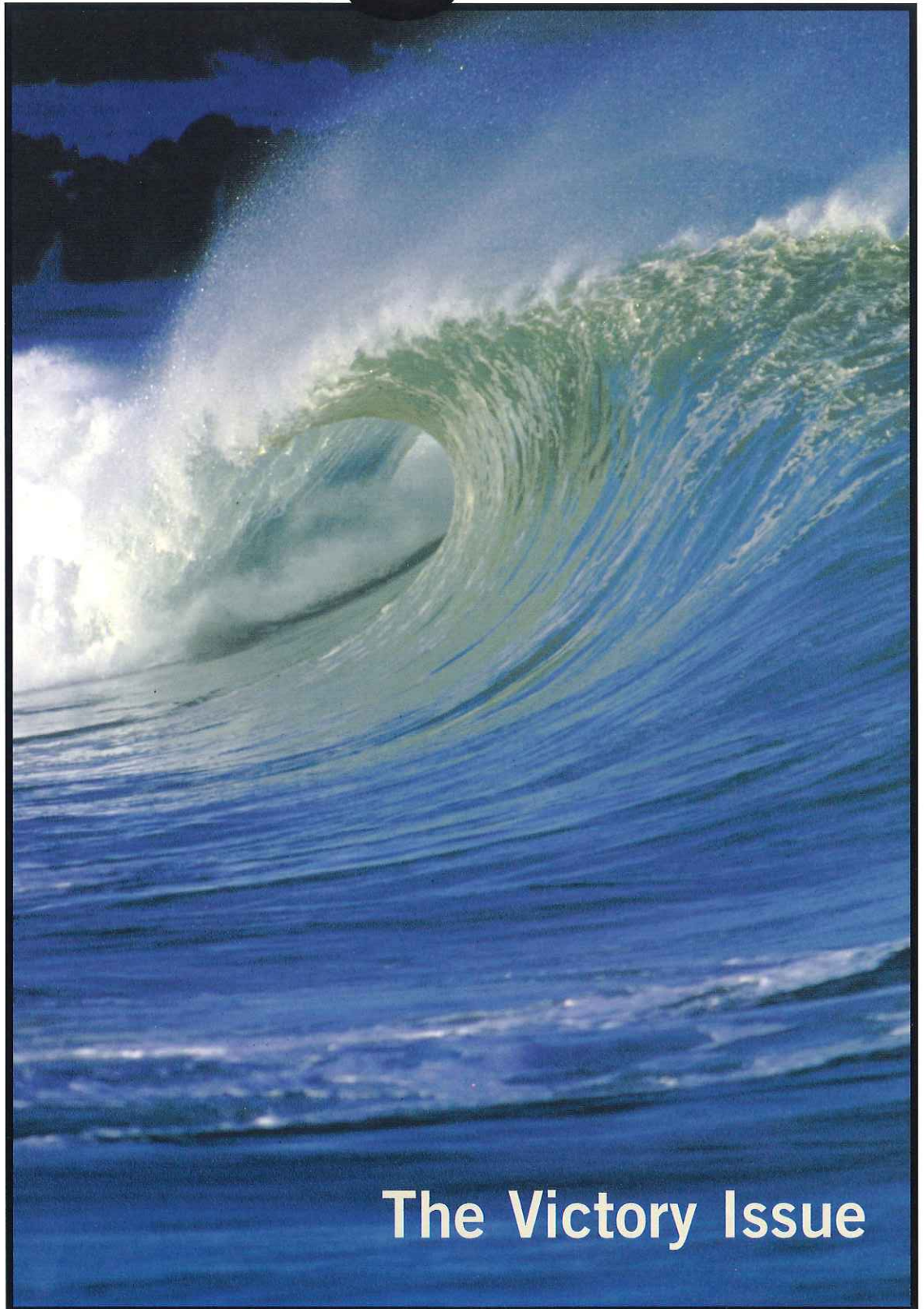
CHAPTER ECO-
ACTIVISM UPDATES

SURF SPOTLIGHT

FINAL INSTALLMENT
BY DREW KAMPION

BLUEWATER TASK
FORCE'S TENTH
ANNIVERSARY

YOUTH PERSPECTIVE
WITH FLYNN NOVAK



The Victory Issue

President Clinton signs B.E.A.C.H. Bill into Law

HR 999, the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health Act of 2000 (B.E.A.C.H. Bill) sponsored by Congressman Brian Bilbray (R-CA) was signed by President Clinton on October 10, 2000. The B.E.A.C.H. Bill establishes consistent nationwide standards for beach water quality monitoring, testing and notification. The B.E.A.C.H. Bill was written with assistance from Surfrider Foundation National Legal Issues Team member, Gary Sirota, Esq. Congratulations to all Surfrider Foundation members who communicated with their government representatives in support of this historic bill.

"This is the most sweeping legislation ever regarding national ocean water quality testing. Surfers have become the indicator species and this is a personal achievement that our members and beach users in general will benefit from. After all, we wear that water every day," said Surfrider Foundation's Executive Director, Christopher Evans.

The B.E.A.C.H. Bill amends the Clean Water Act to require ocean, bay and Great Lakes states to adopt minimum, health-based criteria for water quality, comprehensively test recreational beach waters for pathogens and notify the public when contamination levels make beach water unsafe for swimming, surfing and other activities. It also authorizes \$30 million annually in federal grants to help coastal states develop and implement effective water quality monitoring and public notification programs. By establishing incentives through grants to state and local governments, the B.E.A.C.H. Bill puts the authority and the accountability in the hands of those who know their beaches best. Currently, only eleven states comprehensively test their beach waters and notify the public when contamination occurs.

It was this lack of any national standard that inspired Surfrider Foundation to establish its Blue Water Task Force volunteer water-quality testing program in 1991. This program helped shed light

on the often-overlooked water quality problems in our coastal areas and provided the public with valuable information about the health of their local beach. Over the last several years, the Surfrider Foundation and its 50 grassroots chapters in 16 coastal states has worked with a coalition of groups, including Natural Resources Defense Council, Center for Marine Conservation, and American Oceans Campaign on making the B.E.A.C.H. Bill a reality.

States and various localities that tested their beach waters in 1999 posted 6,100 beach closings and advisories due to the presence of bacteria and viruses from polluted stormwater and runoff, overburdened sewage treatment facilities and malfunctioning septic systems. Contact with contaminated beach water can result in a variety of illnesses, ranging from gastroenteritis and hepatitis to various ear, nose and throat infections.

Besides bringing all states up to EPA standards, the law will require the EPA to upgrade these criteria, and to develop new criteria, based upon the most recent scientific studies. Under the law, states set up comprehensive monitoring and notification programs in order to provide up-to-date information on the condition of all beaches. The EPA will be required to post information about beach closings on its website to make the public aware of what condition exist before they make a trip to the beach.

"Beachgoers won't have to hesitate before going for a dip. They'll know what they're getting into when they go for a swim," said Elizabeth Sturcken, President of the Surfrider Foundation.

The B.E.A.C.H. Bills (S. 522, introduced by Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and H.R. 999, introduced by Representative Brian Bilbray (R-CA)) establish a common-sense, national approach to the problems of inconsistent beach water quality testing and public notification. The bills: establish national beach water quality criteria, improve beach water monitoring programs, and ensure prompt public notification of contamination. ■