



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 Community Council:

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**

Creek(s): **North Fork of Chester Creek**

Water Quality Monitoring: **None**

Issues:

- The North Fork of Chester Creek was completely surveyed from where it emerges from a culvert at 15th and Lake Otis downstream to where the North Fork enters the main stem of Chester Creek.
- 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.
- The main issue found along the North Fork of Chester Creek was an excessive amount of trash, including paint cans, construction materials, residential wastes, plastic bags, cups, plastic and glass bottles, and aluminum cans. Perhaps the Community Council could sponsor a creek cleanup along the North Fork of Chester Creek. Cleanup information and supplies can be obtained from AWC.
- One culvert was almost completely blocked by trash. 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.
- Dissolved oxygen naturally decreases in the summer due to the physiological activity of fish, aquatic life and other organisms in the North Fork of 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.
- Some flooding was noted along much of the creek due to downed trees from the September 2012 wind storm.
- Several footbridges were found across the creek, and these bridges can act as debris dams in flood events and increase the impact of flooding.
- The biggest threat to the Middle Fork of Chester Creek is 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.
- Another threat is the snow dump at Sitka and 15th, which, in part, drains into the North Fork of Chester Creek, carrying with it any pollutants and debris picked up during snow plowing.
- Citizens living along the creek are concerned with the impact of the old landfill at Merrill Field and the possible impacts on water quality. This would be a good topic for the Community Council to take up with the Municipality of Anchorage at a Community Council meeting.