

Long Tom Watershed Council

BY PAUL REED

The Willamette River and most of its tributaries, at times, fail to meet standards for bacterial pollution, especially fecal coliform bacteria. This holds true for the Long Tom watershed.

Data collection by the Council, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the City of Eugene show that current levels of the fecal coliform E. coli in some parts of the watershed indicate that the amount of fecal-matter reaching streams exceed what would be expected from wildlife alone.

Escheria coli, or E. coli for short, is a bacterium commonly found in most lakes and streams. It grows in the intestinal track of all warm-blooded animals and most strains of coliform are relatively harmless. Notable exceptions have been cases of illness and even death where foods and water have been contaminated with particular strains of E. coli and consumed without proper preparation or pasteurization.

Water-borne diseases from bacteria such as E.coli, Salmonella and Cryptosporidium parvum have occurred in other parts of the country, however, there have been no documented cases in Lane County of people becoming ill from contact with these bacterium in lakes or streams. Livestock may have a greater risk of contracting a bacterial disease from surface waters when they drink from or wade in streams.

Potential contamination from E. coli in water comes from many sources: sewer overflows and storm water runoff, failing septic systems, livestock waste from farms, feces from wild animals and pets, waste discharge from boats and even swimmers. Water quality regulators use E.

coli levels as an indicator of the amount of fecal contamination in streams, lakes and ground water.

This fecal matter is like adding fertilizer to our waterways. It promotes the growth of algae and other aquatic plants which compete with fish for dissolved oxygen in the water. Low levels of dissolved oxygen in the water can weaken or kill fish and other aquatic species living in the watershed.

Reducing fecal contamination of our local waterways is one way that we can all play a role in improving watershed health. Some things that you can do to help:

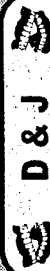
Fence livestock and pets away from streams and wetlands. Make sure that wastes will be dropped away from water-bodies.

Place animal barns and manure storage well away from streams.

Cover manure piles to prevent rain from carrying any runoff into streams or concentrating seepage into ground water. Apply manure to the ground carefully, and not near streams or runoff ditches. Clean up pet waste and flush it, bury it, or wrap it and put it in the trash.

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