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## Experts discuss contamination in Yavapai County creeks



Nicholas Balik, Prescott College Graduate Student, takes tests water for E. coli in Butte Creek. (Jesse Bertel/Courier)



By Jesse Bertel | @jessebertel

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## The creeks are polluted in Prescott, AZ



Although cleanliness of creeks varies from day to day depending on many different variables, according to experts, the creeks in Yavapai County are polluted, which in turn makes the lakes polluted.

Historically, waterways have been at the center of urban development because clean water is the source of life. So when the bodies of water are polluted throughout a city, it affects all of the inhabitants.

Matthew Killeen, environmental coordinator for the City of Prescott, explained that a large amount of the pollution comes from human or animal waste.

“In the creeks of Prescott, we’ve got 12 creeks that have been identified as impaired from E. coli, and that’s really just an indicator of fecal contamination,” Killeen said. “At some point, every warm-bodied animal and person has that in their belly. It exists in soils and so it’s a relatively easy indicator of the potential for fecal contamination through sewer lines or other sources.”

According to Prescott College graduate student Nicholas Balik, one of the ways we can tell how clean the waterways are is to do continuous water monitoring, and Prescott College contributes to this monitoring.

“We monitor Butte Creek and we monitor Miller and we monitor e-coli,” Balik said. “When E. coli gets above a certain standard, we have to report it to ADQ and the city of Prescott. Through that monitoring we’re able to see spikes and then when we inform the city of Prescott, they send one or two individuals out to check out the area. So there is ongoing monitoring happening at a relatively fast pace.”

E. coli isn't the only pollutant that affects the creeks. Cars drip oils onto parking spots, old sewage lines leak, trash builds up around dumpsters or other places, pet waste builds up in yards and rain washes it all into the creeks.

According to Killeen, the best time to monitor pollutants entering the waterways is when it's raining.

"When we have a precipitation event, that first flush of water across the city streets and gutters has a tendency to bring pollutants down into our creeks," Killeen explained. "So those points in time we are out there monitoring to get a sense of where pollutants are coming from and what we can do to reduce them to the greatest extent possible."

Michael Byrd, executive director of Prescott Creeks Organization wants to install restrooms in public places as part of the effort to clean up the creeks in Yavapai County.

One year after the installation of a public restroom near Miller Creek, it's too soon to tell if it has made any environmental impact. Byrd is hoping to have a full environmental impact study completed by next year.

According to Byrd, installing a public restroom near the creek was a challenge, but a necessary step in beginning to clean up the creeks.

"The primary goal with the bathroom was to ultimately improve surface water quality," Byrd said. "Giving folks a place to go to the bathroom in a way that all that waste ends up in the proper waste streams where it goes down to the wastewater treatment plant, et cetera, was important because know there are folks here in the community that have to use the creek because there aren't a whole lot of public restrooms."

Balik explained that everyone can contribute to keeping the creeks clean.

"The best thing you can do is pick up your pet waste," Balik said. "If you see trash, pick it up. And you know, if you smell a funky smell, let the city know. It might be that there's a sewer leak and they will be out promptly to check it out."

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A water test is in progress in Butte Creek. (Jesse Bertel/Courier)



Outdated sewage lines cross Butte Creek on Friday, Feb. 7, 2020. (Jesse Bertel/Courier)

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