



Photos (left to right): Nicolas Melo; courtesy, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority/Allen; courtesy, the Massachusetts Port Authority.

Clean Water

Boston's reconnection with its waterfront has accelerated since 1992. The Boston Harbor clean-up reached a critical turning point in 1998 with the completion of the Deer Island Waste Water Treatment plant, whose 12 oblong sludge digesters, each 150 feet tall, have become a familiar feature of the harbor, like a giant carton of eggs. Federal legislation in 1996 created the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area, with innovative financing including federal and private money. Use of the islands has burgeoned; some 120,000 local visitors and tourists took boat rides out to the 34 islands last year, far above the numbers from the early '90s, and an increase of 10,000 in the last year alone. One of the islands, Spectacle, grew enormously thanks to three million yards of fill from the Big Dig, and is now a favorite hiking destination. From East Boston around to Hull, commercial, residential, and recreational developments are blossoming. Along the North End and South Boston harborfronts, in particular, upscale residences are reshaping neighborhoods that were still rundown just a few years ago. Most harbor beaches are

swimmable. Bluefish, striped bass, and seals are now common visitors.

This clean-up has occurred even as the port has experienced something of a revival. The Conley Container Terminal, once nearly moribund, handled more than 220,000 container equivalents in 2007; exports have more than doubled in the last six years alone. And passengers on cruise ships sailing out of Boston jumped from 29,000 in 1992 to 234,000 last year.

The Charles River has also been cleaned up substantially, following a campaign begun in 1995 by the regional Environmental Protection Agency head, John DeVillars, to make the river fit for swimming within 10 years. Then-governor Bill Weld jumped the timetable by plunging into the river fully clothed in 1996. Indeed, since 2005, the Charles has been safely swimmable except for brief periods immediately after large rainstorms. A private organization, the Charles River Conservancy, regularly pushes the state to make further improvements, but more needs to be done to provide better maintenance and access.

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