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Press Release

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Chena River Water Quality Improving

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is pleased to report an improvement in water quality of the Chena River in Fairbanks. In the past, the river has been considered impaired (polluted) by excessive sediment and petroleum hydrocarbons, which were present at levels above state water quality standards designed to protect aquatic life. Stormwater runoff has been the main pollutant source. In 2010 the State determined that the river met petroleum standards and more recent data shows the Chena is meeting the sediment standard and continuing to meet the petroleum standard. The data was collected by the Tanana Valley Watershed Association under an Alaska Clean Water Actions grant from DEC.

“The Chena River provides habitat for chinook and chum salmon as well as arctic grayling. It is also a valuable recreational and economic resource,” said DEC Environmental Program Specialist Chandra McGee. “We are happy to report this significant improvement in water quality and look forward to maintaining a clean Chena.”

The change in water quality is credited to numerous partners who collaborated on projects that improve Chena water quality including:

- City of Fairbanks
- Cold Climate Housing Research Center
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources
- Fairbanks North Star Borough
- Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District
- Festival Fairbanks
- Tanana Valley Watershed Association
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Alaska Dept. of Transportation and Public Facilities
- GW Scientific
- ERM Foundation

In 2005 the City of Fairbanks and the Fairbanks North Star Borough were issued their first permits to manage municipal stormwater runoff. Programs under these permits have included public education, construction site runoff controls, and outfall and water quality monitoring.

In 2011 local, State, and federal representatives, along with several non-profits, formed the Fairbanks Green Infrastructure Group to collaborate on Green Infrastructure projects in the Fairbanks area. Green infrastructure is an approach to water management that protects or mimics the natural water cycle. It can include both natural and engineered systems like rain gardens, permeable pavements, infiltration planters and rainwater harvesting systems. Examples of recent projects in Fairbanks include stormwater improvements at Shoreway Park downtown and stream bank restoration at the Fairbanks North Star Borough building. These types of projects, along with educational outreach, have played a significant role in cleaning up the Chena.

For more information on water quality in the state of Alaska, visit DEC's Water Quality Standards, Assessment, & Restoration website at:
<http://dec.alaska.gov/water/wqsar/index.htm>.

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