

**ASSATEAGUE COASTAL TRUST AND COASTKEEPER CELEBRATE OFFICAL START OF SUMMER
INTRODUCE “SWIM GUIDE” APPLICATION FOR SMART PHONES**

Smart Phone App Helps Swimmers Find Bacteria Info for Area Swimming Holes & Beaches



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Berlin, MD – Assateague COASTKEEPER and Assateague Coastal Trust announce the May 24, 2013 Worcester County launch of the *Swim Guide*, an online tool and smartphone app to display local bacteria monitoring data.

The *Swim Guide* smart phone app will allow people to find safe beaches and swimming areas to recreate and enjoy their waterways in one easy place. For millions of beach goers, swimmers, and surfers across the country, finding and enjoying beaches and local swimming holes will become much easier with the launch of the *Swim Guide*, the new, free, smart phone app (available from App Store, Google Play, or www.theswimguide.org).

Assateague Coastkeeper, Kathy Phillips, announced, “The focus of this weekend’s launch of the *Swim Guide - Worcester County* is to encourage citizens to celebrate the right to clean, swimmable waters and to promote the importance of the Clean Water Act, established in 1972, in protecting our local waterways.”

Provided and managed by member groups within Waterkeeper Alliance, a network of 207 water protection groups worldwide, the *Swim Guide* helps the user locate the closest, cleanest beach, get directions, view photos, and determine if the water is safe for swimming. The *Swim Guide* also allows the user to share the whole adventure with their friends and family on social networks.

“We are blessed with ocean beaches that are not heavily impacted by stormwater runoff,” noted Phillips, “in fact, Ocean City and Assateague Island are nationally ranked each year with some of the cleanest, safest swimming beaches in the country.”

“However,” Phillips continued, “I’m often asked if the creeks and bays are safe to swim in, especially after a heavy rainfall. The *Swim Guide* provides a free, easy to use way for swimmers and surfers to see the most recent bacteria data for all their favorite bathing beaches or for waterways they use for direct contact watersports like kayaking and SUP paddling. *Swim Guide-Worcester County* will help them

make informed decisions about whether to swim, paddle or go jetskiing,” she added, “Swim Guide will help bring this important information to a much wider audience.”

The Swim Guide utilizes water quality monitoring data from government authorities and other organizations conducting routine testing to determine the water quality at nearly 5,000 beaches across North America. Local testing locations in Ocean City, on Assateague Island, and in the Coastal Bays waterways are updated weekly during the swimming season by Worcester County, the National Park Service and Assateague Coastal Trust – Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Bacteria data for Ocean City and Assateague Island ocean beaches, the Public Landing pier, Castaways Campground, and favorite swimming holes like Horn Island shoals in Isle of Wight Bay, St. Martin River, Herring Creek and Turville Creek are collected, analyzed and the test results are compared to the Environmental Protection Agency’s single test limit for safe swimming levels.

In Swim Guide, testing locations in the Ocean City/Assateague area which are below the threshold are green, and locations whose most recent results are above the limit are red, representing an increased risk of illness.

The innovative Swim Guide app originated with a team from the Lake Ontario Waterkeeper chapter, which set out to determine if it was safe to swim in Lake Ontario. Seven years later, in over 5,000 locations people can now check the status and cleanliness of their local beaches in real time.

“We will be constantly expanding *The Swim Guide-Worcester County*,” noted Phillips, “by adding photographs of the area, historical data about the locations, and even providing a mechanism to report pollution concerns back to the Coastkeeper. We are also working with the National Park Service and Accomack County to post data on bayside and seaside bathing beaches in northern Accomack County, VA. The *Swim Guide* helps connect communities to their waterways, raising awareness and appreciation for clean water.”

Visitors to Worcester County and the coastal watershed are encouraged to contact the Coastkeeper if they would like to see additional areas monitored and reported in the *Swim Guide* App. Coastal bayside waterfront communities like Ocean Pines, Holiday Harbor, and others may contact Assateague Coastal Trust to find out how their swimming or water recreation areas can be monitored and added to the *Swim Guide* if they are interested. They may contact the Coastkeeper at 410-629-1538 or coastkeeper@actforbays.org

More information on the Swim Guide, and app download instructions, can be found at www.theswimguide.org. Worcester County data will be posted on the Swim Guide website and on the app by Friday, May 24 and each Friday throughout the summer until Labor Day weekend.