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## Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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### **Elevated Levels of Enterococci and Fecal Coliform Bacteria Found at the South Kenai River Beach**

(KENAI, AK) – Recent water quality samples collected at the south Kenai River Beach 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 impacted by enterococci or fecal coliform bacteria may cause stomach aches, diarrhea, or ear, eye and skin infections. DEC recommends that beach users take normal precautions to avoid exposure, such as avoiding drinking or swimming in the water; washing if you come in 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.

South Kenai River Beach is located on the south bank of the Kenai River at its confluence with Cook Inlet. Water quality samples were collected on Tuesday July 12 and Thursday July 14, 2011. DEC continues to monitor water quality. If bacteria levels increase significantly, the City of Kenai will post advisory signs at the beach until sampling indicates that bacteria numbers have dropped to safe levels. Additional sampling results are expected Monday, July 18.

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 include dogs, humans, birds feeding on fish waste and food scraps left on the beach, and a large bird rookery just upriver from the beach.

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>