

# River Report Card Grades Freshwater Health Risks in Los Angeles County

*Environmental group Heal the Bay ranks local freshwater recreation zones and popular swimming holes based on levels of bacterial pollution*

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Monday, May 20, 2019) – Heal the Bay today released the annual River Report Card, which assigns water quality color-grades of Red, Yellow, or Green for 27 freshwater sites in Los Angeles County based on bacteria levels in 2018 and prior years. The River Report Card is the most comprehensive water quality report to date on bacterial pollution in freshwater recreation areas within the Los Angeles River Watershed, the Malibu Creek Watershed, and the San Gabriel River Watershed.

Freshwater recreation season officially kicks off on Memorial Day, making this a critical time for public awareness about potential health risks in local waterbodies and how to stay safe. Popular freshwater areas are used for swimming, wading, fishing, kayaking, and other outdoor activities, especially during summer months when communities seek relief from warm Southern California temperatures.

## **Here are the major findings from Heal the Bay's 2018 report:**

- Over half of all the water quality samples taken at freshwater sites in 2018 received Green grades – meaning bacterial levels were not a cause for concern at the time the water was tested.
- There is still a significant risk of getting sick from freshwater contact in Los Angeles County during dry weather. In 2018, forty-three percent of water quality samples monitored by Heal the Bay came back as Yellow or Red, signaling a moderate to high public health risk.
- Freshwater sites in more natural areas tended to earn better grades than freshwater sites near development.
- The River Report Card features a Top 10 Honor Roll of the freshwater sites with the best water quality grades overall. Six locations earned perfect Green grades every time, including four sites in the San Gabriel River Watershed and two sites in the Upper L.A. River Watershed. Heal the Bay recommends heading to Hermit Falls and the East Fork San Gabriel River areas for freshwater swimming, based on the 2018 water quality analysis. Water quality conditions are subject to change so it's best to check the latest available data when choosing a swimming spot.
- The River Report Card includes a Top 10 Freshwater Fails list. Taking the top spot, with the worst grades overall, was Hansen Dam. Eighty percent of grades at this City of L.A. swimming site were Red.
- Better State and regional oversight and funding are needed for monitoring and public notice of water quality in freshwater recreation sites. Monitoring protocols and public notification in L.A. County are not standardized, and government agencies only test for *E. coli*. Testing should also include the fecal indicator bacteria *Enterococcus*. Solely monitoring for *E. coli* may be putting the public at unnecessary risk.

**The annual River Report Card 2018 is available at:**

<https://healthebay.org/river-report-card-2018/>

### **Tips for enjoying and staying safe in L.A.'s rivers, streams, and creeks**

Before heading to a freshwater recreation area in the Los Angeles region check out Heal the Bay's River Report Card at [healthebay.org/riverreportcard](http://healthebay.org/riverreportcard). If water quality is poor (Yellow or Red), consider choosing a site that has good water quality instead.

People can also minimize risk by limiting water contact, avoiding submerging their heads underwater, avoiding hand-to-face water contact, and washing off after water contact, using soap and clean water. For all water recreation, users should avoid entering the water with an open wound, if immunocompromised, or after a rainfall.

### **About the River Report Card**

Nonprofit group Heal the Bay believes people have a right to know about the conditions of local waterbodies, and to make informed decisions about how they want to experience them. Heal the Bay began monitoring freshwater recreation sites in 2014 and developed the River Report Card program in 2017 to provide easy-to-understand water quality information to the public.

Water quality grades are based on the levels of fecal indicator bacteria (*E. coli* and/or *Enterococcus*) and are displayed as Red, Yellow, or Green. Green means there is a low risk of illness when there is contact with the water. Yellow indicates a moderate risk, while Red signals a high risk.

Since Heal the Bay started monitoring freshwater recreation sites and making water quality data public, some positive changes have included increased bacterial monitoring and public notification in L.A. River recreation zones as well as public outreach through emails, websites, and other online means by government agencies collecting water quality information. The River Report Card 2018 includes additional recommendations for water quality monitoring and public notification protocols to protect public health.

Heal the Bay also manages the Beach Report Card and NowCast, available at [beachreportcard.org](http://beachreportcard.org), which provides A-to-F letter-grades for water quality at hundreds of beaches on the West Coast.

### **About Heal the Bay**

Heal the Bay is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to making Southern California coastal waters and watersheds safe, healthy and clean. We use science, education, community action and advocacy to pursue our mission. Learn more about Heal the Bay at [healthebay.org](http://healthebay.org)

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