

Focus on: Mid-Yakima River Basin Bacteria TMDL



More information

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ADA Accessibility

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Background

The Mid-Yakima River basin is located in the south-central portion of Washington State surrounding and including the cities of Yakima, Union Gap, Moxee, and Tieton, as well as the community of Cowiche. The **Mid-Yakima River Basin Bacteria Total Maximum Daily Load** (Mid-Yakima River Bacteria TMDL) project area encompasses over 338 square miles and contains three sub-basins: Cowiche Creek, Moxee Drain and Wide Hollow Creek.

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) has determined that surface waters in the Mid-Yakima River Basin have fecal coliform bacteria and *E. coli* levels greater than allowed under state water quality standards for surface waters (Chapter 173-201A WAC). A TMDL study was completed and the results were used to develop (1) appropriate target reductions for bacteria pollution, and (2) an implementation plan that lays out roles and responsibilities for the cleanup process.

Why are fecal coliform and *E. coli* bacteria a concern?

High levels of bacteria pollution in streams and lakes are a risk for disease to humans and animals that are exposed to contaminated water. Washington State is required to protect the “most sensitive” beneficial uses found in water bodies, which include the ability to wade, swim and fish in the state’s lakes, rivers and streams (recreational uses). The Mid-Yakima River Bacteria TMDL will specifically reduce bacteria pollution within the Cowiche Creek, Moxee Drain and Wide Hollow Creek sub-basins.



Figure 1 Photo of South Fork of Cowiche Creek.



Figure 1 Ecology Environmental Assessment Program staff collecting bacteria sample in Wide Hollow Creek.



Figure 3 Photo of current conditions on Moxee drain.

What have we found in the Mid-Yakima River Basin?

In many areas of the Mid-Yakima River Basin, fecal coliform bacteria and *E. coli* numbers are much greater than the maximum allowed under state water quality standards, and those numbers are significantly higher between April and October than during the rest of the year, potentially affecting recreational uses in the river.

What actions can help reduce fecal coliform bacteria and *E. coli*?

Ecology staff are working with a wide range of partners who help conduct studies, serve on the advisory committee, participate in planning, and conduct or oversee cleanup activities. We also look forward to working with all residents of the project area. Some key actions that groups and individuals can take to help reduce bacteria include:

- Improve stormwater management practices.
- Protect existing streamside (riparian) buffers, and plant new ones where possible. Riparian buffers filter contaminated runoff.
- Identify and renovate failing septic systems.
- Modify livestock management practices to reduce animal contact with surface water.
- Improve irrigation practices to reduce the transport of bacteria into adjacent surface water.
- Provide public education regarding pet waste management.

How can you participate?

We need your help. Improving the water quality will require action by many people. If you would like to be on a mailing list to receive information related to water quality in the Mid-Yakima sub-basin, please contact Cole Provence at (509) 575-2490 or cole.provence@ecy.wa.gov.

Information gathered from interested citizens and organizations will be used to develop a final detailed water cleanup strategy. The strategy will identify how, when, where, and what activities can be implemented.