



Anchorage Waterways Council

P.O. Box 241774

Anchorage, AK 99524

www.anchoragecreeks.org

Anchorage Waterways Council's Creek Report Card

"No creek left behind."

Dear Airport Heights, Fairview, Southern Addition, North Star, Rogers Park and Turnagain Community Councils:

The Municipality of Anchorage is about 2,000 mi² and has approximately 2,250 miles of creeks and rivers. These creeks and rivers are often listed as some of Anchorage's premier amenities. During the summer of 2012, 70-hardy citizen volunteers surveyed nearly 175 miles of these creeks for issues, problems, access, suggestions for projects and repairs and general comments. These volunteers "graded" the creeks on a variety of criteria, including human impacts, recreational opportunities, natural processes, and aesthetics. Specific findings will be provided to the appropriate agency or organization.

This survey was modeled after the Anchorage Park Foundation's Park Report Card as well as another 50+ citizen creek surveys around the U.S. and a number in other parts of the world. These citizen creek report cards have been encouraged by a number of organizations including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and American Rivers. The Anchorage program was sponsored by the Bullitt Foundation and the USFWS.

Additionally, the Anchorage Waterways Council has volunteer water-quality monitors along our creeks, and is the only organization that routinely monitors the water quality of our creeks.

With this note, the Anchorage Waterways Council (AWC) would like to provide information to you about the "state of the creeks" in your Community Council area. They are one of our urban assets, and **we ALL need to be involved in protecting and enhancing our creeks.**

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas J. Eley, Ph.D.

Creek Report Card Coordinator

Anchorage Waterways Council is a non-profit, membership organization

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Community Council(s): **Airport Heights, Fairview, Southern Addition, North Star, Rogers Park and Turnagain Creek(s): *Chester Creek***

Water Quality Monitoring: **Mouth of Chester Creek, Valley of the Moon Park, and University Lake where stream emerges from the lake.**

Issues:

- Chester Creek was completely surveyed from where the Middle and South Forks join to the mouth at Westchester Lagoon during summer 2012 by about 20 different individuals.
- The water was generally turbid and sediment filled due to the rainy summer. Water levels ranged from average to filled to the top of its banks, particularly after the September 2012 wind and rain storm.
- The State of Alaska, Department of Environmental Conservation considers Chester Creek to be “impaired water” due to high fecal coliform counts, which is a product of urban runoff (<http://www.dec.alaska.gov/water/wqsar/Docs/2010impairedwaters.pdf>). Considerable pet waste was seen along the lower sections of the creek, and pet waste has been shown to be a significant source of fecal coliform bacteria.
- Chester Creek water leaving University Lake has a low fecal coliform count as the lake appears to be acting as a settling pond for fecal coliform bacteria. By the time the water reaches Valley of the Moon Park the fecal coliform count has increased significantly, which might be a concern as I have seen children swimming in the water there. The water leaving the creek at the mouth has a significantly lower fecal coliform count and it appears that Westchester Lagoon is functioning as a settling pond for fecal coliform bacteria as the counts in the Lagoon are high.
- Chester Creek generally has had dissolved oxygen (DO) levels above 9 mg/l which is considered acceptable for good fishing waters. However, on several occasions, Chester Creek has closely approached the lower limit for DO. The State’s minimum requirement is 7 mg/l in waters for wildlife and the growth and propagation of other aquatic life.
- Dissolved oxygen naturally decreases in the summer due to the physiological activity of the fish, aquatic life and other organisms in Chester Creek. However, the decomposition of yard wastes dumped into the creek also results in the depletion of oxygen, and **yard wastes should not be dumped** into Chester Creek. A number of residents are dumping yard wastes into the creek, and some residents are cutting their lawns right to the edge of the creek removing the natural vegetation that protects the creek’s banks.
- Chester Creek is suffering from severe bank trampling particularly in the Valley of the Moon Park area, but there is an inter-agency (including Anchorage Waterways Council) group that is working on ways to mitigate the trampling. Bank trampling is also severe in the Chester Creek Greenbelt between Lake Otis and the New Seward Highway.
- Considerable trash was found in and along the creek, including bicycles, luggage, tires, construction materials, pallets, household and yard debris, cups, aluminum cans, fast food debris and plastic bags. Additionally, homeless camps appear to be another major source of trash and well-worn trails lead from the homeless camps to the creek.

- A number of culverts along the creek were plugged with debris, which can enhance flooding. The culverts need to be cleaned on a regular basis either by the Municipality or by a group of community volunteers under the guidance of the Municipality.
- Several homeless camps are found along the creek. One camp has a rope that allows people to lower themselves to the creek. Two of the camps are quite neat, but the rest are very trashy. Trash and human waste could be contaminating the creek. Some flooding was noted along much of the creek due to downed trees from the September 2012 wind storm.
- The biggest threat to Chester Creek is most likely from storm water runoff from roads, commercial properties and yards. Storm water runoff, and whatever it carries with it in the way of pollutants, ultimately ends up in our creeks and rivers and **is not routed** through the sewage treatment plant.
- Citizens living along the creek should work with the Municipality of Anchorage and State of Alaska to get Chester Creek off the Impaired Waters List.