

Frequently Asked Questions:

2019 KENAI RIVER BEACH MONITORING PROGRAM

Frequently asked questions

What is the BEACH program?

The Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act was passed by the U.S. Congress in 2002 in response to increased occurrences of water-borne illnesses. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administers grant funds to states, tribes and territories under the Act to establish monitoring and public notification programs. The BEACH program has established national marine water quality monitoring and reporting standards for fecal waste contamination and notifies the public when levels exceed state standards.

Why monitor Kenai River beaches?

The Alaska BEACH program was initiated for the Kenai River beaches to evaluate potential health risks by fecal coliform and enterococci bacteria, and to notify the public when levels exceeded state recreation standards. Marine water samples were collected to monitor for fecal waste contamination during the recreational season **at the north and south Kenai River beaches, Warren Ames Bridge, and upstream and downstream of the gull colony**. During 2010-2014 and 2018, the Kenai River beaches were monitored during the personal use fishery (PUF) and recreational season (July – September). Monitoring will take place during the 2019 recreational and PUF seasons (May – September 2019).

Why were these locations chosen for monitoring?

The monitoring locations on the north and south Kenai River beaches (NKB2, NKB4, SKB2, and SKB3) are used for recreation during the PUF season. The Warren Ames bridge location (BRG1) is a reference location, upstream of the area most likely to be impacted by human activities during the PUF season. The monitoring locations by the gull rookery (KRG1, KRG2) serve as reference locations to determine fecal contamination close to area where the gulls are nesting. The monitoring locations selected for the 2019 beach sampling program are the same locations sampled in previous years.

What are the potential sources of bacteria?

Potential bacteria sources present along the Kenai River beaches are overwhelmingly fecal waste from seagulls and other birds, but test results from the 2014 recreational beach monitoring season included a single possible contribution from cow waste, dog, and one from human waste. Molecular Source Tracking (MST) will be used in 2019 to determine sources of bacteria before and during the PUF.

Is the water safe to swim or fish in?

When elevated fecal bacteria levels are present in the marine water, precautionary measures are advised. DEC recommends people avoid direct exposure, such as swimming in the water, and wash after contact with the marine water. Commonly documented health issues from swimming in bacteria contaminated recreational waters include gastrointestinal illness, respiratory illnesses, skin rashes, and ear, eye, and wound infections.

Is the fish safe to eat?

When elevated fecal bacteria levels are present, precautionary measures are advised. DEC recommends rinsing fish with clean water after they have been harvested from the area. As always, people should cook seafood to a minimum internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit to destroy pathogens.

Have any steps been taken to improve bacteria pollution on the Kenai Beaches?

The city of Kenai has implemented Best Management Practices (BMPs), undertaken since the 2014 bacteria monitoring results were analyzed. These BMPs include clearing fish carcasses from the beach each night during the PUF season and installing portable toilets for people using the recreational beaches. By conducting the 2018 and 2019 Kenai recreational beaches monitoring program, DEC is seeking information about possible improvements in the bacteria levels, as a result of the BMP practices.

What are the plans for this summer?

DEC plans to:

1. Monitor for at the North Kenai Beach, South Beach, Warren Ames Bridge, and the two gull rookery sites; and
2. Notify the public when levels exceed water quality recreation criterion.

What happens if there are elevated results?

DEC will continue to share the test results with the City of Kenai and other stakeholders. If the levels exceed state recreation standards, DEC will issue a press release and post it on the Alaska BEACH Program website <http://dec.alaska.gov/water/water-quality/beach-program/>. The City of Kenai may post an advisory sign at the affected beach.

What happens next?

The monitoring program will help support the development of recommendations for best management practices to reduce bacteria levels on the Kenai River beaches. The data collected will then be compared to Alaska Water Quality Standards to determine if an impairment decision is warranted, and to document this decision in the 2022 Integrated Report.

For Additional Program Information

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