



Russian River Watershed Association

300 Seminary Ave, Ukiah, CA 95482 • (707)833-2553 • www.rrwatershed.org

RRWA Environmental Column – April 2013 Water Quality Monitoring and River Recreation

Thousands of people visit the Russian River area each year to kayak, canoe, swim, wade, and go fishing. In order to protect the health of people recreating in and along the Russian River, the County of Sonoma Department of Health Services Environmental Health and Safety Section (EHS) has partnered with the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board to monitor bacteria levels by sampling at several beaches along the Russian River.

The monitoring, which has occurred for several years, currently consists of looking at total coliform bacteria, E. coli, and Enterococcus bacteria for a presence exceeding healthy levels as specified in the California Department of Public Health's (CDPH) "Draft Guidance for Fresh Water Beaches." In the future, new indicators and more rapid testing methods may be adopted based on recommendations in the Environmental Protection Agency's 2012 publication "Recreational Water Quality Criteria."

Historically, six beaches along the Russian River have been monitored:

- Camp Rose
- Healdsburg Veterans Memorial Beach
- Steelhead Beach
- Forestville Access Beach (replaced Odd Fellows Bridge as sample site)
- Johnson's Beach
- Monte Rio Beach

Additional beaches monitored more recently include:

- Cloverdale River Park
- Alexander Valley Road Bridge

Monitoring typically occurs from Memorial Day through Labor Day each year. When a sample exceeds "Guidance" levels for a given indicator bacteria, the beach in question is typically posted with an advisory sign by EHS, and follow-up sampling is performed. Advisory postings are removed once levels drop below the "Guidance" levels. If all indicators exceed "Guidance" levels by a wide margin and/or a known sewage release is reported, the affected area is posted "Closed" until such time that levels return to below "Guidance" levels and the beaches are considered safe for swimmers, boaters, and others who come in contact with the water.

Sample results are reported on the EHS website at:

<http://www.sonoma-county.org/health/services/freshwater.asp>

In the near future, the Russian River Watershed Association plans to add links on its web-based interactive map displaying the monitoring sites, as well as providing the data from the EHS website.

In addition to monitoring beaches along the Russian River, EHS coordinates with the County of Sonoma Regional Parks Department in monitoring Spring Lake Swimming Lagoon with results posted at the same link above.



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EHS also monitors seven ocean beaches along the Sonoma County coast:

- Gualala Regional Park Beach
- Black Point Regional Park Beach
- Stillwater Regional Park Beach
- Goat Rock State Beach
- Salmon Creek State Beach
- Campbell Cove State Beach
- Doran Regional Park Beach

Ocean beach sample results are posted on the EHS website at: <http://www.sonoma-county.org/health/services/ocean.asp>

Ocean beach monitoring, although similar to freshwater beach monitoring, follows somewhat different standards as specified in the CDPH's Regulations for Ocean Beaches and Ocean Water-Contact Sports Areas pursuant to Assembly Bill 411.

For current beach status, contact the EHS Beach Sampling Hotline at (707) 565-6552, or contact EHS directly at (707) 565-6565 for additional information.

Additional links:

CDPH Draft Guidance for Fresh Water Beaches:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/environhealth/water/Documents/Beaches/DraftGuidanceforFreshWaterBeaches.pdf>

CDPH Regulations for Ocean Beaches and Ocean Water-Contact Sports Areas Pursuant to AB 411:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/environhealth/water/Documents/Beaches/Regulations-OceanBeaches.pdf>

EPA 2012 Recreational Water Quality Criteria:

<http://water.epa.gov/scitech/swguidance/standards/criteria/health/recreation/index.cfm>

RRWA website: <http://www.rrwatershed.org/>

This article was authored by James Tyler, Supervising Environmental Health Specialist for the County of Sonoma Department of Health Services on behalf of RRWA. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.