



## Anchorage Waterways Council

P.O. Box 241774

Anchorage, AK 99524

[www.anchoragecreeks.org](http://www.anchoragecreeks.org)

## Anchorage Waterways Council's Creek Report Card

*"No creek left behind."*

Dear Turnagain, Campbell Park, Midtown and Spenard Community Councils:

The Municipality of Anchorage is about 2,000 mi<sup>2</sup> 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

[www.anchoragecreeks.org](http://www.anchoragecreeks.org)

Community Council(s): **Turnagain, Midtown and Spenard**

Creek(s): ***Fish Creek***

Water Quality Monitoring: **Consistently since 2004 at the end of LaHonda**

Issues:

- Fish Creek was completely surveyed where it emerges from its headwater at E 42<sup>nd</sup> and Lake Otis to the mouth of the creek. Also the tributaries and former tributaries were surveyed.
- In 1916, salmon still ran up Fish Creek, and it was a fully functioning watershed. Currently, it has a small population of trout, but the existence of salmon in Fish Creek is questionable.
- Since 1916, 73 percent of Fish Creek has disappeared. Fish Creek was one of the first Anchorage Creeks to suffer from development, road and railroad building, filling, and channelization. By 1964, the channelization and filling of Fish Creek was well underway.
- Fish Creek once ran through what is now the Sears Mall, and, if you ever visit BP's Energy Center and walk across the bridge that crosses what is now a ditch, you are crossing an old section of Fish Creek.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Building is built on a former lake on Fish Creek, and you could pick out the creek's course through the ACS complex until it was clear cut and built upon in summer 2012.
- From 42<sup>nd</sup> and Lake Otis to Shelikof, the creek is above ground and is important wildlife habitat. It then goes underground and emerges again in Spenard except for a brief daylighting at Cuddy Park.
- 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 Fish 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. In addition, the open section of the creek in Cuddy Park is the haunt of several hundred ducks, ravens and eagles as well as by geese and gulls in the summer months. People feed the ducks there causing them to concentrate in the winter and this concentration could be an additional source of fecal bacteria.
- Fish Creek has times exceed the State dissolved oxygen requirement and has had a dissolved oxygen level as low as 4.8 mg/l. The State's minimum requirement is 7 mg/l in waters for wildlife and the growth and propagation of fish and other aquatic life. Numerous scientific studies suggest that 4-5 mg/l of DO is the minimum amount that will support a large, diverse fish population. The DO level in good fishing waters generally averages about 9.0 mg/l.
- Dissolved oxygen naturally decreases in the summer due to the physiological activity of fish and other organisms. 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 Fish Creek.
- Fish Creek has recorded pH as low as pH 6.0, which exceeded the State standards of a minimum of 6.5 and a maximum of 8.5 for wildlife and the growth and propagation of fish and other aquatic life.
- Considerable trash was found in and along the exposed sections of the creek, including bicycles, tires, construction materials, pallets, household debris and plastic bags.
- Some flooding was noted along much of the creek due to downed trees from the September 2012 wind storm.

- The biggest threat to Fish 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 Fish Creek off the Impaired Waters List.
- Lastly, a number of people have voiced their desire to see more of Fish Creek opened back up from its underground home and restored to a more natural condition. Perhaps this would be a good topic of discussion for the Community Councils.