

Frequently Asked Questions:

2020 KENAI RIVER BEACH MONITORING PROGRAM

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 have been 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, 2018 and 2019, the Kenai River beaches were monitored during the personal use fishery (PUF) and recreational season (July – September). Monitoring is scheduled to take place during the 2020 recreational season (May – September 2020).

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 upstream and downstream of 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 2020 beach sampling program are the same locations sampled in previous years.

What are the potential sources of bacteria?

Fecal waste from seagulls and birds is the primary source of along Kenai River beaches. Waste from pet dogs is another common source of bacteria. Microbial source tracking (MST) is the tool used to trace bacteria to a host organisms. MST monitoring occurred in 2014, 2018, and 2019. Test results from these monitoring events indicated gulls were the primary source of bacteria. Other contributors include a possible hooved animal, dogs, and a few from human waste. MST will be used in 2020 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 continuing the Kenai recreational beaches monitoring program in 2020, DEC is seeking information about possible improvements in 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 <https://dec.alaska.gov/water/water-quality/beach-program/>. The City of Kenai may post an advisory sign at the affected beach.

What can I do to help?

Beach users can discourage gulls and other birds from congregating on the beach by properly disposing of their fish (chop waste into small pieces and throw into fast moving out flowing water), pack out all waste, and use provided outhouses and dumpsters. Pick up after your pets. Keep you and your family healthy by washing your hands after contacting river water, and before eating and drinking. Finally, stay up to date on current water quality conditions by visiting the ADEC Beach webpage: <https://dec.alaska.gov/water/water-quality/beach-program/>.

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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