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Press Release

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Elevated levels of bacteria found at Kenai River beaches *Enterococci and Fecal coliform bacteria could pose health threat*

(KENAI, AK) – Recent water quality samples collected at Kenai River Beaches indicate elevated levels of enterococci and fecal coliform bacteria in the water. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is collecting samples this summer to determine if the water is safe for recreation.

Contact with water that has high levels of enterococci/fecal coliform bacteria may cause people to have stomach aches, diarrhea, or ear, eye and skin infections.

DEC suggests that beach users take normal precautions to avoid exposure, such as avoiding drinking or swimming in the water, washing after contact with the water, and rinsing fish harvested from the area with clean water. As always, people should cook seafood to a minimum of 145 degrees Fahrenheit internal temperature to destroy pathogens.

Kenai River Beaches are located on the banks of the Kenai River at its confluence with Cook Inlet. Water quality samples were collected on Tuesday June 25, and Sunday June 30, 2013. DEC continues to monitor water quality. If bacteria levels increase significantly, the City of Kenai may post advisory signs at the beach until additional sampling indicates that bacteria numbers have dropped to safe levels.

Enterococci and fecal coliform bacteria can come from any warm blooded animal including birds, seals, and humans. The reason for the currently elevated levels is unknown. Potential sources are birds feeding on the beaches and mud flats during low tides as well as a large bird rookery located upriver from the beach. Other possible sources include dogs and humans.

The beach sampling program is being funded and implemented by DEC with cooperation of the City of Kenai. It is part of a nationwide effort to decrease the incidence of water-borne illness at public beaches under the federal BEACH Act.

For more information about the Alaska beach monitoring program visit the Alaska BEACH Grant Program website:

<http://www.dec.state.ak.us/water/wqsar/wqs/beachprogram.htm>.

For more information on DEC's Division of Water, visit:

www.dec.state.ak.us/water/.