

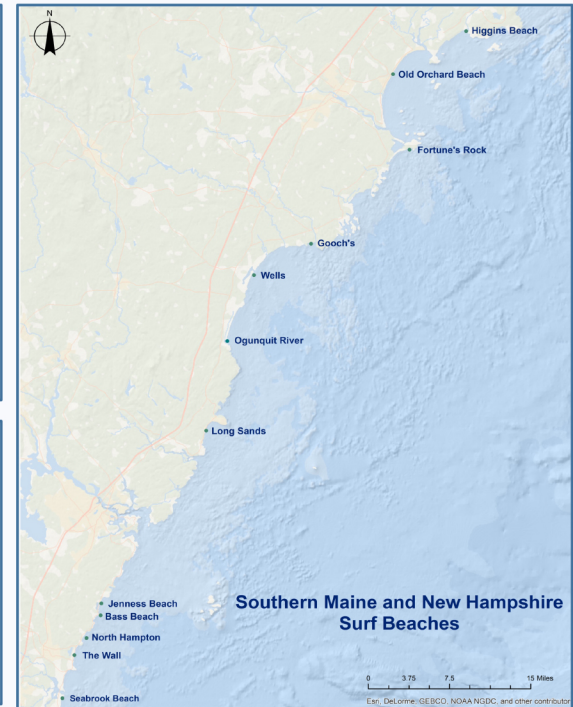
How do surfers perceive the risk of impaired water quality?

Fall 2016 • Sophia Scott • Shannon Rogers • Center for the Environment • Plymouth State University

The **Gulf of Maine** is a resource region in the North Atlantic and home to 11.2 million people in Maritime Canada and New England. Tourism is a major industry in Maine and New Hampshire and coastal tourism and recreation represent a large portion of the tourist economies of ME and NH. Beach visits are a popular tourist activities for those who visit southern ME and coastal NH. Recreational beach advisories and closures can impact the socio-economic systems in the two states through perception and value of place, health implications, and loss of revenue from unwarranted beach closures.

The **New England Sustainability Consortium (NEST)** is a sustainability science project focused on bridging the gap between science and decision making with respect to water quality in the Gulf of Maine. This place-based, problem-driven, and solutions oriented transdisciplinary research project spans states and institutions focused on working collaboratively to solve a regional problem.

As part of the NEST project and focused on recreational beach advisories we chose to study the surfing population of southern ME and NH given that they represent a beach stakeholder group who are more prone to issues of poor water quality. Specifically, we were interested in understanding surfers' **perceptions of risk**, whether they **considered water quality a risk**, and how this **impacted their decision-making** around when to enter the water to surf.



Study Area

As shown above we focused on 12 surf beaches in southern ME and NH. We attempted to survey surfers at our study beaches a total of 63 times over the course of our field season from May to October 2015.

To understand surfers' perceptions of risk and water quality we interviewed and surveyed over 300 surfers in our study area.



Surfers are more vulnerable to water pollution

- ❖ Surfers frequent the beaches more often and spend longer periods of time in the water than the average beach goer
- ❖ Surfers surf year round and experience the season
- ❖ Surfers are more apt to ingest water or get cuts and scrapes which can result in water borne illnesses
- ❖ Surfers surf after storm events when waves are the best but water quality is the poorest

Who surfs in ME & NH?

Gender

- Male 80%
- Female 20%

Residence

- MA 22%
- ME 40%
- NH 20%
- QC 10%
- Other 8%

Education

- HS 10%
- Some college 19%
- Associates/technical 4%
- Bachelors 45%
- Graduate 22%

Envir. or surf group member

- Member 74%
- Not a member 26%

Age

- Mean, (median), (min-max)
- 33.6, (31), [18-69]

Surf experience (years)

- Mean, (median), (min-max)
- 11.4, (9), [0-52]

