

CASE STUDY

DEPOE BAY, OREGON

Empowering youth to become scientists and stewards of the Oregon coast.



The Blue Water Task Force (BWTF) program in Depoe Bay, Oregon, is making science fun and accessible for Lincoln County youth. Since the program's inception in 2010, more than 75 students have been trained in water quality testing methodology. Collectively, they have conducted 375 water tests to provide year-round information on the safety of Oregon's beaches. As the [state's monitoring program](#) is seasonal from May through September, the Depoe Bay BWTF program is currently generating the only water quality information available during the off-season at these beaches.

The Depoe Bay BWTF program is a unique collaboration between the Surfrider Foundation [Newport Chapter](#) and [Neighbors for Kids](#), a nonprofit organization that provides students with a safe and fun learning environment after school. Surfrider volunteers collect water samples on a monthly basis from [five beaches](#) that stretch from Depoe Bay to Road's End State Park in Lincoln City. All water samples are then processed in a lab that is set up at Neighbors for Kids.

Student participation in this water testing program is gaining traction. Each BWTF processing session consists of up to six students and there are often waiting lists.

Most of the student scientists range from 8-11 years old, including many young girls who are highly enthusiastic about the program. In fact, since 2015, 60% of the students participating in the water testing program have been girls, which is a shift from earlier years when a higher ratio of boys were signing up.

The Depoe Bay BWTF program was initiated by Larry and Nanci Brammer, who started their Surfrider journey with the [Florence BWTF program](#) in 2009. Larry is well-known within the Oregon BWTF scene for developing the "[No-Brammer](#)" [sampling method](#) that uses a fishing pole to collect samples on dangerous or hard-to-reach beaches. After a decade of service, the Brammers continue to volunteer their time to collect water samples, train and inspire students involved in the water testing program.

Karen Driscoll, a volunteer who helps to run Surfrider's BWTF lab at Neighbors for Kids, draws on her teaching experience to make science accessible and fun for students of all ages. When teaching scientific concepts to younger kids, she uses simple analogies, such as correlating the process of 'dilution' to mixing chocolate and white milk together. This allows the students to not only better understand what they are doing in the lab,



Above: Students participating in a surf camp hosted by Surfrider and Warm Current to promote healthy and active lifestyles for youth in the Pacific Northwest.

but also to share their own perspectives with Karen. For instance, a five-year old student once described unwrapping a piece of glassware while still keeping it sterile, by comparing it to “opening string cheese.”

While the water samples that the students process typically test clean with low bacteria levels, the outcomes can surprisingly disappoint the kids. Each month, Larry, Nanci and Karen explain that low readings are desirable because they show that the monitored beaches are safe for swimming. An atypically high reading, however, can cause all sorts of excitement in the lab and a lively discussion on potential sources of the bacteria in the water ensues. As a result, the inspiration and learning goes both ways. While the adults bring experience and wisdom to share, the kids continue to surprise their leaders with fresh insight and perspectives, which creates a rewarding experience for everyone.

Since 2016, Neighbors for Kids has also added a surf experience option to their summer camp with the help of the Surfrider Foundation and [Warm Current](#), an organization that promotes healthy, active lifestyles for youth in the Pacific Northwest. The surf camps have quickly grown from 30 kids to more than 100 each summer. While some of the first participating kids weren't comfortable in the water and took their initial surfing lessons in life jackets, several have since grown into competent surfers and are training to become instructors themselves. Campers are also learning to be good stewards of the environment by participating in beach cleanups and learning about the marine life they observe along the coast. These experiences are helping to

foster a love for the beach and develop future stewards of Oregon's beautiful coastline.

To make their programming, including BWTF water testing, accessible to the full community, Neighbors for Kids also offers scholarships to families who need assistance. Many of the participating students come from underserved populations, are in foster homes or may have behavioral issues at school. “They are all survivors,” said Heidi Lambert, Director of Operations for NFK. “This program gives them such a sense of self-confidence. Once they get just a little confidence in one area, it spills over.”

To see where the Blue Water Task Force is testing in Oregon, visit [Surfrider.org](#). Check out [Oregon Health Authority's website](#) for information on the state's seasonal beach monitoring program.

Thank you to the [Surfrider Foundation Newport Chapter](#) and [Oregon Coast Aquarium](#) for financial and logistical support of the Depoe Bay Blue Water Task Force.