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Goose Droppings Are Top Esplanade Concern

By Jim Cronin
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A survey of visitors to the Charles River Esplanade revealed goose feces at their foremost complaint.

The results, culled from interviews with 346 park users, were revealed last week at The Esplanade Association's annual meeting.

To reduce goose droppings, the association entered "GeesePeace", a program run by the MSPCA, in 2003. Volunteers visit nests along the Charles to inspect goose eggs. If the eggs have not been fertilized, the volunteers cover them with a layer of oil to stop oxygen from penetrating the shell, preventing them from fertilization.

The association also hires two border collies trained to herd the geese and push them into the river, encouraging them to relocate to areas with less human activity.

Other grievances regarding the Esplanade included a lack of amenities like restrooms and drinking fountains, litter and unleashed dogs. However, more than 85 percent ranked the park as a "major factor" in their enjoyment of the city.

Steve Wolf is a board member who conducted interviews for the survey. He said the most prevalent negative comments he heard were about trash and a lack of signs at nearby T stations, which made the park hard to find for some.

The survey was conducted during spring and summer months in 2007, when 155 volunteers observed the ways more than 6,500 people used the public space, said Patrice Todisco, executive director of The Esplanade Association.

"We wanted to go beyond our own internal assumptions to understand what is really going on in the Esplanade," she said.

One of those assumptions, she said, was that the Esplanade is primarily used by residents of nearby neighborhoods, like Beacon Hill and the Back Bay. The survey, she said, revealed the park as a destination for local residents, suburban dwellers and international tourists, with about two-thirds of visitors coming from outside the downtown area.

"The Esplanade is truly more than just a neighborhood park," Todisco said. "It's a metropolitan resource."

Roseann Colot, another association board member who conducted interviews for the survey, said she was amazed that one person, a high school student, used the Esplanade as a favorite fishing spot.

Another, a cook from Dorchester, told Colot he enjoyed the park because he found it safe and quiet. Colot met people from Japan, Ireland and Italy relaxing along the banks of the Charles while she was doing interviews.

“It was interesting because you realized how many different kinds of people really use the Esplanade,” she said.

Wolf said what surprised him the most was how many people come from other parts of the city, state and out-of-state to utilize the green space.

“One woman who drove from Belmont to use the Esplanade has four or five parks on the route she takes in, but she said she prefers the Esplanade,” Wolf said.