



DEC News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DEC Study Identifies Primary Cause of Elevated Levels of Petroleum Hydrocarbons in Kenai River

Preliminary findings point to boats as the primary cause of Kenai River pollution

Kenai--November 20, 2003--Results from a Department of Environmental Conservation water quality study of the Kenai River show a direct correlation between boat traffic and elevated levels of petroleum hydrocarbons.

The Department of Environmental Conservation funded the Kenai Watershed Forum to take water quality samples of the Kenai River in 2000, 2001 and 2002. The samples collected found measurable concentrations of petroleum in the river. Based on this preliminary data, DEC designed a more focused and thorough follow-up study to measure the extent of hydrocarbons in the river and track down the probable sources of the pollution. From May through August 2003, DEC took samples in the lower river, throughout the water column, and from bank to bank. Samples were collected at both high and low boat traffic times, as well as near stormwater outfalls, boat harbors and other possible petroleum sources.

"The final results will not be available until January; however, the preliminary results indicate that boat use is the primary source of petroleum hydrocarbons in the river," said Jonne Slemons, DEC's non-point source water pollution control program manager. Preliminary figures indicate boat engines discharged as much as 10,000 gallons of petroleum into the river during the month of July alone.

For the DEC study, 284 samples were taken. Of these, 2 samples exceeded the water quality standards for petroleum hydrocarbons of 10 parts per billion. The Kenai River had a higher than average flow in the summer of 2003. During a normal year concentrations of petroleum could be greater. "The water quality results at a time of higher flow are cause for concern," Slemons said. "While the overall quality of the Kenai River currently meets the State's water quality standards, quick and effective action is necessary to keep it that way."

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Under the State's Kenai River Special Management Area Plan, the Department of Natural Resources manages activities on the river. DEC will work under DNR's leadership to evaluate options for reducing hydrocarbon pollution to the river from boat traffic. Continued monitoring of the Kenai River will be essential to determine the success of steps taken to control future motor boat pollution.

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