



ANCHORAGE WATERWAYS COUNCIL

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Facebook (Anchorage Waterways Council)

January 16, 2017

Ms. Kristi Bischofberger
Watershed Management Services
4700 Elmore Rd.
Anchorage AK 99507-1554

Re: APDES Permit AKS-052558, Section 4.1.8

Dear Ms. Bischofberger,

Per your request for an evaluation of monitoring results in respect to “public education to reduce fecal coliform bacteria in the outfall, and other trends or characteristics that may appear as a result of monitoring” (p. 35), please see my comments below regarding work accomplished by Anchorage Waterways Council (AWC) for outreach and public education.

1. Comparison of 2010 Watershed Perception Survey Responses to 2014 Watershed Perception Survey Responses:

Generally, there was improvement demonstrated in the watershed perception survey responses in areas that are important for this component of the report. One survey question was, “What do you think is the biggest threat to the water quality of Anchorage lakes and streams?”. In both 2010 and 2014, respondents considered “Animal Waste” to be the second biggest threat to Anchorage’s water quality, second only to “Stormwater Runoff”. In 2010 concern with “Animal Waste” and water quality garnered 10% of the responses, and in 2014 it was 19.2%—essentially a doubling in numbers. It is rewarding to see a 100% increase in recognition of “Animal Waste” as a threat to water quality.

The survey also asked pet owners about the frequency of cleaning up after their dogs, “If you own a dog or dogs, do you pick up after your pet when out?”. Those respondents who answered that they “Always” clean up were tallied at 30% in 2014 up 5% from 2010 (25%). And at the opposite end of the survey, those who “Never” cleaned up dropped from 4% in 2010 to approximately 1% in 2014. Both of these responses show an improvement which we attribute to education and outreach.

Finally, one survey question that is germane but not specific to “Animal Waste” asked, “How much responsibility for water quality of Anchorage waterways do residents have?”. In 2010 approximately 40% responded that residents very much have a responsibility, and in 2014 it increased to nearly 60%. This is generally a good sign for all forms of impacts on Anchorage’s creeks when there is a personal assumption of responsibility and stewardship.

2. Citizen response to outreach and education regarding waterfowl feeding at Cuddy Family Midtown Park:

During Alaska's FY 2016, AWC received funding from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) for a project that we have long lobbied for—addressing the feeding of waterfowl which resulted in large populations of geese and ducks and degraded water quality from high fecal coliform (FC) counts at Cuddy Family Midtown Park. This project took almost the entire one year grant period to accomplish and involved development of signage that was designed to attract viewers and explain the consequences of humans feeding waterfowl. It is well known that the typical “Do not feed the birds” signs just don't work, so a creative approach was taken. The signage had multiple messages (in minimal words) that were provided at in at least three different ways and was primarily visual graphics. The final signs were colorful and involved an interactive component. Four stationary signs were placed strategically around the Cuddy ponds for maximum exposure to popular feeding areas. The sign design was also adapted for display on the back of 5 Municipality of Anchorage People Mover buses for several months over the summer. In addition, nine news stories (TV and paper) were done throughout the year on the fecal coliform problem and the solutions applied. Numerous posts on the issue were put out in e-newsletters and in social media such as Facebook.

Following up on this first year grant was a related ADEC project for FY 2017 that was to interview Cuddy Park visitors which occurred over summer and fall of 2016. One part of the project was entirely observational—watching park visitors come to Cuddy to see what they did, if they read the signs, and if they fed the ducks and geese. The other part of the survey was a face-to-face questionnaire conducted by AWC's Dr. Thom Eley over several visits. Of 48 interviews, 4 sets of visitors specifically came to feed the waterfowl (2 were adults only and 2 were families with children). Two said they had read the signs and two said they had not. The latter two were directed to the signage, the first two were “hard core” and continued to feed the waterfowl. All the remaining respondents were asked what they learned from the park signage and 23% of those answering mentioned the impact on water quality. This is a positive aspect. They also learned some other things from the signage about the nutritional problems with wild birds and human food, food dependence, overcrowding, etc., but the cause and effect on water quality is considered very important.

A very positive result from the public outreach at Cuddy Park were the FC results that were analyzed by SGS Labs at no cost. Through their generosity, AWC was able to collect and get results for 3 FC samples on a monthly basis from April 14, 2016 to September 13, 2016. FC counts, which reached as high as 4000 colonies/100 ml of water in the main waterfowl area in July and August fell to approximately 200 colonies/100 ml in September. Granted, some birds may have started their migration by then—meaning reduced numbers—but many geese were still observed on the park and library grounds eating grass—what they should be eating. Most geese were gone by November. During this winter, several hundred ducks remain in the area, although many of them are sitting in the upper parking lots on 40th Ave. Straw has been spread out in the parking lot by an unknown person or persons, and a few people have been observed still feeding the overwintering ducks. They drive into the parking lot and dump bags of some type of feed on the ground for the ducks. Because there are no specific rules or code about feeding the birds, there is no enforcement and we have to rely on people understanding that they are creating this problem of overwintering by feeding them (while most of those feeding think they are “saving” the ducks from starvation). We believe that the 2017 season will be important to see

if there is a general downward trend in feeding and the associated problems especially when the geese return. Water quality will be tested throughout the same period in 2017 for FC and analyzed by SGS Labs.

The above examples, in my opinion, show a positive upward trend in human behavior regarding the issue of fecal coliform. The original survey from 2010 and 2014 will be repeated again in 2019 or sooner.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need clarification.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cherie", is positioned above the typed name.

Cherie Northon, Ph.D.
Executive Director