HEAL THE BAY
START WHERE YOU ARE

2025

River Report Card

2025

River Report Card

Heal the Bay would like to acknowledge that we are located on the traditional lands of the Tongva and Chumash People and pay our respects to elders past, present, and emerging.

Heal the Bay is an environmental non-profit dedicated to making the coastal waters and watersheds of Greater Los Angeles safe, healthy and clean. To fulfill their mission, they use science, education, community action, and advocacy. The River Report Card program is funded by grants from:

Heal the Bay believes people have a right to know about the quality of the water where they swim and play. We are pleased to provide our community with this science-based, easy-to-use report card. This annual report can be used to make decisions about where to get in the water, as well as policies to protect public health and the environment.

Cover: Benedict Street (Frogspot) in the Elysian Valley-Recreation Zone / Photo: Heal the Bay

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Upper L.A. River / Photo: Heal the Bay

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Heal the Bay is proud to release the eighth annual River Report Card (RRC), summarizing recreational water quality trends for summer 2025 across 35 freshwater recreation sites in Los Angeles (L.A.) County.

Rock Pool, Malibu Creek State Park / Photo: Heal the Bay

L.A. County's freshwater rivers, streams, and lakes receive multitudes of visitors yearly, providing essential recreation and green space, and supporting cultural practice. However, many of these sites continue to face fecal indicator bacteria (FIB) pollution. These bacteria are not typically harmful themselves but instead indicate the presence of pathogens that can cause infections, skin irritation, and respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses. This report aims to highlight water quality concerns, advocate for improvements, and empower community members with information to enjoy natural spaces safely.

This is the third year the RRC has implemented letter grades (A+, A, B, C, D, and F) for weekly and annual assessments, providing a clearer understanding of water quality risks compared to the previous color grading system (green, yellow, and red). The 2025 report provides the Freshwater Fails List, the worst freshwater sites receiving an F annual grade; and the Honor Roll List, the best freshwater sites receiving an A+ annual grade; along with a deeper analysis of water quality trends, focusing on *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), the predominant bacteria, across sites.

Surface water quality in L.A. County declined overall in 2025 compared to 2024, driven largely by persistently poor grades in the Lower L.A. River Watershed, reflecting ongoing impacts from urban runoff and the continued need for expanded stormwater capture across L.A. County. In the Upper L.A. River Watershed, results were more variable, with several high-performing sites but a notable increase in failing grades, particularly at newly monitored locations at sites potentially influenced by post-fire runoff from the 2025 Eaton Fire. The Eaton Fire also affected site accessibility, leading to temporary closures of some freshwater recreation sites that have been long-term monitoring locations. While some sites, primarily those higher in the watershed within more open space areas, showed localized improvements, other recreation areas experienced declining water quality, highlighting the complex and uneven patterns of bacterial pollution across the watershed. This highlights emerging pollution concerns and the need for targeted source identification and continued monitoring.

Honor Roll List

Water quality was excellent at sites higher in the watersheds and in open spaces, such as the Upper San Gabriel River Watershed and the Upper L.A. River Watershed. Among the 35 sites sampled during the summer of 2025, 29% of L.A. County's freshwater recreation sites received an A+ annual grade, reflecting consistently excellent water quality with no bacterial exceedances. The A+ grades for these 10 sites indicate they are consistently safe for swimming, earning them a spot on our Honor Roll List.

- Malibu Creek at Rock Pool (Malibu Creek Watershed)
- East Fork at Cattle Canyon (Upper San Gabriel River Watershed)
- East Fork at Graveyard Canyon (Upper San Gabriel River Watershed)
- Upper Cattle Canyon (Upper San Gabriel River Watershed)
- Upper East Fork (Upper San Gabriel River Watershed)
- Upper North Fork (Upper San Gabriel River Watershed)
- Upper West Fork (Upper San Gabriel River Watershed)
- Gould Mesa Creek (Upper L.A. River Watershed)
- Switzer Falls (Upper L.A. River Watershed)
- Big Tujunga at Vogel Flats (Upper L.A. River Watershed)

Freshwater Fails List

In large part due to urban runoff, water quality declines downstream in heavily urbanized areas, as has been previously noted in Heal the Bay's RRC. Of the 35 monitored sites, 31% received F annual grades in summer 2025, indicating a high risk of illness. These 11 sites consistently exceeded the state standard for bacteria in water, earning a spot on our Freshwater Fails List. This year, all six sites in the Lower L.A. River Watershed had extremely poor water quality. These six sites were joined by two recurring sites and three new sites from the Upper L.A. River Watershed. These sites are within urbanized areas surrounded by highways, industrial and warehouse facilities, and high population density. The Freshwater Fails List ranks the sites with F annual grades, with the first ranking indicating the worst water quality.

- #1 (tie) L.A. River below Rio Hondo Confluence (Lower L.A. River Watershed)
- #1 (tie) L.A. River at Hollydale Park (Lower L.A. River Watershed)
- #2 L.A. River below Compton Creek Confluence (Lower L.A. River Watershed)
- #3 L.A. River at Willow Street (Lower L.A. River Watershed)
- #4 Eaton Wash at Sierra Madre Boulevard (Upper L.A. River Watershed)
- #5 (tie) Santa Anita Wash at Colorado Boulevard (Upper L.A. River Watershed)
- #5 (tie) L.A. River at Riverfront Park (Lower L.A. River Watershed)
- #6 Compton Creek (Lower L.A. River Watershed)
- #7 Tujunga Wash at Hansen Dam (L.A. River Watershed—Recreation Zones)
- #8 Arroyo Seco at Brookside Golf Course (Upper L.A. River Watershed)
- #9 Bull Creek (Upper L.A. River Watershed)

Watershed News

The stormwater and dry weather urban runoff that flows through L.A. County, from inland communities into tributaries, ultimately reaches our oceans and beaches. This runoff has largely gone unaccounted for until recently. Stormwater capture projects improve water quality by diverting and treating dry and wet weather runoff prior to being discharged into a freshwater stream. This report will cover projects that have utilized green infrastructure, nature-based solutions, and community-scale projects that capture stormwater while also providing benefits to communities.

Inell Woods Park, Eaton Wash Stormwater Capture Project, Bowtie Wetland Demonstration, and Urban Orchard Park exemplify projects that combine environmental benefit, community stewardship, and river revitalization efforts. The Eaton Wash project is located in a unique area where runoff from the Upper L.A. River watershed will be collected before entering the L.A. River. This is significant because the site serves as a transition point between urban land use and natural space near Eaton Canyon where the project can help maintain good water quality in the upper sections of this watershed. In contrast, Inell Woods Park and Urban Orchard Park are both situated in the Lower L.A. River Watershed, where previous RRC data has shown persistent bacteria pollution. These parks allow L.A. County to create recreational spaces that reduce pollution loading, expand green space in park-poor neighborhoods, and support local needs while addressing environmental concerns. There has also been growing interest in restoration projects along the L.A. River. The Bowtie Wetlands Demonstration serves as an educational, ecologically beneficial, and sustainable model for river restoration. By treating runoff that would otherwise be discharged directly into the L.A. River, these projects help reduce pollutants, provide critical habitat, and support ecosystem services.

As L.A. County deals with the uncertainty of climate change, the public has a unique opportunity to support projects like these that reflect environmental stewardship, sustainability, and climatic resilience. Heal the Bay encourages residents who support projects like this to participate in the Safe, Clean Water Program's Community Strengths and Needs Assessment. Community feedback helps inform future funding decisions and ensures that investments continue to reflect local priorities, improve watershed health, and expand access to cleaner, greener public spaces across L.A County.

Heal the Bay Recommendations

Stay Informed: Check the RRC for freshwater recreation site information and weekly summer water quality grades.

Protect and Restore L.A. County's Waterways: Support work that expands freshwater monitoring near fire-prone areas and downstream locations where data are limited, support projects that emphasize watershed restoration to improve natural filtration and climate resilience, and demand action from decision makers to plan for wildfire impacts, including post-fire watershed recovery.

Strive for Safe, Clean Water: Reduce pollutants entering waterways by addressing urban runoff through nature-based solutions and stormwater capture programs while strengthening trash reduction efforts and improving maintenance of local water bodies.

INTRODUCTION

Heal the Bay is proud to present the eighth annual River Report Card (RRC). This report provides an overview of recreational water quality trends across 35 freshwater recreation sites for summer 2025.

Compton Creek Confluence, Lower L.A. River / Photo: Heal the Bay

The rivers, streams, and lakes in L.A. County attract many visitors each year and are essential for providing recreation, green space, and cultural activities to surrounding communities. Our goal is to raise awareness about water quality issues, advocate for improvements, and empower community members with the knowledge they need to stay safe and healthy while enjoying local recreational activities like swimming and kayaking.

Unfortunately, many freshwater recreation sites in L.A. County suffer from fecal indicator bacteria (FIB) pollution. These bacteria are not harmful themselves but indicate the presence of pathogens that can cause infections and various illnesses. Sources of FIB pollution include urban runoff, leaks or spills from wastewater systems, illegal discharges, failing wastewater infrastructure, and natural sources like wildlife waste. Unlike ocean beaches, there is no statewide oversight, standardization, or funding for freshwater FIB monitoring, nor are there mandated public water quality notifications for freshwater recreational areas. Regulatory permits for discharge into surface water often require monitoring, but the data collected are not typically shared with the public in an accessible format. **Heal the Bay is committed to ensuring everyone is informed about the conditions of their local waters, enabling them to make safe choices.** Since 2014, Heal the Bay has monitored freshwater recreational areas and introduced the RRC in 2017 to expand water quality information and make it available for free to the public.

In 2025, Heal the Bay welcomed 13 local college and university students to the Stream Team, our river monitoring program. Stream Team Associates this year came from California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), University of California, Los Angeles, University of Southern California, and University of California, Berkeley. Additionally, our ongoing partnerships with Los Angeles Trade Technical College and CSULB have significantly expanded our operational reach. By using additional laboratory facilities to process river water samples, we have enhanced our capacity for water quality monitoring and analysis. As the RRC program continues to expand, our commitment to ensuring high water quality and protecting public health remains a top priority at Heal the Bay.

Since Heal the Bay began monitoring freshwater sites and publicizing water quality data, positive changes have occurred, including increased bacterial monitoring and public notifications in the L.A. River Watershed—Recreation Zones. Additionally, users of the weekly RRC saw significant changes starting in the summer of 2023, when we updated our grading system to letter grades for weekly and annual grades (Appendix A). With the new grading system, Heal the Bay provides A through F grades for 35 freshwater recreation sites. In addition to grading each site, Heal the Bay implements a Freshwater Fails List and Honor Roll List. The 2025 Freshwater Fails List includes sites that earn F annual grades, with high bacteria levels that pose significant health risks. In contrast, the Honor Roll List reflects sites with A+ annual grades, proving excellent water quality and bacteria levels consistently well below health standards, posing the lowest risk of illness. For more information on how sites are graded, see the River Report Card Basics section.

Wildfire and Water Quality

Wildfires are becoming more frequent, intense, and destructive as a result of climate change. Increasingly, fires are no longer confined to wildland areas but are burning directly through densely populated urban communities. These urban fires pose unique and compounding risks to surface water quality because they generate large volumes of ash and debris from burned structures, vehicles, and infrastructure in addition to natural vegetation.

The January 2025 L.A. wildfires exemplify this growing threat. From January 7th to January 31st, 2025, a series of fires burned nearly 124 square miles across the region, destroyed more than 16,000 structures, and caused significant loss of life. The Eaton and Palisades fires, driven by extreme Santa Ana wind events, devastated communities including Pacific Palisades, Malibu, Altadena, and Pasadena. While L.A. County has experienced wildfires in the past, the scale and severity of the 2025 events were unprecedented, with entire neighborhoods burned, including areas immediately adjacent to bodies of water.

Wildfires can significantly degrade water quality, particularly through post-fire runoff. The loss of vegetation reduces the landscape's ability to intercept rainfall and promote infiltration, while heat-altered soils often become hydrophobic, a process in which the soil repels water, further increasing runoff during storm events. As a result, even relatively small rain events following a fire can generate large pulses of storm runoff that re-mobilize contaminants. These materials are readily transported into rivers, streams, and lakes, where they can elevate concentrations of nutrients, metals, and organic pollutants and contribute to degraded water quality.

In the highly urbanized watersheds of L.A. County, extensive storm drain networks have been built to efficiently transport runoff directly into our waterways, which, unfortunately, limits opportunities for natural filtration or attenuation even further. This rapid transport of pollutants can lead to water quality impairments that affect recreational use and public health. While wildfires can introduce a wide range of contaminants to our waterways, this report focuses specifically on FIB, which are used to assess recreational water quality and public health risk. The 2025 RRC examines whether and how wildlife-related landscape changes and post-wildfire runoff may influence bacterial pollution levels in rivers, streams, and lakes across L.A. County by comparing data from the 2024 summer recreation season (pre-fire) to the 2025 summer recreation season (post-fire). By focusing on bacteria, this report helps evaluate potential public health implications of wildfire impacts on freshwater recreation sites, while recognizing that wildfires may also affect water quality through additional chemical and physical pathways not captured by bacterial monitoring alone.[1,2]

1 Cira, M., et al. 2022

2 Raoelison, O. D., et al. 2023

RIVER REPORT CARD BASICS

L.A. County's rivers, streams, and lakes host numerous popular recreation areas that are vital to many people's quality of life.

Sampling, Locations, and Dates

Heal the Bay collected water samples weekly during the summer months of May through September at 12 freshwater sites in L.A. County. Three sites are located in the Malibu Creek Watershed, three sites in the Recreation Zones, and six sites in the Lower L.A. River Watershed. Heal the Bay uses the defined substrate technology method to quantify FIB, total coliform, *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), and Enterococci, utilizing Colilert and Enterolert (IDEXX, Westbrook, ME). There is plenty of evidence that Enterococci are a more health protective metric, which is why Heal the Bay continues to monitor these bacteria; however, the state standards' criteria in freshwater focus on *E. coli*.[3] As a result, recreation sites are graded using only results from our *E. coli* analysis. If, during a sampling period, there is a rain event (wet weather), the RRC does not issue water quality grades due to potential physical hazards associated with sampling in freshwater areas during and immediately after rain events. Instead, Heal the Bay provides advisories to alert the public about these risks, prioritizing safety, and raising awareness of the potential dangers associated with rain events.[4] Therefore, the RRC grades dry weather data only.

During the 2025 recreation season, the Stream Team collected 139 water samples over 18 weeks at 12 freshwater sites. Complete field and laboratory protocols are available in Heal the Bay's Quality Assurance Project Plan, which was reviewed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), the California State Water Resources Control Board, and the City of L.A. Bureau of Sanitation and the Environment's (LASAN) Environmental Monitoring Division.[5]

In addition to the Stream Team monitoring program, Heal the Bay compiles water quality data from other monitoring programs and government agencies that oversee some of the same locations that Heal the Bay monitors, including sites in Elysian Valley Recreation Zones and in the Upper L.A. River, as well as 23 other locations throughout the LA Basin. Typically, agencies collect water samples every week during the summer months and quantify levels of *E. coli*, which is the indicator used to determine compliance with freshwater recreational standards in California. For the L.A. River Watershed, data is collected and shared by the Los Angeles River Watershed Monitoring Program (LARWMP) and LASAN's Environmental Monitoring Division. The LARWMP collected 394 water samples during 15 weeks for 15 freshwater sites.[6] The San Gabriel River Regional Monitoring Program (SGRRMP) collected 179 water samples during 15 weeks for nine freshwater sites.[7] Data have been collected by these groups for many years and were made public starting in 2017 for the L.A. River Watershed and in 2018 for the San Gabriel River Watershed. Site locations, monitoring groups, and date ranges are detailed in Appendix B.

3 State Water Resources Control Board, Bacterial Objectives

4 We want to remind the public to avoid contact with waterways for at least three days following a rain event of 0.1 inches or more. Rainfall increases the risk of flooding and swift currents while also carrying harmful contaminants into local waterways, posing serious health risks.

5 Los Angeles Regional Watershed Monitoring Program

6 City of L.A., Bureau of Sanitation and the Environment (LASAN)

7 San Gabriel River Regional Monitoring Program

Annual Grading Methodology

Heal the Bay implemented an updated grading methodology in June 2023 that utilizes an A through F grading system, where A and B grades represent conditions that are safe to swim, while C, D, and F grades represent increased human health risk, including eye infections, ear infections, skin rashes, and gastrointestinal illnesses. This year marks the third year we have used letter grades for both weekly and annual grades. The full grading methodology and steps are provided in Appendix A. This year, we have also regraded previous seasons' data from 2020 to 2022 using the new methodology to calculate a five-year average, helping users better understand trends and variability of *E. coli* concentrations in L.A. County.

To calculate weekly grades, Heal the Bay evaluates the weighting of single sample (SS) results more than the geometric mean (GM), where the SS is weighted more heavily, which provides more accurate and protective information to inform recreational decisions. To calculate annual grades, Heal the Bay uses the average of all weekly grades at a site to produce an annual grade that gives equal weight to SS and GM, providing a better overview of water quality trends throughout the recreational season.

Presentation of Results

For our analysis, we grouped sites by watershed. For the L.A. River Watershed, we further divided it into three areas: 1) official recreation zones (L.A. River Watershed—Recreation Zones, Malibu Creek Watershed, and Upper San Gabriel River Watershed), 2) popular recreation sites outside of local zones (Upper L.A. River Watershed), and 3) sites not designated for recreation, but are nonetheless used in ways that might involve water contact (Lower L.A. River Watershed). Each site's grades were compared to those of other sites in L.A. County as well as within its respective watershed or zone.

The RRC grades are based on REC-1, California's recreational freshwater bacteria thresholds for *E. coli* associated with a 32/1000 illness rate among recreators.[8] A standard threshold value (STV) determines the maximum acceptable concentration above which the water is considered unsafe. For the RRC, Heal the Bay calculates when SS exceeds the STV, in which the water is unsuitable for recreation. The STV for *E. coli* is 320 colony-forming units (cfu) per 100 milliliters (mL). The STV value is not to be exceeded by more than 10% of the samples collected in 30 days (**TABLE 1**). These thresholds aim to be health protective and have been substantiated by numerous epidemiological studies across various water bodies and geographic regions. Below these bacterial thresholds, illness rates are not statistically different from those observed in the general public. Essentially, when water quality meets the STV, the risk of illness from recreating in the water is comparable to the background risk of illness experienced in everyday life. The GM is a value calculated weekly based on the previous 30 days of data. Looking at the cumulative water quality, the GM for *E. coli* is not to exceed 100 cfu/100mL (**TABLE 1**). RRC monitoring data are reported in Mean Probably Number per 100 milliliters (MPN/100mL), which is equivalent to cfu/100mL.

Illness Rate of 32/1000 Recreators		
	Geometric Mean (GM) cfu/100 mL	Statistical Threshold Value (STV) cfu/100 mL
E. coli	**100**	**320**

TABLE 1. Freshwater Bacteria Objectives used by the State of California. Heal the Bay uses the above limits in the River Report Card based on California's recreational freshwater bacteria objective thresholds for *E. coli*, associated with a 32/1000 illness rate among water recreators.

8 State Water Resources Control Board, Bacterial Objective

Heal the Bay regraded water quality data from 2020 through 2022 using the current A–F grading system, enabling historical comparison moving forward. As part of this year's analysis, we are providing 2025 grades in comparison to a five-year average grade distribution for each watershed from 2020 through 2024. The five-year average offers additional insights into water quality trends throughout the previous five-year recreational seasons. Additionally, this year's analysis considers data from 2023 through 2025 recreational seasons, focusing on the 2025 median *E. coli* concentrations, SS exceedances, and GM exceedances at each site.

Hansen Dam, Upper L.A. River / Photo: Heal the Bay

2024 Summary Recap and New Changes

Across all 35 sites graded throughout summer 2024, 28% of the grades issued were A+ (10 sites), 34% were A (12 sites), 6.0% were B (two sites), 6.0% were C (two sites), and 26% were F (nine sites) (**FIGURE 1** and Appendix J). 68% of L.A. County's freshwater recreation sites received A+, A, or B grades (24 sites), indicating they were safe to swim with low health risks, and 32% of the sites received C, D, or F grades (11 sites), indicating increased risk of illness. The 2024 Freshwater Fails List includes nine recreation sites that received annual F grades. The median *E. coli* concentrations for the sites on the Freshwater Fails List in 2024 ranged from 203 MPN/100mL to 835 MPN/100mL (Appendix M).

In 2024, sites in the Malibu Creek Watershed and the Upper San Gabriel River Watershed had median *E. coli* concentrations below the state health standard. Most sites in the Upper L.A. River Watershed also maintained safe bacteria levels, with the exception of Tujunga Wash at Hansen Dam and Bull Creek. Sites in the Recreation Zones showed less variability, with more than half of the sites exhibiting safe water quality. Further down in the watershed, the sites in the Lower L.A. River Watershed all had median *E. coli* concentrations that exceeded the state health standard (Appendix K).

DISTRIBUTION OF 2024 ANNUAL GRADES

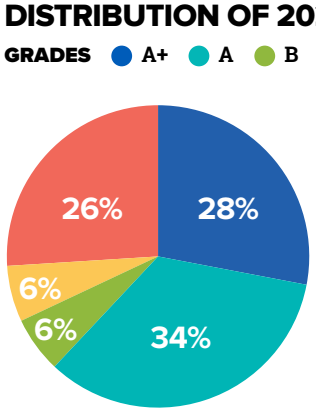

FIGURE 1. Distribution of 2024 Annual Grades. Across all L.A. County sites and by region: Malibu Creek Watershed, Upper San Gabriel River Watershed, L.A. River Watershed: Upper, Lower, and Recreation Zones.

2025 Water Quality Results

San Gabriel Dam / Photo: Heal the Bay

L.A. COUNTY OVERVIEW

Across all 35 sites graded during summer 2025, 28% of the annual grades issued were A+ (10 sites), 23% were A (eight sites), 9.0% were B (three sites), 6.0% were C (two sites), 3.0% were D (one site), and 31% were F (11 sites). This means that 60% of the L.A. County's freshwater recreation sites received A+, A, or B grades, indicating they are safe to swim at a low health risk; and 40% of the sites received C, D, or F grades, indicating increased risk of illness (FIGURE 2).

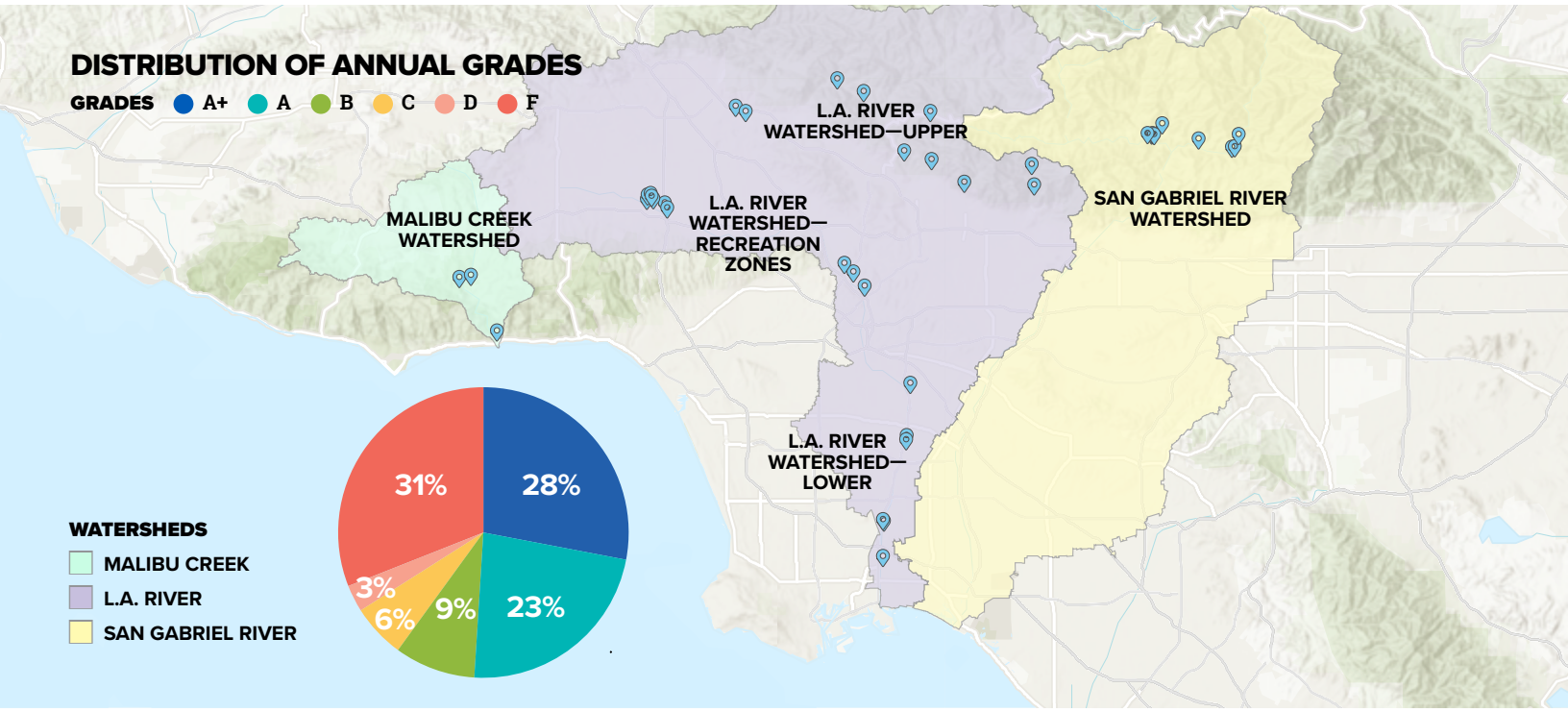

FIGURE 2. Distribution of 2025 Annual Grades. Across all L.A. County sites and by region: Malibu Creek Watershed, Upper San Gabriel River Watershed, L.A. River Watershed: Upper, Lower, and Recreation Zones.

The 2025 grading results show a decrease in overall water quality compared to 2024. The number of sites with good water quality (A+, A, and B) decreased from 68% in 2024 to 60% in 2025; in total, 21 sites were deemed safe to swim with a low health risk. Conversely, the number of high risk sites (C, D, and F) increased from 32% in 2024 to 40% in 2025, with two sites receiving a C grade and one site receiving a D grade, indicating increased risk of illness, and 11 sites receiving an F grade, indicating the highest risk (Appendix C). These grading distributions indicate slightly worse water quality in 2025 compared to 2024.

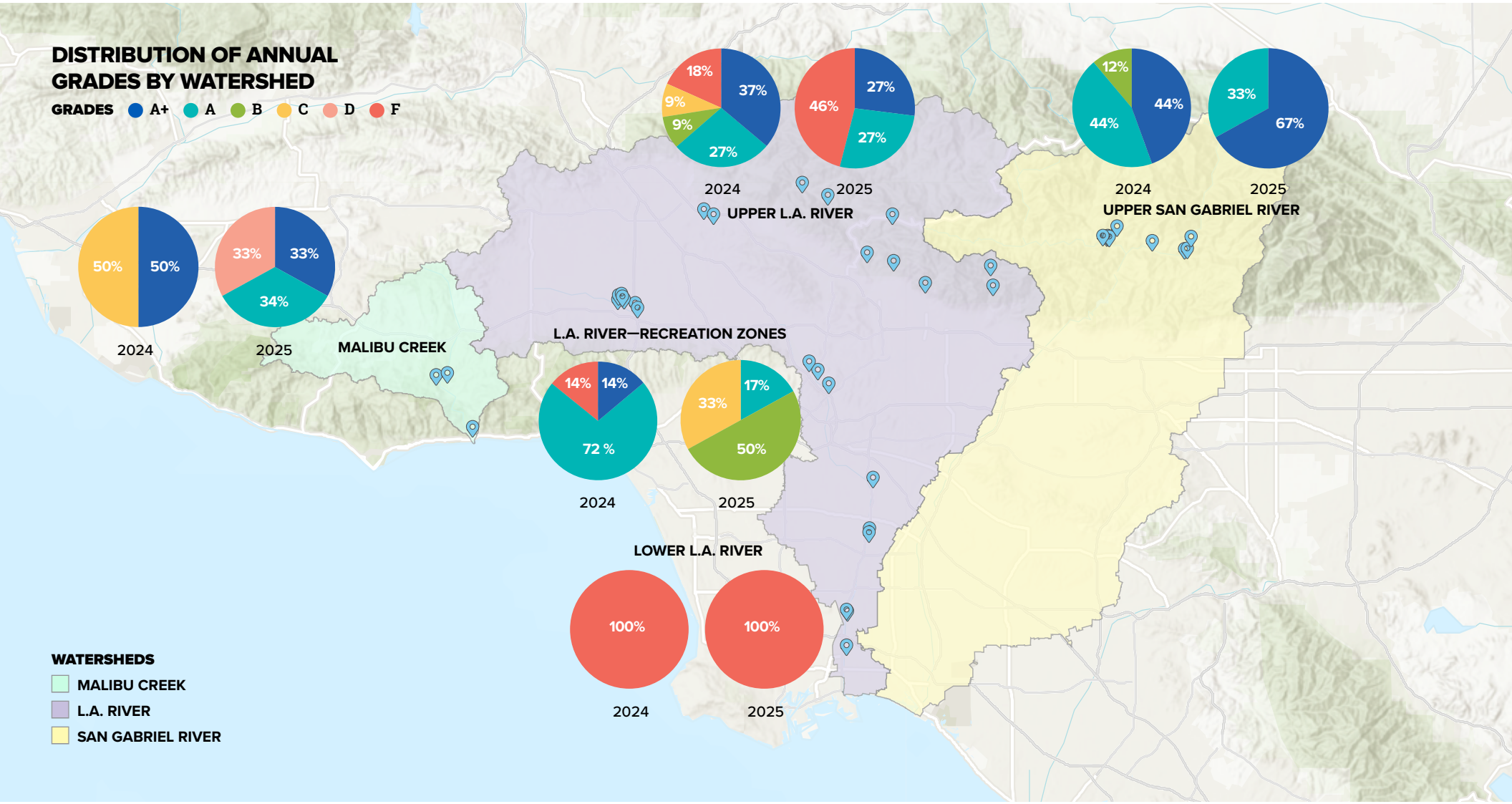

FIGURE 3. Distribution of Annual Grades by Watershed. Distribution of Annual Grades by Watershed. Annual grades across all 35 freshwater monitoring sites in L.A. County, shown for both 2024 and 2025: Malibu Creek Watershed, Upper San Gabriel River Watershed, L.A. River Watershed: Upper, Lower, and Recreation Zones. **TABLES 4, 6, 8, 10,** and **12** show the percentages of grades for 2025 at each watershed.

The weekly grade counts across all 35 freshwater sites for 2024 and 2025 grouped by watersheds are shown in **FIGURE 5**. The Recreation Zones showed a decrease in the number of A weekly grades compared to the 2024 season, when these sites received a greater distribution of C grades.

The Upper L.A. River Watershed and the Upper San Gabriel River Watershed remained relatively stable, with most sites consistently receiving A+ weekly grades. Additionally, Lower L.A. River Watershed consistently received F weekly grades. In Malibu Creek Watershed, one site (Malibu Creek at Rock Pool) remained consistent, receiving A+ weekly grades and Las Virgenes Creek consistently received A grades, while Malibu Lagoon saw poor water quality for most of the summer. Important to note that the four sites not previously monitored brought the low health risk grade distribution in both the Upper L.A. River Watershed and the Malibu Creek Watershed.

The 30-day GM for *E. coli* across the 35 freshwater recreation sites was compared to the 30-day GM standard of 100MPN/100mL (Appendix G). The GM exceedance for the 2025 summer, broken up by watershed, are as follows: Malibu Creek Watershed with 25%, Upper San Gabriel River Watershed with 1%, Upper L.A. River Watershed with 41%, L.A. River Watershed—Recreation Zones with 49%, and Lower L.A. River Watershed with 100%.

The median *E. coli* concentration at 35 freshwater recreation sites is included here to show the typical levels of bacteria at each site. Across all sites in 2025, the median *E. coli* concentration was 86 MPN/100mL, indicating good water quality overall throughout most sites during the summer. This is a slight increase from 2024 median *E. coli* concentrations at 63 MPN/100mL, further suggesting a decline in water quality in 2025 compared to 2024. (**FIGURE 4** and Appendix K).

The median *E. coli* concentrations broken down by watershed for 2025 are provided in **FIGURE 4** and Appendix D. The median *E. coli* concentrations for each watershed were similar to 2024 values in the Malibu Creek Watershed, Upper San Gabriel River Watershed, and the Recreation Zones, and were below the STV, indicating consistently good water quality year over year. While water quality conditions remain largely unchanged, the broader decline in overall grades in 2025 reflects greater variability between different watershed areas, particularly in the Recreation Zones. Lower L.A. River Watershed had a decrease in median *E. coli* concentrations; however, sites in the watershed continually had high SS and GM exceedances. So, in the Lower L.A. River Watershed, median *E. coli* concentrations declined compared to the previous year, while overall grades worsened, indicating more consistent low-magnitude bacterial exceedances, rather than fewer, high-magnitude spikes. This indicates more consistent pollution loading in the Lower LA River Watershed when compared to the higher variability in the Upper Watersheds, likely driven by episodic pollution.

The distributions of *E. coli* SS concentrations for all 35 freshwater sites are shown in **FIGURE 4**. These sites are ordered on the graph based on their location in the watershed, with those that are higher in the watershed further to the left and sites lower in the watershed further to the right, thus representing the flow of water throughout each watershed. The box-and-whisker plot compares the distribution of *E. coli* levels across 2024 and 2025, with the exception of Malibu Lagoon, Delta Flats, Wildwood Picnic Site, Arroyo Seco, Eaton Wash, Eaton Canyon, Santa Anita Wash, and L.A. River at Burbank Boulevard, which only have sampling results from one of the two summer seasons. For REC-1 beneficial use, the state standard for the water quality objective (320 MPN/100mL), was attained by 81% of samples, during 2025, compared to 84% of samples during 2024 recreation season and 86% of samples during the 2023 recreational season, indicating a slight but steady decline year-over-year.[9] Although there were improvements in some sections of the watersheds (e.g., L.A. River Recreation Zones), sites in the Lower L.A. River Watershed saw consistently worse water quality, with more weekly F grades, and higher overall bacteria levels when considering the full recreational season. In 2024, these sites also got F annual grades but had more safe-to-swim weekly grades.

Across the Recreation Zone sites, levels of bacteria were higher in 2025, compared to 2024, which corresponds with a decline in letter grades seen at these sites in 2025. Meanwhile, sites in the Upper L.A. River Watershed, Upper San Gabriel River Watershed, and Malibu Creek Watersheds maintained consistently safe water quality grades across the previous two years. Sites in the Lower L.A. River Watershed had lower bacteria levels compared to 2024, but still consistently received failing grades, exceeding the state standards (Appendix C and Appendix J).

Sites on the 2025 Freshwater Fails List exhibit significantly higher bacteria levels compared to the 2024 Freshwater Fails List. For a majority of these sites, the median concentration exceeded the state standard of 320 MPN/100mL. The median *E. coli* concentrations for the sites on the Freshwater Fails List in 2025 ranged from 249 MPN/100mL to 1240 MPN/100mL, indicating very high risk.

9 2024 River Report Card

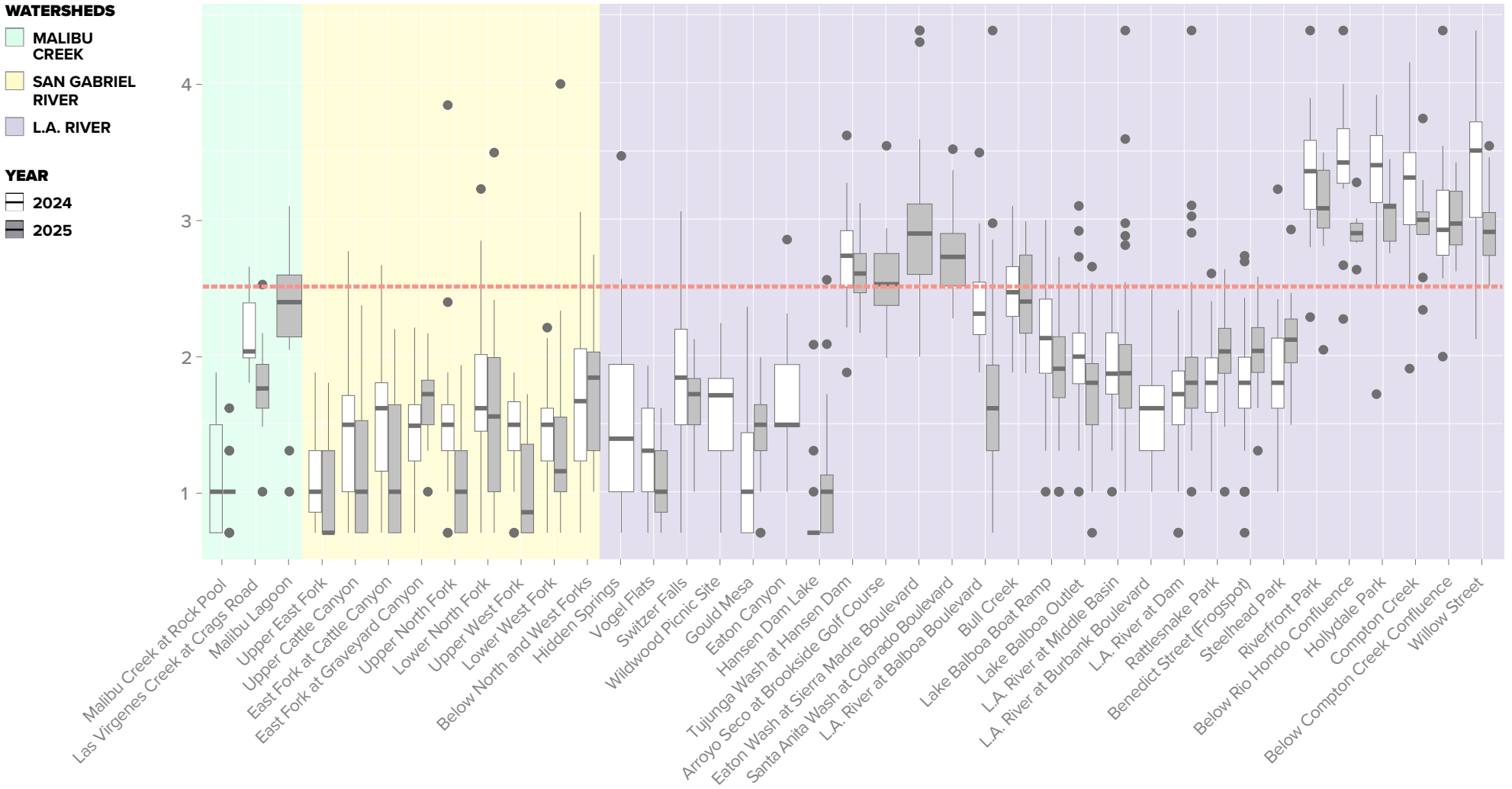

FIGURE 4. Box-and-whisker plot. Box-and-whisker plot showing $\log_{10}$-transformed *E. coli* results for all 35 freshwater sites: Malibu Creek Watershed, Upper San Gabriel River Watershed, L.A. River Watershed: Upper, Lower, and Recreation Zones for both 2024 (□) and 2025 (■). Boxes show median values, and span from the lower quartile to the upper quartile. The whiskers (—) represent data points within 1.5 times the interquartile range. Data is censored by a lower bound of 5 MPN/100mL and an upper bound of >24,196 MPN/100mL. The red dash line (----) represents the STV of 320 MPN/100mL for REC-1, which has been $\log_{10}$-transformed. Values at or below the line comply with the water quality objective, while values above the lines exceed. Data only shown for 2024 include Delta Flats, Wildwood Picnic Site, Eaton Canyon, and L.A. River at Burbank Boulevard and data only shown for 2025 include Malibu Lagoon, Eaton Wash, Santa Anita Wash, and Arroyo Seco. These sites were only sampled for a single season.

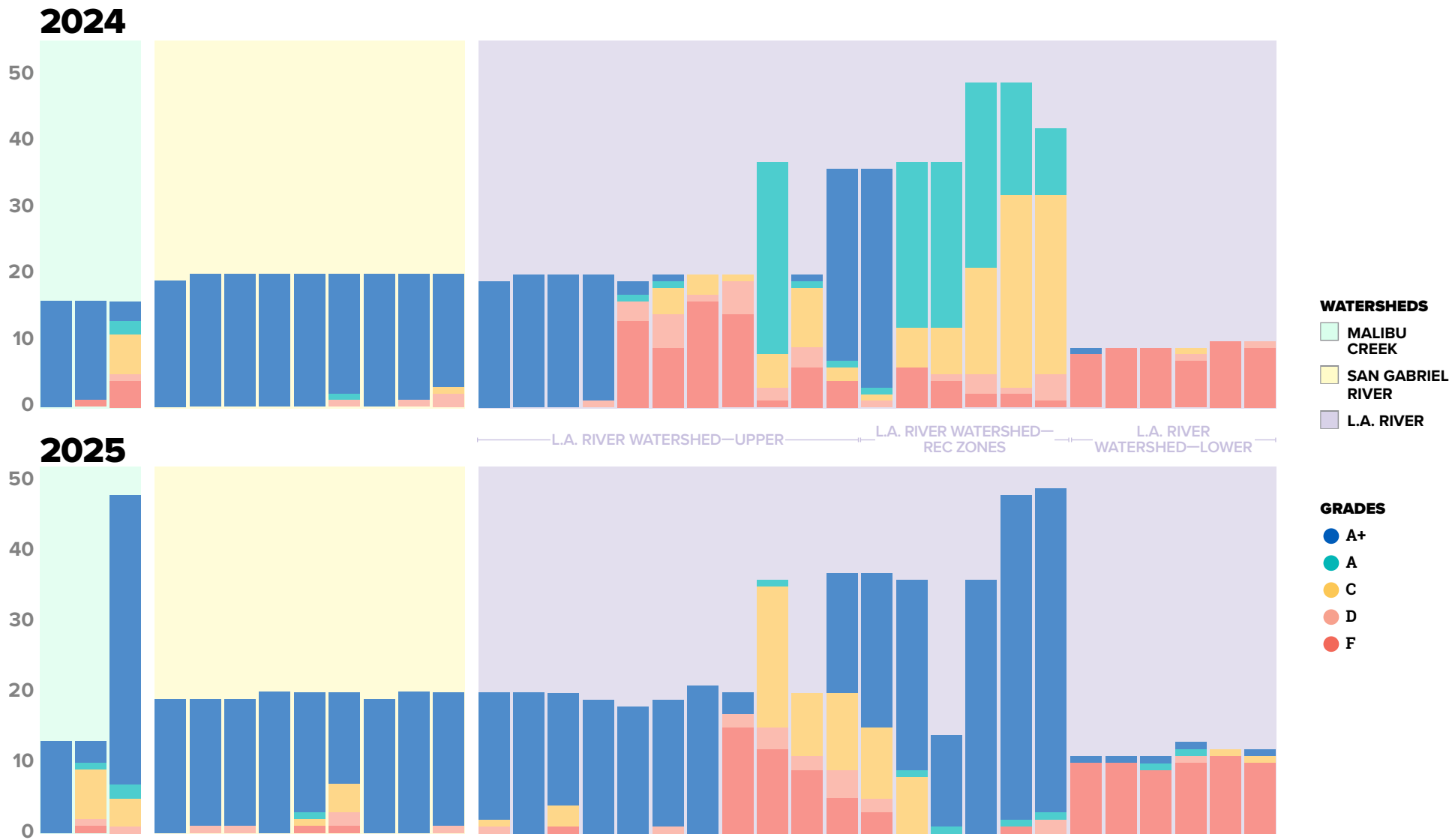

FIGURE 5. Count of 2024 and 2025 Weekly Grades. Across all L.A. County sites and by region: Malibu Creek Watershed, Upper San Gabriel River Watershed, L.A. River Watershed: Upper, Lower, and Recreation Zones. Sites are ordered by their location in the watershed, with sites higher in the watershed to the left of the graphic, and sites lower in the watershed to the right of the graphic. The number of samples per week varied due to differences in sampling frequency with more samples collected at certain locations tested by LARWMP, SGRMP, and Heal the Bay.

FRESHWATER FAILS LIST

The Freshwater Fails List identifies the sites with the worst water quality, where bacteria levels significantly exceed health standards, posing the highest risk of illness. To qualify for the list, a site must have an annual grade of F and an average score of 59 points or lower, indicating consistently high bacteria levels (**TABLE 2**). In 2025, 11 sites made the Freshwater Fails List, an increase from the 2024 Freshwater Fails List, which consisted of nine sites. This was also an increase from the previous year, 2023, with seven sites on the Freshwater Fails List, suggesting that water quality has declined for the last three years across L.A. County.

This decline is further highlighted by the fact that sites on the Freshwater Fails List in 2025 had a worse average weekly score compared to last year. In 2025, average scores ranged from 37 points to 59 points, while in 2024, the average weekly scores ranged from 40 points to 58 points (Appendix C and Appendix J). This trend was also observed in 2023, where the average weekly score ranged from 43 to 54 points.[10] The pattern of lower average weekly scores in 2025 signals consistently higher levels of bacteria at these sites this year.

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Rank	Site	Watershed	Grade	Average total points
1	L.A. River Below Rio Hondo Confluence	Lower L.A. River Watershed	F	37
1	Hollydale Park	Lower L.A. River Watershed	F	37
2	L.A. River Below Compton Creek Confluence	Lower L.A. River Watershed	F	39
3	Willow Street	Lower L.A. River Watershed	F	40
4	Eaton Wash	Upper L.A. River Watershed	F	43
5	L.A. River at Riverfront Park	Lower L.A. River Watershed	F	44
5	Santa Anita Wash	Upper L.A. River Watershed	F	44
6	L.A. River at Compton Creek	Lower L.A. River Watershed	F	48
7	Tujunga Wash at Hansen Dam	Upper L.A. River Watershed	F	51
8	Arroyo Seco	Upper L.A. River Watershed	F	54
9	Bull Creek	Upper L.A. River Watershed	F	59

TABLE 2. Freshwater Fails sites across L.A. County. The Freshwater Fails sites receive the lowest average scores (<59%), earning F annual grades. These sites exhibit very poor water quality, with bacteria levels significantly exceeding health standards, posing the highest risk of illness. The annual scores at these sites ranged from 37 points to 59.

In 2025, the L.A. River below Rio Hondo Confluence tied for the first-worst site with the lowest annual score at 37 points, a marked decline from 2024, when it was ranked the second-worst site with 42 points. The L.A. River at Hollydale Park also had an annual score of 37 points, tying for the worst site in 2025, and also had a decreased score from 2024, when it was ranked fifth and had an average annual score of 46 points. L.A. River below Compton Creek Confluence ranked the second-worst site with 39 points, an improvement in ranking from 2024, despite a slight decline in the annual score to 40 points. L.A. River at Willow Street ranked the third-worst site in 2025, with an average score of 40 points. This is a marked decline from 2024, when this site had an average score of 44 points. Eaton Wash ranked the fourth-worst site in 2025, with an average score of 43 points. Santa Anita Wash ranked the fifth-worst site with an average annual score of 44 points. L.A. River at Riverfront Park also tied for the fifth-worst, tied with Santa Anita Wash, with an average annual score of 44 points, a slight improvement from 2024, when it was ranked the second-worst site with 42 points. L.A. River at Compton Creek ranked the sixth-worst site with an average annual score of 48 points, an improvement in points and ranking, from 2024, when it was ranked the fourth-worst site with 46 points. Arroyo Seco ranked the seventh-worst site with an average annual score of 54 points. Bull Creek ranked the eighth-worst site in 2025 with an average annual score of 59 points, a significant increase in both ranking and average annual points from 2024, when it was ranked the seventh worst site with 53 points.

Arroyo Seco River / Photo: Levi Clancy

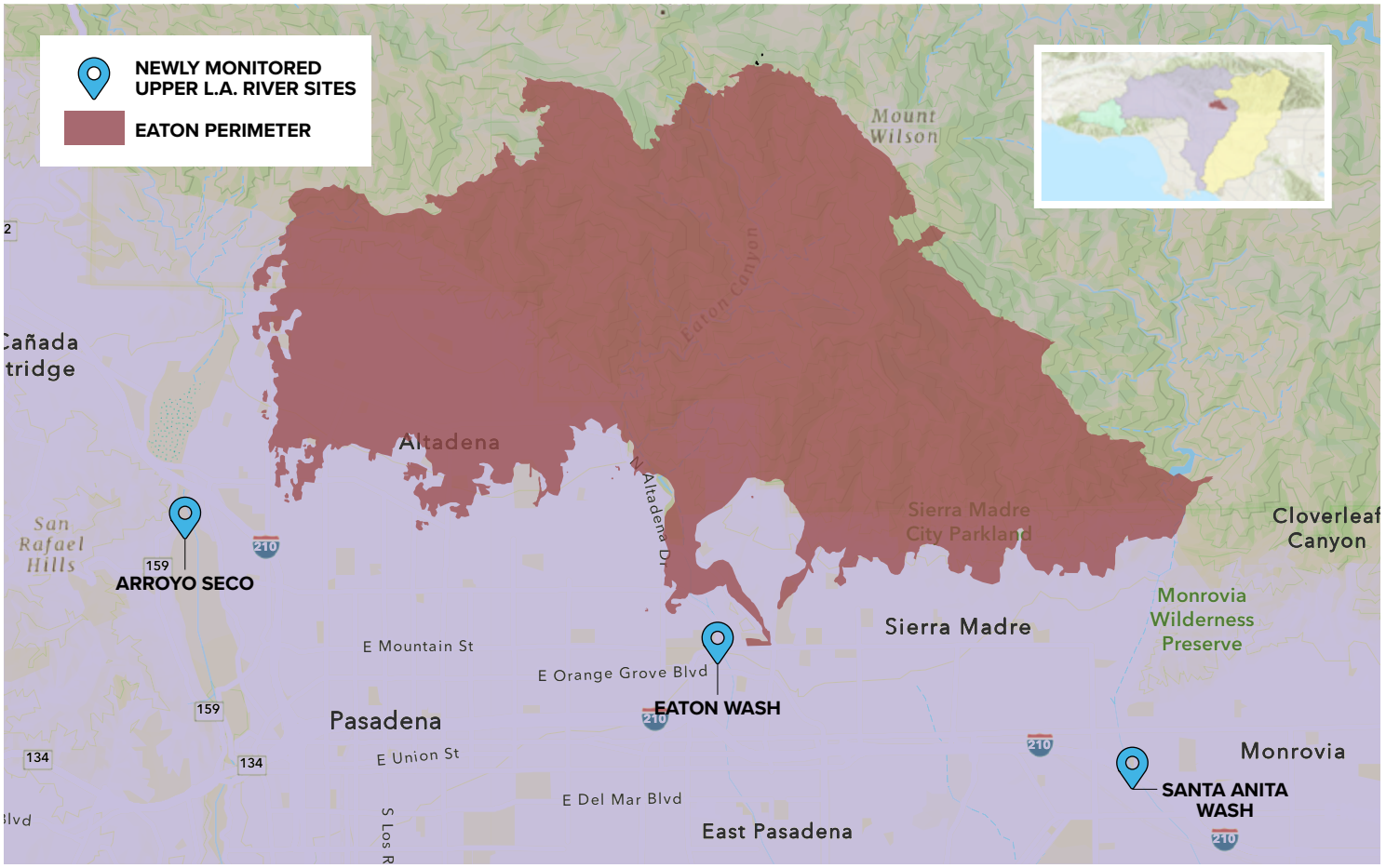

FIGURE 6. Eaton Fire Map

This year, water quality in the Upper L.A. River Watershed may have been impacted by the Eaton Fire. A previously tested site in the upper watershed, Eaton Canyon, was no longer accessible to LARWMP. In 2024, Eaton Canyon had an A letter grade and was considered consistently safe to swim, alongside other monitored sites in the upper portion of this watershed. As a result of inaccessibility at this historical monitoring site, three other testing sites were monitored this year: Eaton Wash, Santa Anita Wash, and Arroyo Seco, all downstream of the Eaton Fire burn zone, and all featured on this year's 2025 Freshwater Fails List (**FIGURE 6**). While we cannot definitely attribute the significant FIB pollution at these sites to the Eaton Fire, this finding reveals a significant load of bacterial pollution at these locations previously not evaluated. Each of these new sampling sites is located downstream of the natural portions of the river, in mixed land use, with residential neighborhoods, highways, and some commercial buildings along the cement channels of the L.A. River. These characteristics may also be contributing to the poor water quality monitored at these sites. Continued monitoring at these locations is strongly encouraged, especially to develop an understanding of how wildfires, so close to the urban environment, may impact surface water quality and ultimately environmental and public health.[11]

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HONOR ROLL LIST

The Honor Roll List features sites with consistently excellent water quality, where bacteria levels remain well within state health standards. To qualify for the list, sites must have an annual grade of A+. Because sites on this list maintained the highest possible water quality, each with a score of 100%, there are no rankings for this list. Among the 10 sites on the Honor Roll List in 2025, one site is in the Malibu Creek Watershed, six sites are in the Upper San Gabriel River Watershed, and three sites are in the Upper L.A. River Watershed (**TABLE 3**). No sites in the Recreation Zones and the Lower L.A. River Watershed are on the Honor Roll List. Six of this year's sites were also on the Honor Roll List in 2024, including Malibu Creek at Rock Pool, Upper San Gabriel River at West Fork, Upper San Gabriel River at East Fork, Upper San Gabriel River at Graveyard Canyon, Gould Mesa Creek, and Big Tujunga at Vogel Flats. Four sites were removed this year: Upper San Gabriel River at Lower West Fork, Hansen Dam Lake, Wildwood Picnic Site, and L.A. River at Sepulveda Dam. Wildwood Picnic Site was removed from LARWMP as a testing site in 2025. Upper San Gabriel River at Lower West Fork and Hansen Dam Lake had only two exceedances, precluding them from the list, and the L.A. River at Sepulveda Dam got a B with more variation than years prior.

The majority of these are within more natural, open spaces with limited anthropogenic alterations to the surrounding area. These sites benefit from natural filtration and vegetation, which help to maintain a healthy, balanced ecosystem that contributes to good water quality.

Site	Watershed	Grade
Malibu Creek at Rock Pool	Malibu Creek Watershed	A+
East Fork at Cattle Canyon	Upper San Gabriel River Watershed	A+
East Fork at Graveyard Canyon	Upper San Gabriel River Watershed	A+
Upper Cattle Canyon	Upper San Gabriel River Watershed	A+
Upper East Fork	Upper San Gabriel River Watershed	A+
Upper North Fork	Upper San Gabriel River Watershed	A+
Upper West Fork	Upper San Gabriel River Watershed	A+
Gould Mesa	Upper L.A. River Watershed	A+
Switzer Falls	Upper L.A. River Watershed	A+
Big Tujunga at Vogel Flats	Upper L.A. River Watershed	A+

TABLE 3. Honor Roll sites across L.A. County. The Honor Roll List includes sites that received the highest average scores (100 points), earning A+ annual grades. These sites exhibit excellent water quality, with bacteria levels never exceeding health standards, posing the lowest risk of illness.

MALIBU CREEK WATERSHED

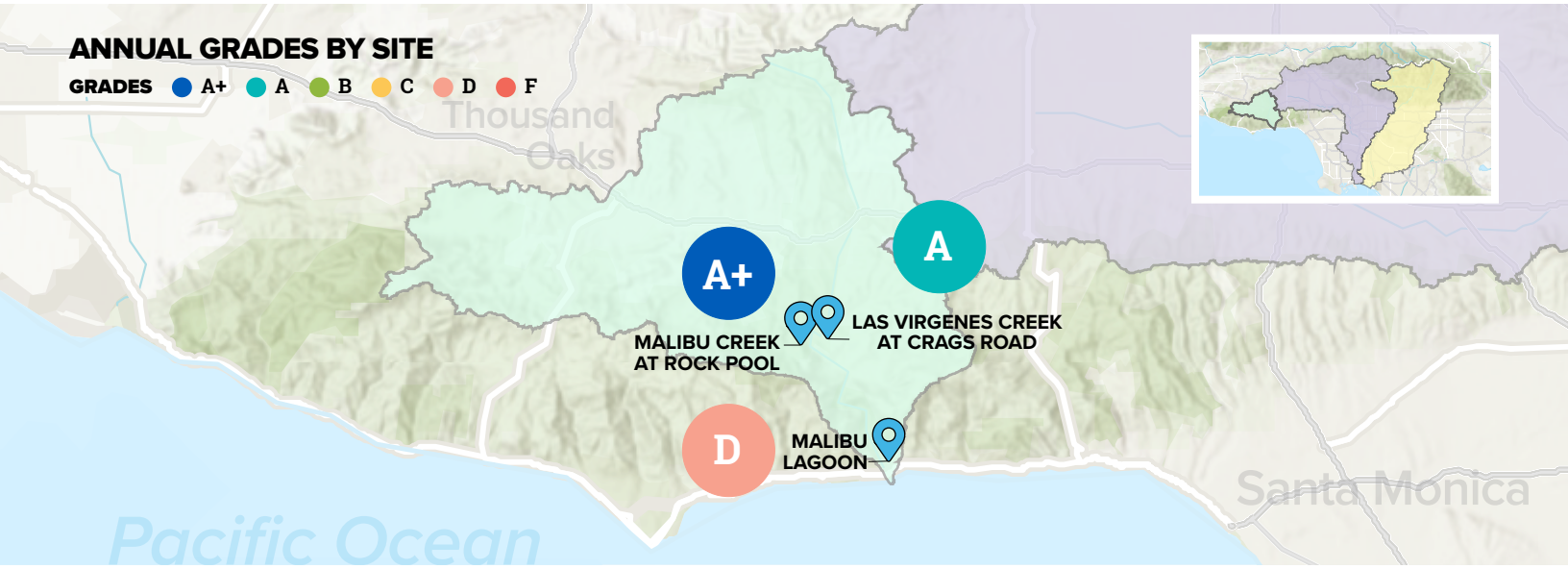

FIGURE 7. Malibu Creek Watershed 2025 Annual Grades by Site. Annual grades at Malibu Creek Watershed sites during the 2025 monitoring season.

Since 2014, Heal the Bay has regularly monitored two recreation sites in the Malibu Creek Watershed: Malibu Creek at Rock Pool and Las Virgenes Creek at Crags Road (**FIGURE 7**). These popular swimming holes in Malibu Creek State Park are easily accessible and frequently used for recreation. This year, Heal the Bay's Stream Team began testing at Malibu Lagoon to investigate the potential impacts on bacterial pollution from the Palisades Fire downstream in the Malibu Creek Watershed. These three sites are listed as impaired for bacteria by the California State Water Resources Control Board and the USEPA.

In 2025, Malibu Creek at Rock Pool earned an A+ grade and retained its spot on the 2025 Honor Roll list, maintaining high water quality from the previous two years, with minimal health risks associated with recreation in these waters (**FIGURE 8** and **TABLE 4**).

Las Virgenes Creek at Crags Road received an A in 2025, an improvement from a C grade in 2024. This site exceeded the *E. coli* SS threshold value just once in 2025, a 6% exceedance rate (Appendix F). This site exceeded the 30-day GM objective once, with an 8% exceedance rate (Appendix G). Additionally, the median *E. coli* concentrations decreased in 2025, falling from 107 MPN/100mL to 57.5 MPN/100mL in 2025. This is a continuation of decreasing bacterial pollution, where in 2023, the median *E. coli* concentrations were at 120 MPM/100mL.[12] More monitoring at this location is encouraged to understand the improvements in water quality at this site.

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MALIBU CREEK WATERSHED

GRADE	# SITES	%
A+	1	33
A	1	33
B	0	0
C	0	0
D	1	33
F	0	0
A+A+B	2	66
C+D+F	1	33

TABLE 4. 2025 Malibu Creek Watershed Grade Distribution

Breakdown of 2025 Annual Grades Over the Summer Season

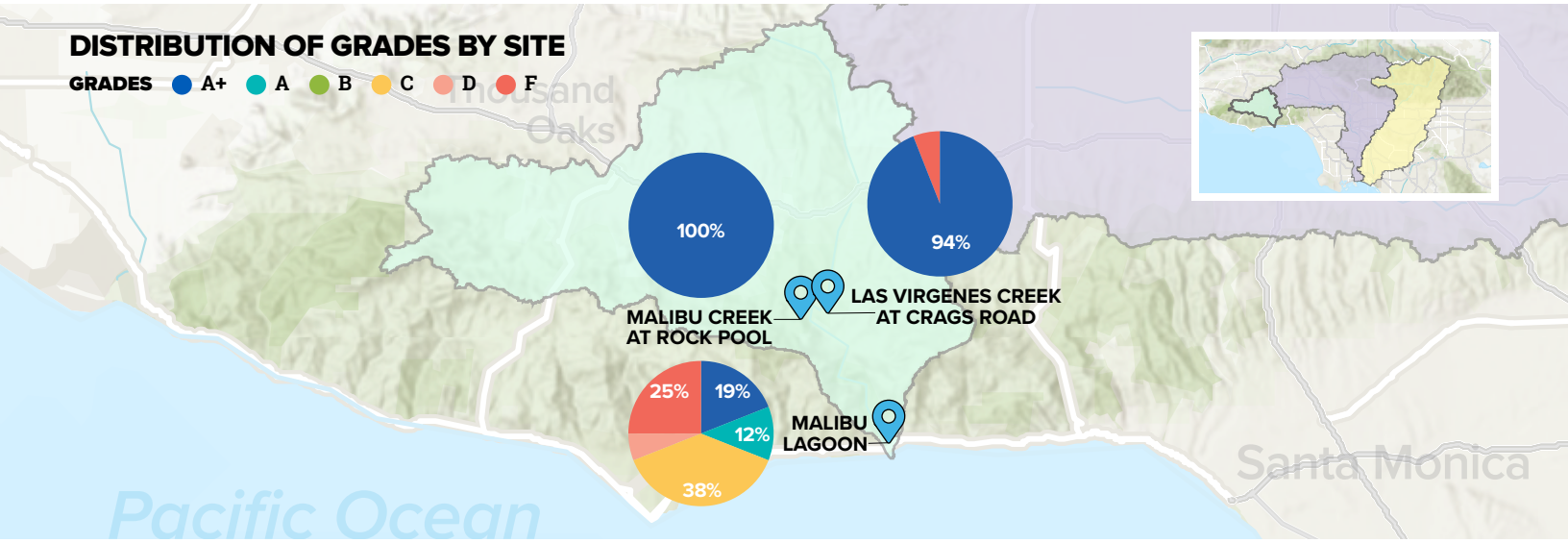

FIGURE 8. Malibu Creek Watershed Distribution of 2025 Weekly Grades by Site. Breakdown of weekly grades as percentages for three sites in the Malibu Creek Watershed during the 2025 monitoring season. Percentages ≤10% are not labelled on the pie charts; refer to Appendix H for all values.

However, the newly tested Malibu Lagoon site demonstrated poor water quality throughout the 2025 recreational season, receiving a D grade. Malibu Lagoon exceeded the *E. coli* SS health standard five times, with a SS exceedance rate of 31% and a GM exceedance rate of 67% (Appendix F and Appendix G). The Malibu Lagoon site and the three newly tested sites in the Upper L.A. River Watershed, Arroyo Seco, Eaton Wash, and Santa Anita Wash, all share similar attributes: (1) being downstream of a fire burn zone, (2) being adjacent to urbanized landscapes, and (3) exhibiting poor water quality. The Palisades Fire may have contributed to the poor water quality grades at Malibu Lagoon, but there are other contributing factors, such as inputs from urban land use and wildlife waste, as the lagoon serves as an important refuge for birds and other coastal wildlife. Additionally, the cumulative impact of downstream pollution could have also likely contributed. This highlights the complex challenge of balancing public recreation with the protection of ecologically critical areas, underscoring the need for continued monitoring and public awareness to ensure safe recreational water use without disrupting wildlife habitat.

With the exception of Malibu Lagoon, water quality in the Malibu Creek Watershed was safe for recreation. Even with Malibu Lagoon included, the median *E. coli* concentration was 41 MPN/100mL, which is below the state health standard, and even an improvement from last year's 63 MPN/100mL (Appendix D and Appendix K). The GM exceedance rate remained low for the watershed at 25%, an increase from 2024 when there were no SS exceedances, an expected result from the newly tested site downstream in the Malibu Creek Watershed (**FIGURE 4** and Appendix F and Appendix M). The grade distribution, with about 67% of the sites receiving safe water quality grades, is on par with the five-year average, where 70% of the sites received an A letter grade, further emphasizing that the Malibu Creek Watershed has continued to be a safe recreation spot for Angelenos (**TABLE 5**).

MALIBU CREEK WATERSHED

ANNUAL GRADES	Total Count	%
A	7	70
B	1	10
C	2	20
D	0	0
F	0	0

TABLE 5. Five Year Average at Malibu Creek Watershed

UPPER SAN GABRIEL RIVER WATERSHED

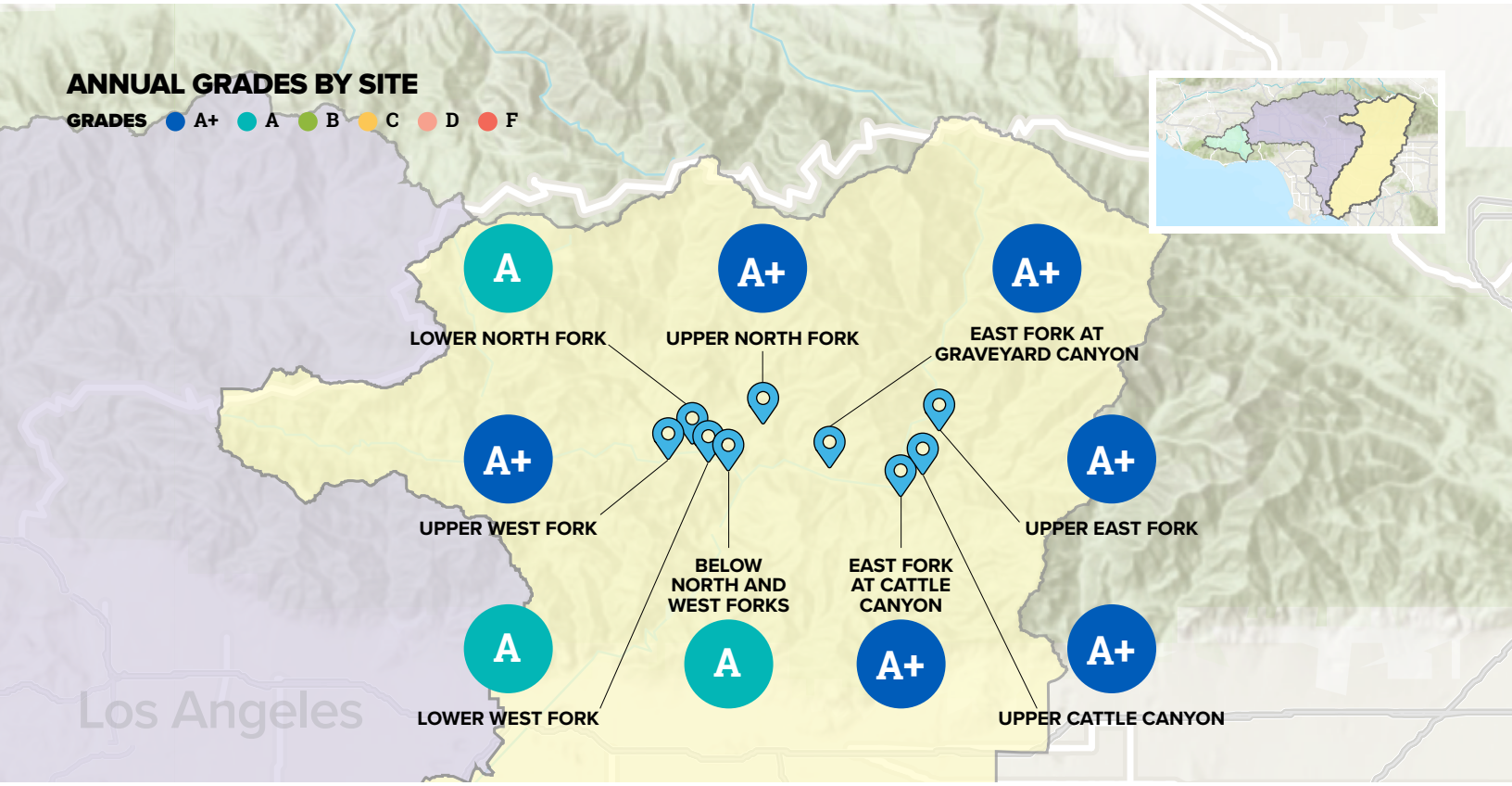

FIGURE 9. Upper San Gabriel Watershed 2025 Annual Grades by Site. Annual grades at Upper San Gabriel River Watershed sites during the 2025 monitoring season.

Sites within the Upper San Gabriel River Watershed continued to demonstrate consistently good water quality, with a low overall SS bacteria exceedance rate of just 2.2%, a median *E. coli* concentration of 20 MPN/100mL, and one GM exceedance, indicating minimal risk for illness and general safe conditions for swimming (**FIGURE 4** and Appendix F). Further, comparing the grading distribution of the five-year averages, there was an improvement in more A letter grades, with the makeup of 100% being an A letter grade or higher compared to 92% being an A letter grade or higher over the last five years (**TABLE 7**). These results remain consistent, and with improvements in safe levels in 2025.

UPPER SAN GABRIEL RIVER WATERSHED

GRADE	# SITES	%
A+	6	67
A	3	33
B	0	0
C	0	0
D	0	0
F	0	0
A+A+B	9	100
C+D+F	0	0

TABLE 6. 2025 Upper San Gabriel River Watershed Grade Distribution

Breakdown of 2025 Annual Grades Over the Summer Season

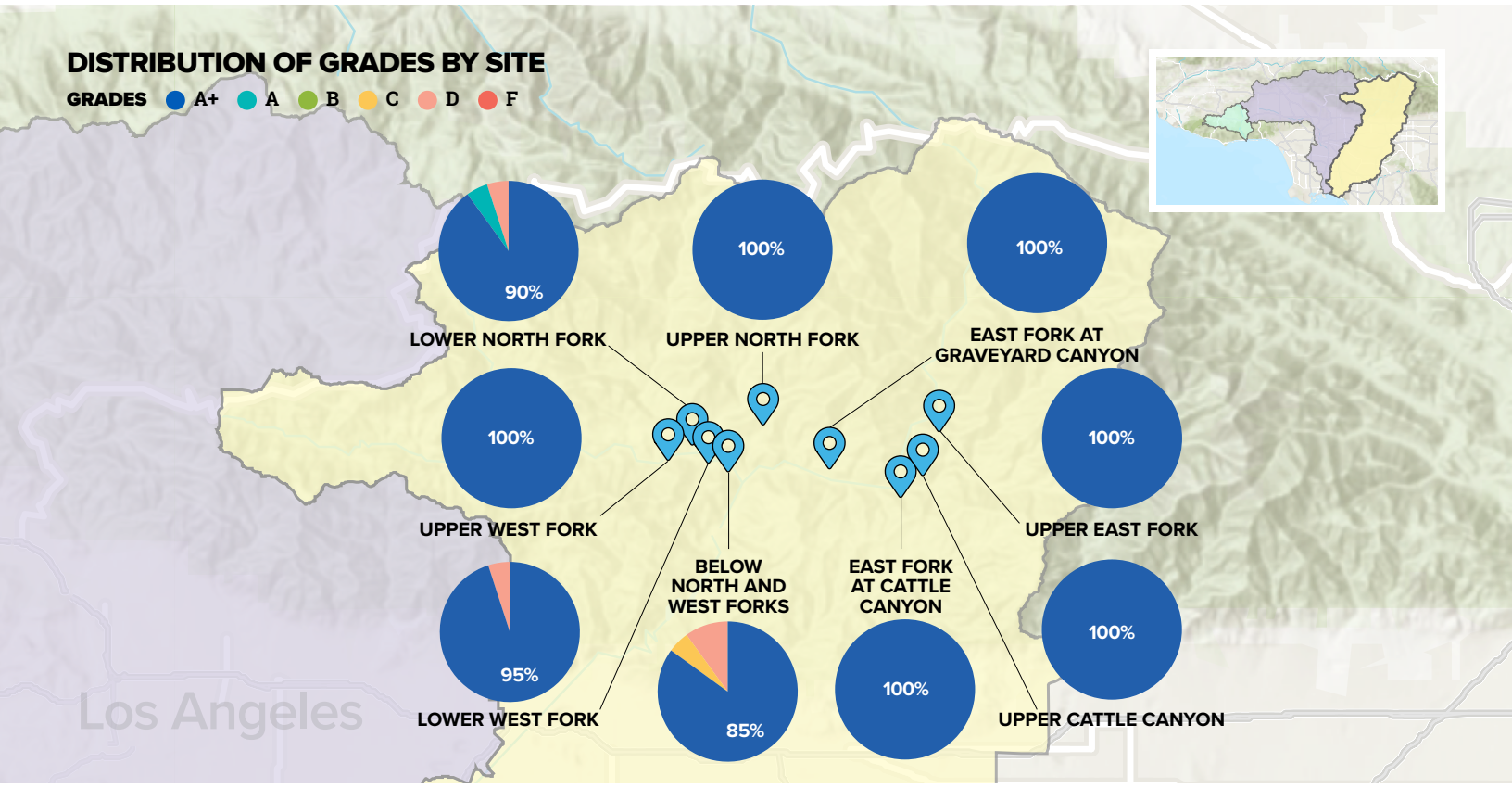

FIGURE 10. Upper San Gabriel River Watershed Distribution of 2025 Weekly Grades by Site. Breakdown of weekly grades as percentages for nine sites in the Upper San Gabriel River Watershed during the 2025 monitoring season. Percentages ≤10% are not labelled on the pie charts; refer to Appendix H for all values.

The six sites in the Upper San Gabriel River Watershed that received A+ annual grades, earning spots on the Honor Roll List, are East Fork at Graveyard Canyon, East Fork at Cattle Canyon, Upper Cattle Canyon, Upper East Fork, Upper North Fork, and Upper West Fork (**FIGURE 10**). Notably, East Fork at Cattle Canyon, Upper Cattle Canyon, and Upper North Forks are new additions to the Honor Roll List in 2025. Last year, these three sites received A grades, indicating improved water quality this summer, with no exceedances. Upper East Fork and Upper West Fork had three consecutive years on the Honor Roll List, and for East Fork at Graveyard Canyon, this was its second consecutive year.

Below North and West Forks maintained an A annual grade for both 2024 and 2025; however, water quality declined in 2025, as these sites received C, D, and F grades 15% of the season compared to only 10% in

UPPER SAN GABRIEL RIVER WATERSHED

ANNUAL GRADES	Total Count	%
A	37	93
B	3	8
C	0	0
D	0	0
F	0	0

TABLE 7. Five Year Average at Upper San Gabriel River Watershed

Lower North Fork, Upper San Gabriel River / Photo: Heal the Bay

2024 **(FIGURE 10** and Appendix O). Despite this decline in water quality during certain weeks of the recreational season, this site remained overall safe to swim, with a median *E. coli* concentration of 69 MPN/100mL (Appendix F).

Lower West Fork received an A grade in 2025, a decline from its A+ grade in 2024 when there were no exceedances, removing this site from the Honor Roll List (Appendix C and Appendix J). The SS exceedance rate increased 5% in 2025, contributing to its lower grade. Despite this, the site was still generally within safe limits for recreation; the median *E. coli* concentration remained low at 15 MPN/100mL, with only one SS exceedance, and the GM did not exceed the water quality objective this season (Appendix F).

Lower North Fork received an A grade in 2025, a marked improvement from its B grade the year before (Appendix C and Appendix J). In 2024, this site had a 15% SS exceedance rate, and it dropped to 5.0% in 2025. Additionally, the median *E. coli* concentration remained low at 41 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 36 MPN/100mL in 2025, indicating that the site remained within safe limits for recreational use (Appendix F and Appendix M).

In spite of the excellent water quality, the East Fork of the San Gabriel River still faces ongoing and significant pollution challenges, including trash pollution. Despite its natural beauty and minimal upstream urban development, which generally contribute to excellent water quality, the area is frequently overwhelmed by garbage and graffiti. This pollution not only spoils the scenic landscape but also poses a threat to the watershed's overall health and highlights the need for improved waste management and conservation efforts to protect the vital resources.

L.A. RIVER WATERSHED OVERVIEW

Trail Canyon, Upper L.A. River Watershed / Photo: Heal the Bay

The L.A. River Watershed spans approximately 834 square miles, bordered by the Santa Monica, Santa Susana, and San Gabriel Mountains to the north and west.[13] The entire watershed is impacted by runoff, as many urbanized areas surrounding the L.A. River are highly developed. As water travels downstream, the effects of runoff are compounded, often resulting in worse water quality. This watershed includes the upper portion of the watershed, which is closer to more natural open space, with some soft-bottom tributaries.

It also includes the Recreation Zones of the L.A. River, which has been paved over with cement, though some sections maintain a soft bottom, which allows for the growth of trees, shrubs, and other local and native plants. This watershed also includes the lower portion of the L.A. River, which is almost entirely channelized and encased in concrete, making this watershed one of the most diverse in terms of land use patterns and river structure.

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UPPER L.A. RIVER WATERSHED

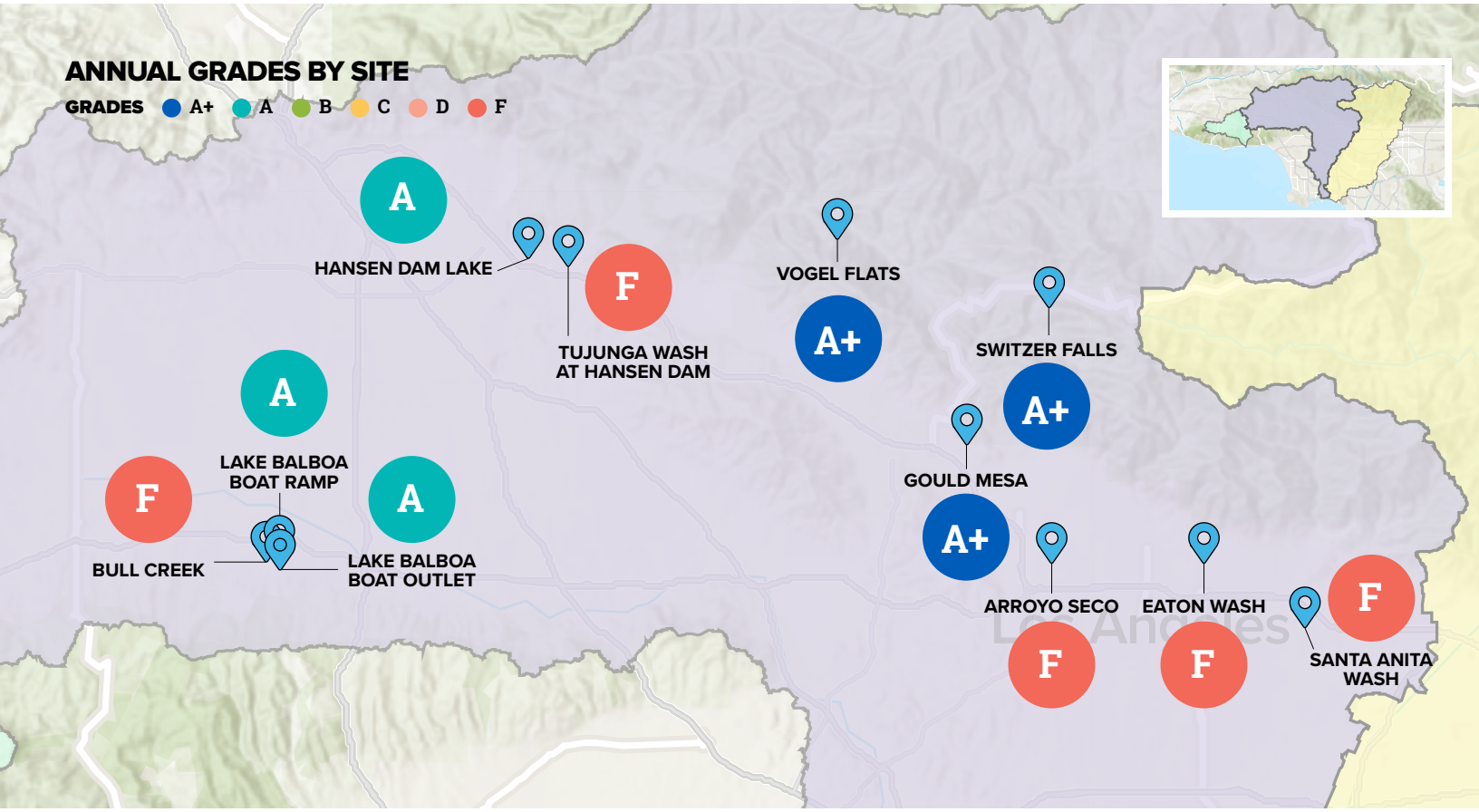

FIGURE 11. Upper L.A River Watershed 2025 Annual Grades by Site. Annual grades at Upper L.A. River Watershed sites during the 2025 monitoring season.

In 2025, the annual grades for the Upper L.A. River Watershed varied significantly. Three recreational sites made the Honor Roll List, indicating excellent water quality; three sites received A grades, indicating good water quality; and five sites received F grades, all of which are placed on the Freshwater Fails List, exhibiting the highest risk of illness. Bull Creek and Tujunga Wash at Hansen Dam have received F grades for three consecutive years, and are within urbanized areas of the watershed, signaling continued issues with higher bacteria levels due to various sources (**FIGURE 11** and **TABLE 8**).

UPPER L.A. RIVER WATERSHED

GRADE	# SITES	%
A+	3	27
A	3	27
B	0	0
C	0	0
D	0	0
F	5	46
A+A+B	6	54
C+D+F	5	46

TABLE 8. 2025 Upper L.A. River Watershed Grade Distribution

Breakdown of 2025 Annual Grades Over the Summer Season

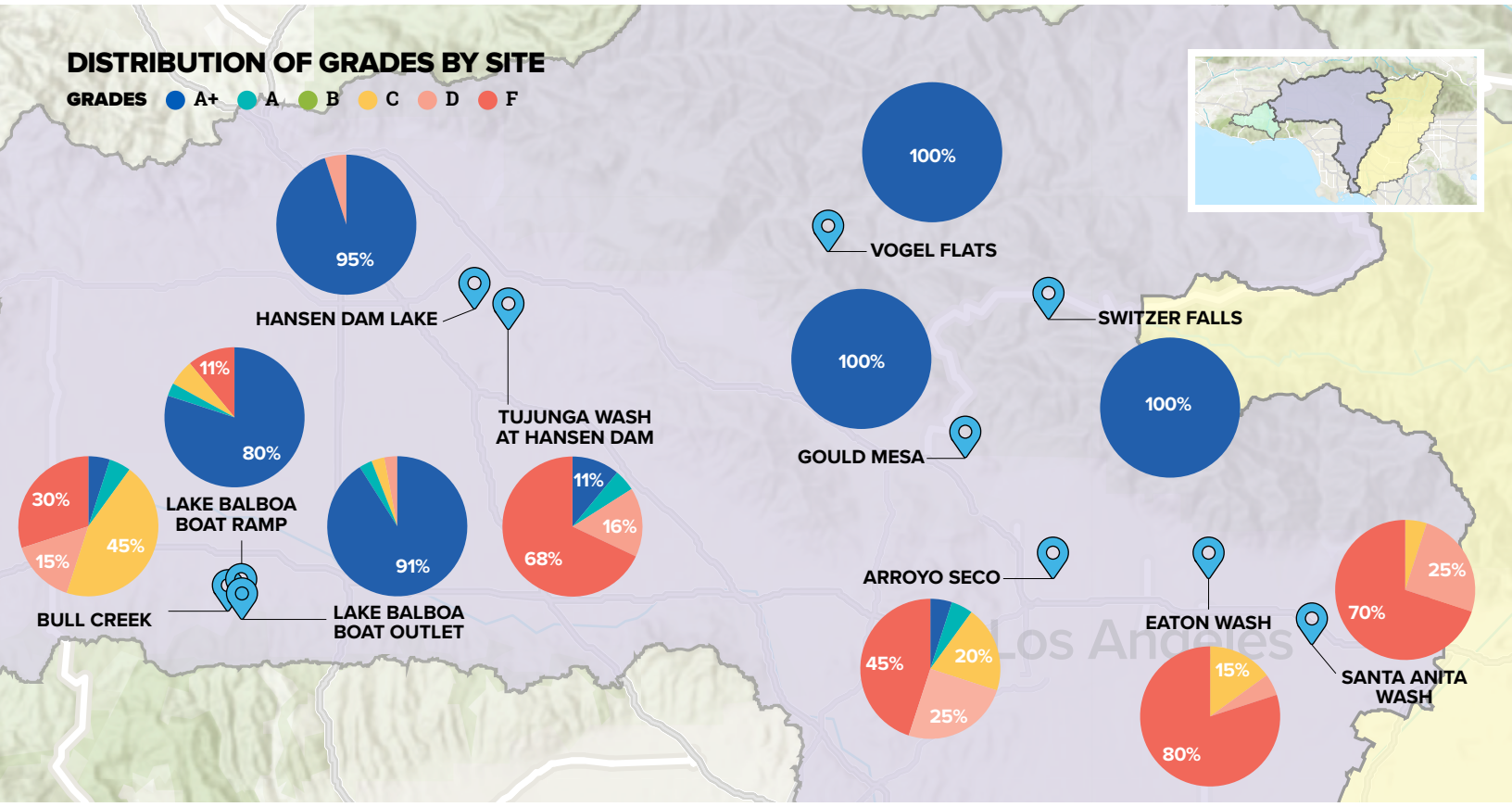

FIGURE 12. Upper L.A. River Watershed Distribution of 2025 Weekly Grades by Site. Breakdown of weekly grades as percentages for 11 sites in the Upper L.A. River Watershed during the 2025 monitoring season. Percentages ≤10% are not labelled on the pie charts; refer to Appendix H for all values.

Water quality at the sites in the Upper L.A. River Watershed slightly decreased from 2024 to 2025. The median *E. coli* concentrations were 63 MPN/100mL in 2024, and then 97 MPN/100mL in 2025, with a SS exceedance rate at 16% in 2024, and 27% in 2025 (Appendix D). While an increase in median *E. coli* concentrations for the entire watershed still indicates safe to swim water quality, with some risk, in 2025 almost half of the sites in the Upper L.A. River Watershed, 46%, received failing grades. Compared to the five-year average, where only 17% of the sites in the Upper L.A. River Watershed received failing letter grades, this new trend reveals a significant issue in the Upper L.A. River (**TABLE 8** and **TABLE 9**). While this increase in distribution of failing grades is likely due to the newly monitored sites receiving F grades and the removal of one site that consistently received A grades (Eaton Conyon) continued monitoring is recommended to have a better understanding of bacterial pollution location in the Upper L.A. River.

UPPER L.A. RIVER WATERSHED

ANNUAL GRADES	Total Count	%
A	32	62
B	6	12
C	1	2
D	4	8
F	9	17

TABLE 9. Five Year Average at Upper L.A. River Watershed

Of the three sites that earned an A+ annual grade in 2025, Gould Mesa and Vogel Flats maintained their Honor Roll List status for three consecutive years, reflecting consistently excellent water quality. Switzer Falls received an A+ grade, adding the site to the Honor Roll List in 2025. Lake Balboa Boat Ramp and Lake Balboa Outlet both received an A annual grade in 2025, indicating high water quality that approaches the highest standards and remains within acceptable limits. These sites showed improvements from 2024, with median *E. coli* concentrations decreasing from 134 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 80 MPN/100mL in 2025 and from 98 MPN/100mL to 63 MPN/100mL, respectively. The SS exceedance rates at these sites also decreased. Lake Balboa Boat Ramp had a SS exceedance rate decreased from 11% to 5.0% in 2025. These six sites demonstrate exceptional water quality and improvement from prior years in the Lake Balboa area (**FIGURE 12** and Appendix F and Appendix M).

Hansen Dam Lake, which received an A+ annual grade with no exceedances in 2024, dropped to an A annual grade in 2025. This was the result of one SS exceedance that led to a 5.0% increase in its exceedance rate. Despite this slight increase, the median *E. coli* concentration remained relatively constant compared to 2024, with a median *E. coli* of 5 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 10 MPN/100mL in 2025 (Appendix F and Appendix M). Despite this change in letter grade, this site maintained good water quality and was considered safe to swim for the 2025 recreational season.

Five sites in the Upper L.A. River Watershed—Arroyo Seco, Bull Creek, Eaton Wash, Santa Anita Wash, and Tujunga Wash at Hansen Dam received F annual grades in 2025. Both Bull Creek and Tujunga Wash at Hansen Dam earned spots on the Freshwater Fails List for the third consecutive year. The three newly monitored sites, Arroyo Seco, Eaton Wash, and Santa Anita Wash, received F grades in 2025 (**FIGURE 12**). These sites experienced poor water quality conditions in the first year of sampling, but since there are no prior data available, annual grades cannot be compared. However, their proximity near the Eaton Fire burn area suggests that post-fire runoff may have contributed to the poor water quality observed, highlighting the importance of continued monitoring to determine whether these conditions persist in subsequent years.

Bull Creek is largely channelized through a heavily urbanized area of the San Fernando Valley. Upon entering Lake Balboa Park, the creek transitions to a more natural landscape, but the flow through the park remains limited, resulting in relatively stagnant water. The creek eventually discharges into the L.A. River, just downstream from the L.A. River at Balboa Boulevard site. Despite the underlying conditions contributing to poor water quality and earning an F, Bull Creek had a decreased SS exceedance rate from 50% in 2024 to 30% in 2025. The median *E. coli* concentration also decreased from 293 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 249 MPN/100mL in 2025 (Appendix F and Appendix M). This trend in decreasing SS exceedance rate and median *E. coli* concentration has continued since 2023, which had a high median *E. coli* concentration with 437 MPN/100mL and a SS exceedance rate of 70%.[14] While these improvements are promising, significant efforts are still needed to address persistent water quality issues at this site.

Tujunga Wash at Hansen Dam has consistently exhibited poor water quality for three consecutive years. In 2025, water quality exceeded safety standards 68% of the time, a decrease from 2024 exceedance rate of 75%. The median *E. coli* concentration also decreased from 539 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 399 MPN/100mL in 2025 (Appendix F and Appendix M). Similar to the Bull Creek site, this trend does seem to highlight an improvement, where in 2023, the values of the median *E. coli* concentration were 520 MPN/100mL.[15] Nonetheless, the consistent failing grades emphasize the continued need to monitor and improve the water quality at these two locations. The area surrounding the Dam is heavily

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industrialized, featuring a small airport, a golf course, and several large warehouses. Within the Hansen Dam Recreation Area, there are several equestrian facilities and private horse barns, which may contribute runoff that can negatively impact water quality. Additionally, the overgrowth of algae mats in the Dam and overflowing trash could be factors likely contributing to the unsafe bacterial levels observed at this site.

Grades at Lake Balboa varied in 2025 but improved generally. Lake Balboa Outlet received a B grade in 2024, while Lake Balboa Boat Ramp received a C grade. In 2025, both sites received A grades (**FIGURE 11** and Appendix J). These sites are relatively close together but exhibit different site characteristics. Lake Balboa Outlet, which drains overflow water from the lake into the L.A. River, sees a steadier flow than the Boat Ramp, which is more stagnant and a likely spot for people to be in contact with the water. The lake was observed by Heal the Bay staff to have high duck populations, including Muscovy Ducks (*Cairina moschata*), Mallards (*Anas platyynchos*), and American Coots (*Fulica Americana*). The lake is also frequented by dog walkers, joggers, and hikers.

Lake Balboa, Upper L.A. River / Photo: Heal the Bay


Lake Balboa, Upper L.A. River / Photo: Heal the Bay

L.A. RIVER WATERSHED RECREATION ZONES

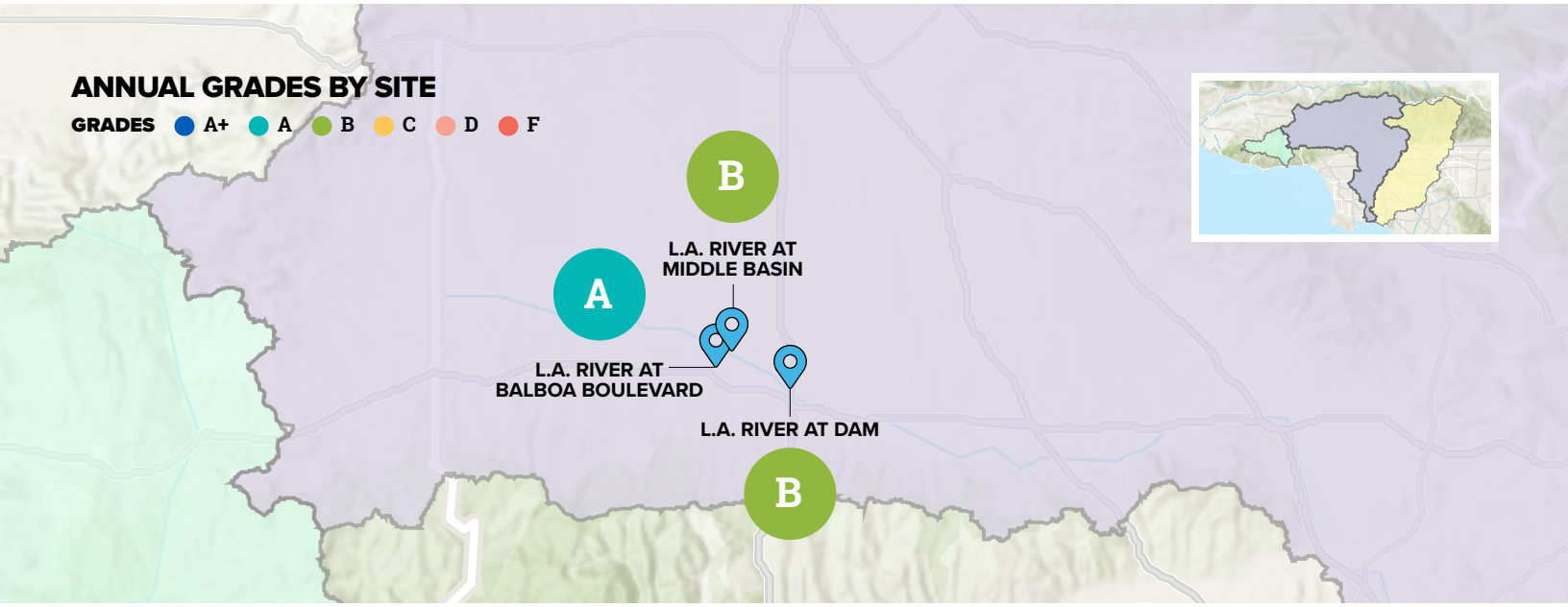

FIGURE 13. L.A. River Watershed-Sepulveda Basin Recreation Zone 2025 Annual Grades by Site. Annual grades at L.A. River Watershed-Sepulveda Basin Recreation Zone sites during the 2025 monitoring season.

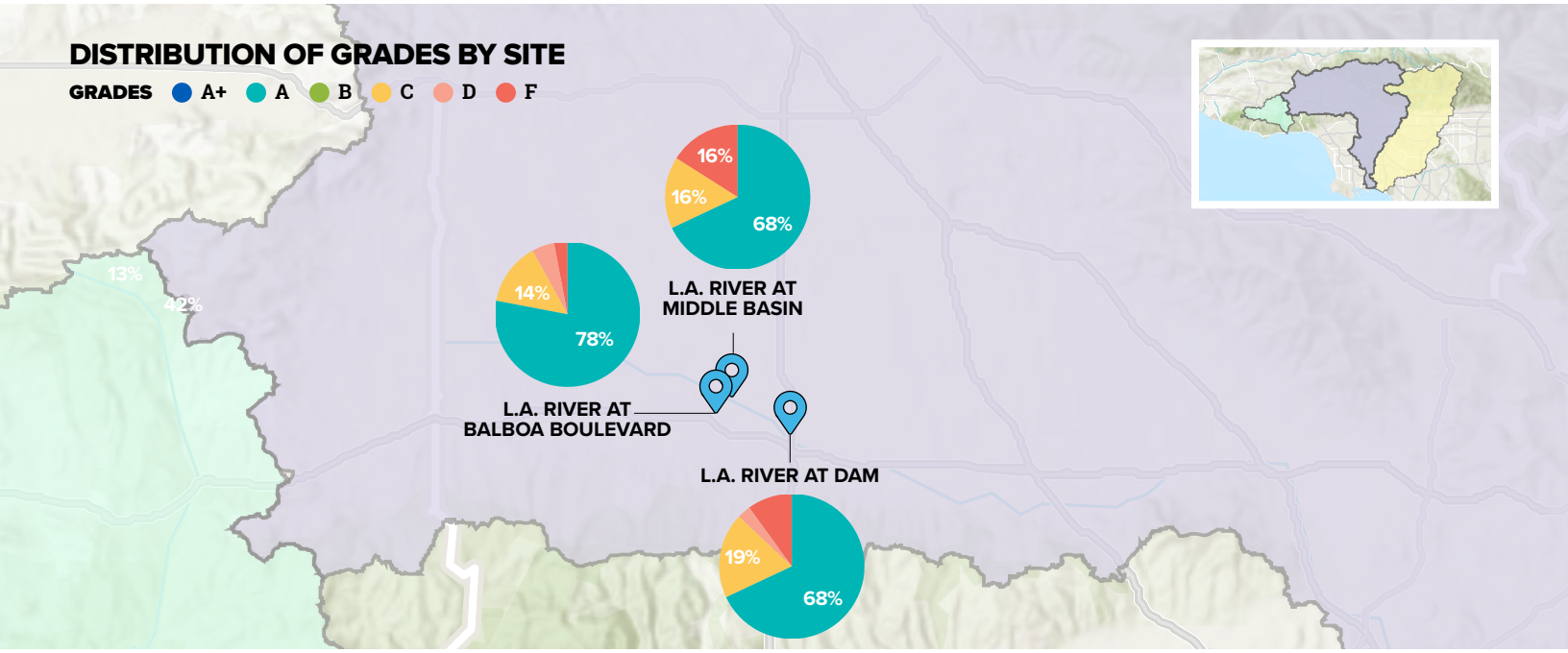

FIGURE 14. L.A. Rec Zone-Sepulveda Basin Weekly Grade Distribution. Breakdown of weekly grades as percentages for three sites in the L.A. River Watershed-Sepulveda Basin Recreation Zone during the 2025 monitoring season. Percentages ≤10% are not labelled on the pie charts; refer to Appendix H for all values.

Breakdown of 2025 Annual Grades Over the Summer Season

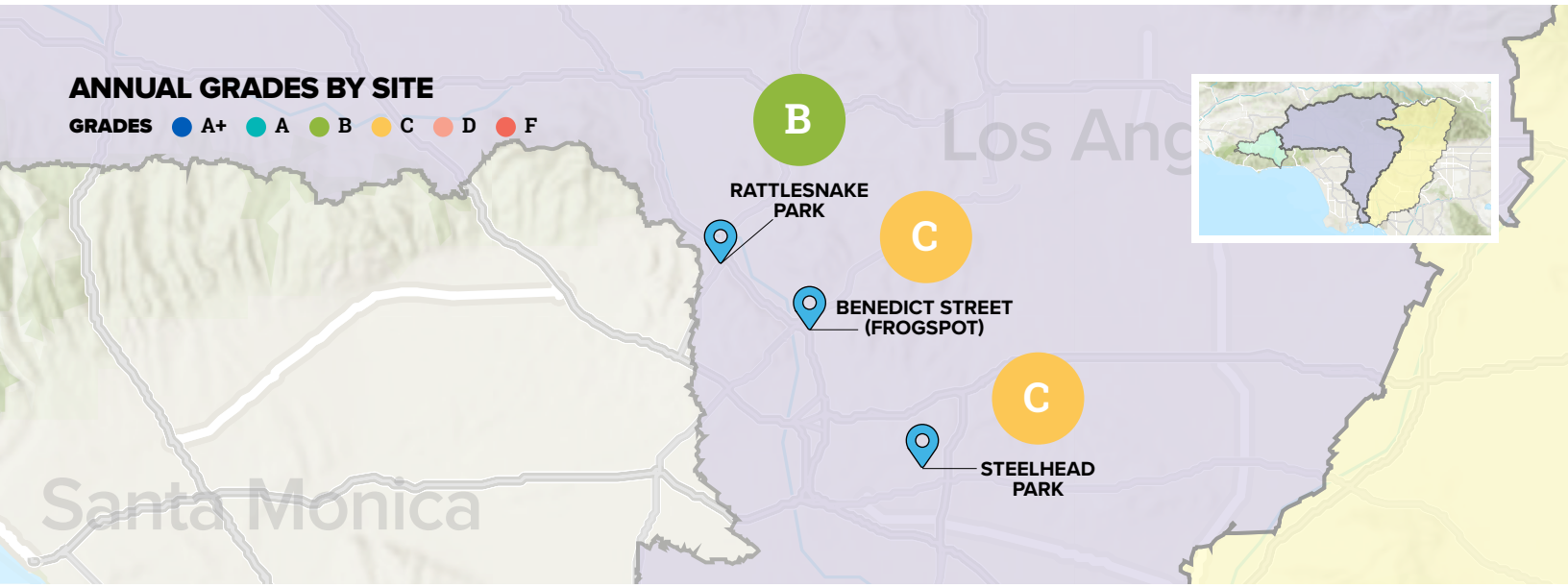

FIGURE 15. L.A. River Watershed-Elysian Valley Recreation Zone 2025 Annual Grades by Site. Annual grades at L.A. River Watershed-Elysian Recreation Zone sites during the 2025 monitoring season.

The L.A. River Watershed—Recreation Zones include two segments: the two-and-a-half-mile Elysian Valley Recreation Zone, encompassing Upper, Middle, and Lower Elysian Valley; and the two-mile Basin River Recreation Zone, containing Upper Sepulveda, Basin Kayak Zone, Middle Basin, and Lower Basin at Dam.[16] These zones encompass six sites monitored by the Los Angeles Regional Watershed Monitoring Program and the City of L.A., Bureau of Sanitation and the Environment. Heal the Bay also monitors three of those same sites in the Elysian Valley that correspond to the Rattlesnake Park (Upper), Benedict Street (Frogspot) (Middle), and Oso/Steelhard Park (Lower). Within this area, the public is permitted to enjoy the river for recreational activities, such as fishing and kayaking, in designated areas from Memorial Day through Labor Day, though access is possible year-round.

Bacteria levels were generally greater in the Recreation Zones in 2025 compared to 2024, resulting in slightly worse grades for five of the six sites monitored. The median *E. coli* concentration across all sites increased from 74 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 86 MPN/100mL in 2025, indicating an overall decrease in water quality (Appendix D). Across all Recreation Zones sites, water quality exceeded the state safety threshold 8% of the time in 2025, compared to 6% in 2024. In comparison to the five-year average grading distribution, where 38% of the grades received a C grade or lower, in 2025, 100% of the grades in the Recreation Zones received a C grade or higher (**TABLE 10** and **TABLE 11**).

L.A. RIVER WATERSHED—RECREATION ZONES

GRADE	# SITES	%
A+	0	0
A	1	17
B	3	50
C	2	33
D	0	0
F	0	0
A+A+B	4	67
C+D+F	2	33

TABLE 10. 2025 L.A. River Watershed—Recreation Zones Grade Distribution

16 L.A. River Recreation Zone

1. Sepulveda Basin

As water flows from the Lake Balboa Outlet site into the L.A. River, sites below this outfall, near the L.A. River Watershed—Recreation Zones in the Sepulveda Basin, showed a gradual improvement in water quality. This section of the L.A. River has a more natural, undisturbed environment with constant water movement, which helps with the mitigation of pollution.

The highest site within the Recreation Zone, L.A. River at Balboa Boulevard, had the greatest improvement in water quality across all sites from 2024 to 2025. This site rose from an F in 2024 to an A in 2025. The SS exceedance rate also rose from 31% in 2024 to just 8.0% in 2025. And the median *E. coli* concentration rose from 202 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 41 MPN/100mL in 2025 (Appendix F and Appendix M). In previous reports, Heal the Bay noted the stagnant water conditions and trash pollution around the site as a likely contributing factor to its failing grades; however, more investigations and monitoring are recommended in 2026 to see if improvements persist, and understand why significant improvement occurred in bacterial pollution in 2025.

In contrast, at the L.A. River at Middle Basin site, water quality decreased this year. In 2024, this site received an A annual grade, with *E. coli* SS exceedances occurring 3.0% of the summer and with a median *E. coli* concentration of 74 MPN/100mL (Appendix J and Appendix M). However, in 2025, this site received a B, indicating that the conditions were still safe for recreation, but there were higher levels of bacteria, with 16% of the samples in 2025 exceeding the safety threshold and a median *E. coli* concentration of 74 MPN/100mL (**FIGURE 13** and Appendix F). While the median *E. coli* concentration remained the same across the two years, there were more samples that exceeded the threshold in 2025, resulting in a slight decrease in water quality.

Additionally, L.A. at Sepulveda Basin Dam received a B grade in 2025, indicating a decrease from last year's A+ grade and a removal from the Honor Roll List. In 2024, this site did not have any exceedances, indicating it had minimal health risk. In 2025, however, this site achieved a B grade, still reflecting safe-to-swim conditions, with some exceedances. The exceedance rate increased from 0% in 2024 to 13% in 2025, and the median *E. coli* concentration increased slightly from 52 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 63 MPN/100mL in 2025 (Appendix F and Appendix M). Although water quality was worse this year at this site, the B grade still reflects a thriving ecosystem characterized by a steady water flow, lush vegetation, and abundant wildlife. Wildlife observed at the Sepulveda Dam, observed by Heal the Bay staff in 2024, includes sightings of Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*), Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*), and Red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*). The presence of the abundant wildlife monitored may be the source of increased bacterial pollution at this site.

The L.A. River Watershed—Recreation Zones in Sepulveda Basin remained largely consistent with good water quality and a slight improvement. In 2025, the median *E. coli* concentration at the Sepulveda Basin section of the watershed was 52 MPN/100mL, whereas in 2024, the median was 85 MPN/100mL (Appendix F and Appendix M).

L.A. RIVER WATERSHED—RECREATION ZONES

ANNUAL GRADES	Total Count	%
A	12	34
B	10	29
C	8	23
D	3	9
F	2	6

TABLE 11. Five Year Average at L.A. River Watershed—Recreation Zones

Breakdown of 2025 Annual Grades Over the Summer Season

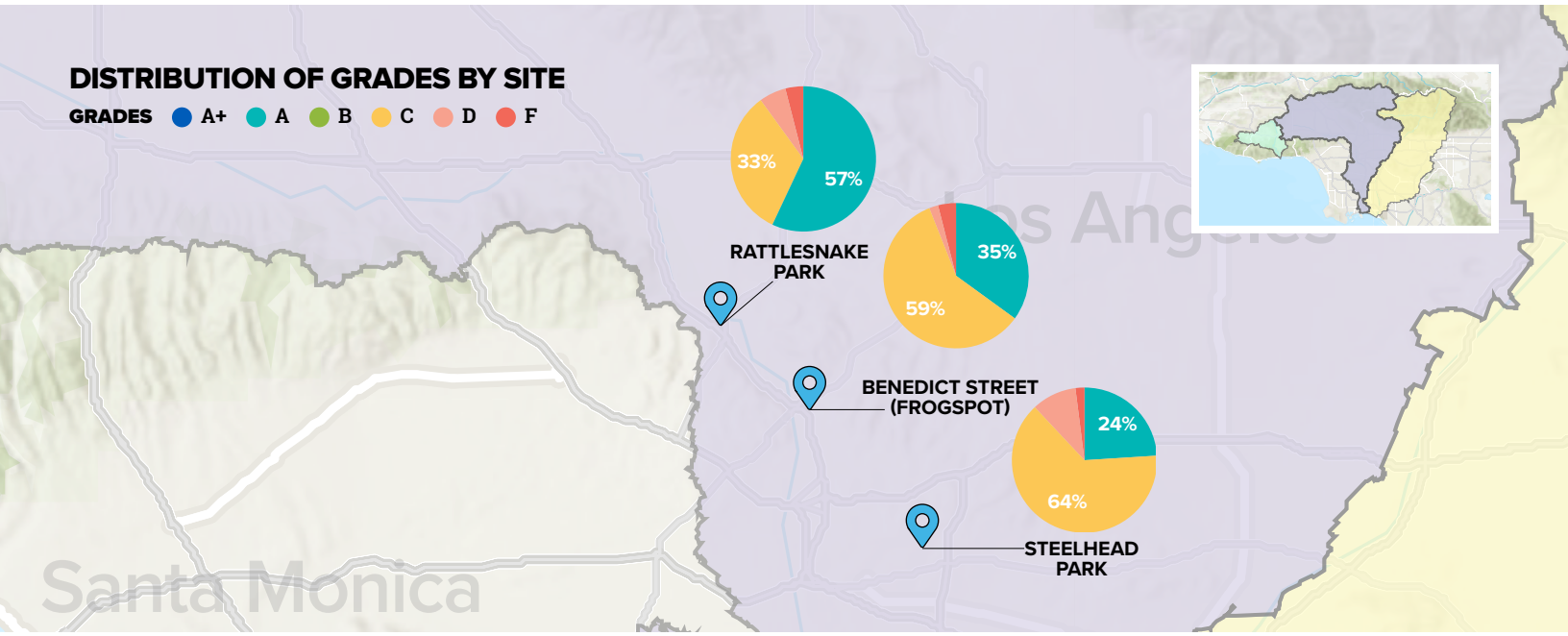

FIGURE 16. L.A. River Watershed-Elysian Valley Recreation Zone Distribution of 2025 Weekly Grades by Site. Breakdown of weekly grades as percentages for three sites in the L.A. River Watershed-Elysian Valley Recreation Zone during the 2025 monitoring season. Percentages ≤10% are not labelled on the pie charts; refer to Appendix H for all values.

While water quality at the Sepulveda Basin slightly increased this year, there are opportunities to improve water quality, particularly in the upstream sections where the river basin is littered with trash. This spoils one of the more natural areas of the L.A. River. Under the Clean Water Act, Trash Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) set a zero-trash limit for waterways in L.A. County.[17] To combat this issue, L.A. County needs comprehensive and proactive trash management. This includes reducing plastic production, improving litter control through street sweeping and catch basin maintenance, and conducting more frequent in-stream cleanups. By addressing these systemic challenges, we can move closer to the goal of trash-free waterways and healthier ecosystems. This suggestion also applies to the Elysian Valley; however, providing these mechanisms of trash reduction upstream will help support downstream efforts.

17 Trash Total Maximum Daily Loads for the L.A. River

2. Elysian Valley

After water goes through the Sepulveda Basin Dam, the water flows east along the base of the Santa Monica Mountain range, loops around Griffith Park, and reaches the Elysian Valley. The three sites monitored by the Stream Team include Steelhead Park, Benedict Street (Frogspot), and Rattlesnake Park. The L.A. River Watershed—Recreation Zones in Elysian Valley saw a decrease in water quality in 2025 compared to 2024, with two sites receiving a B grade and one site receiving a C grade, all previously A grades in 2024 (**FIGURE 14** and Appendix J). Additionally, the median *E. coli* concentration at the Elysian Valley section of the watershed was 114 MPN/100mL in 2025, whereas in 2024, the median *E. coli* concentration was 63 MPN/100mL (Appendix F and Appendix M). While the median *E. coli* concentration is below the SS state standard, the bacterial pollution nearly doubled in 2025, stressing the importance of continued

monitoring at sites where recreators are known and allowed to make direct water contact.

Steelhead Park saw a notable decrease in water quality in 2025, earning a C annual grade, whereas in 2024 the site received an A grade (**FIGURE 14** and Appendix J). The SS exceedance rate stayed the same between years, 2.0%; however, the median *E. coli* concentration increased from 63 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 131 MPN/100mL (Appendix F and Appendix M). Because of this trend, GM exceedances also increased, with more than 84% of GM exceeding the water quality standards, resulting in worse grades in 2025 compared to 2024 (Appendix G). Benedict Street (Frogspot) also saw a similar decrease in water quality, earning a B annual grade in 2025, after receiving an A grade in 2024 (**FIGURE 14** and Appendix J). The exceedance rate was similar for the two years, roughly 4.0%, but the median *E. coli* concentration increased from 63 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 108 MPN/100mL in 2025 (Appendix F and Appendix M). Additionally, in 2025, this site also experienced a high GM exceedance rate, where 70% of the GM exceeded the water quality objective. Rattlesnake Park also displayed this similar pattern, earning a B annual grade in 2025, after receiving an A grade in 2024 (**FIGURE 14** and Appendix J). The SS exceedance rate increased from 2.0% in 2024 to 4.0% in 2025, and the median *E. coli* concentration increased from 63 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 107 MPN/100mL in 2025 (Appendix F and Appendix M). This site also had a high GM exceedance rate at 46% in 2025 (Appendix G). While the water quality conditions in the Elysian Valley have fluctuated year after year, the consistent decrease in water quality across the three sites is concerning.

Steelhead Park, L.A. River Recreation Zone-Elysian Valley / Photo: Heal the Bay

LOWER L.A. RIVER WATERSHED

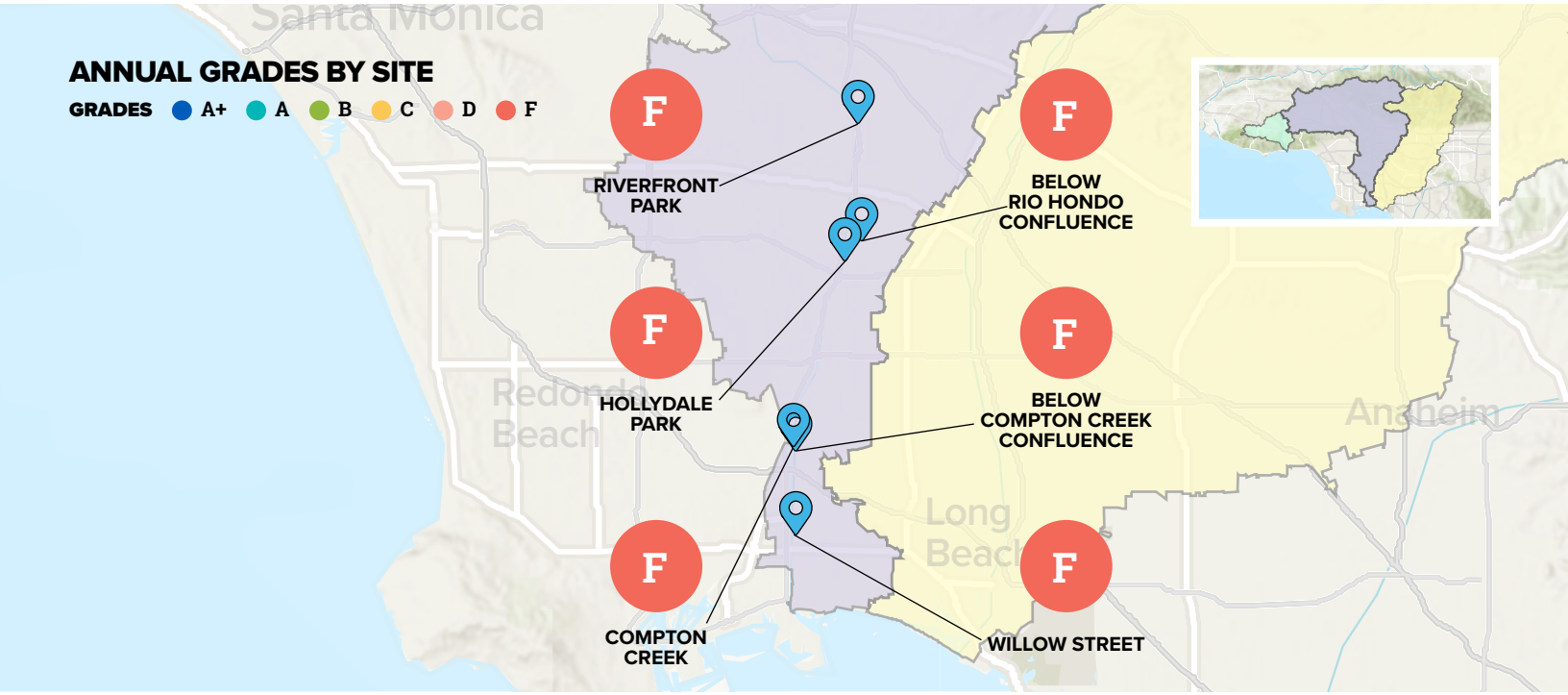

FIGURE 17. Lower L.A. River Watershed 2025 Annual Grades by Site. Annual grades at Lower L.A. River Watershed sites during the 2025 monitoring season.

2025 marks the fifth year of Heal the Bay's sampling efforts in the lower portion of the L.A. River, located south of Downtown L.A. Six sites were sampled including L.A. River at Riverfront Park, L.A. River below the Rio Hondo Confluence, L.A. River at Hollydale Park, Compton Creek, L.A. River below the Compton Creek Confluence, and L.A. River at Willow Street (**FIGURE 17**). The monitoring efforts end at Willow Street before the river transitions into an estuary and then ultimately reaches the Pacific Ocean. All sites, except for Compton Creek, have a concrete riverbed and banks, and none are officially designated for REC-1 (direct contact) recreational use.

Overall, bacteria levels were lower at all Lower L.A. River Watershed sites in 2025 compared to 2024; however, they received failing grades due to the sites exceeding state thresholds. The median *E. coli* concentrations for the watershed decreased from 1991 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 921 MPN/100mL in 2025 across the whole Lower L.A. River Watershed, which is still well above the state standard of 320 MPN/100mL (Appendix D). Across all the sites in this watershed, water quality exceeded the state threshold 96% of the time in 2025, compared to

LOWER L.A. RIVER WATERSHED

GRADE	# SITES	%
A+	0	0
A	0	0
B	0	0
C	0	0
D	0	0
F	6	100
A+A+B	0	0
C+D+F	6	100

TABLE 12. 2025 Lower L.A. River Watershed Grade Distribution

Breakdown of 2025 Annual Grades Over the Summer Season

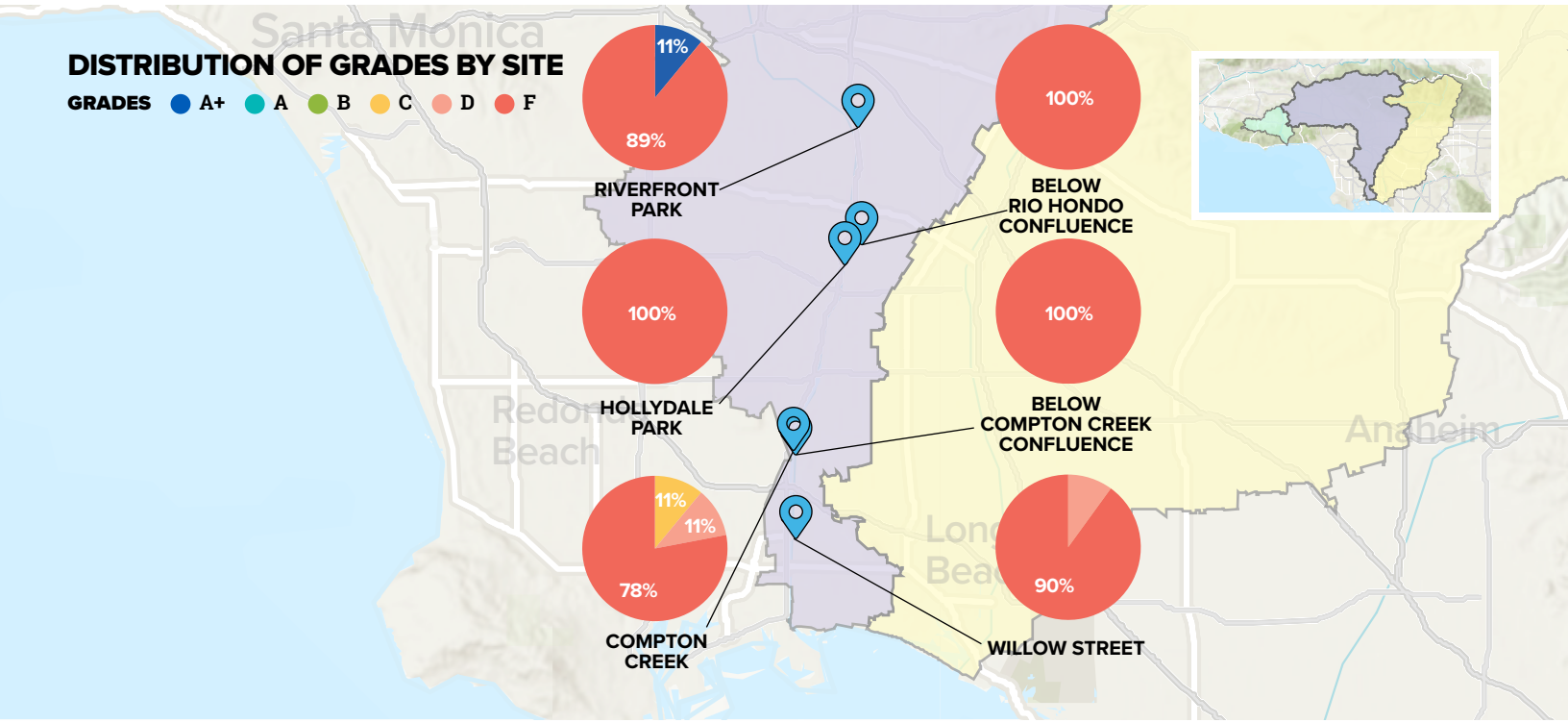

FIGURE 18. Lower L.A. River Watershed Weekly Distribution of 2025 Weekly Grades by Site. Breakdown of weekly grades as percentages for six sites in the Lower L.A. River Watershed during the 2025 monitoring season. Percentages ≤10% are not labelled on the pie charts; refer to Appendix H for all values.

87% in 2024, highlighting more persistent bacterial contamination in these waterways. Similarly, the SS exceedance rate increased from 87% in 2024 to 100% in 2025, reflecting consistent, though low-magnitude, poor water quality for this zone (Appendix D). Additionally, when compared to the five-year averages, the 2025 recreational season had 100% of the sites received F grades, whereas over the five-year period, only 88% of the sites received F grades, revealing a longer trend of failing grades in the watershed (**TABLE 13**).

Riverfront Park is the site furthest upstream in the zone of this watershed. Despite earning an F annual grade this year and ranking as the sixth-worst site on the Freshwater Fails List, water quality at this site improved slightly in 2025 compared to 2024. The SS exceedance rate decreased slightly from 91% in 2024 to 89% in 2025, while median *E. coli* concentrations decreased from 2603 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 1201 MPN/100mL in 2025 (Appendix F and Appendix M). Although median bacteria concentrations decreased by more than 50%, this median *E. coli* concentration is still unsafe for contact, highlighting the ongoing challenges in addressing upstream pollution sources and unmanaged urban runoff.

LOWER L.A. RIVER WATERSHED

ANNUAL GRADES	Total Count	%
A	0	0
B	0	0
C	0	0
D	3	13
F	21	88

TABLE 13. Five Year at Lower L.A. River Watershed

Hollydale Dale Park, Lower L.A. River / Photo: Heal the Bay

The next site is located just downstream of the confluence between the L.A. River and the Rio Hondo River. This site continued to experience poor water quality in 2025, repeating 2024's F annual grade and earning the number one spot on the Freshwater Fails List for the worst water quality monitored in L.A. County. The SS exceedance rate increased from 91% in 2024 to 100% in 2025 (Appendix F and Appendix M). To further highlight this trend of continued exceedances, in 2024, the L.A. River below the Rio Hondo Confluence site had a SS exceedance rate of 67%. Additionally, a 100% GM exceedance rate also emphasizes that this site had consistently reached unsafe levels[18] for every sample taken and between any 30-day period (Appendix G). However, the median *E. coli* concentrations decreased significantly from 2247 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 789 MPN/100mL in 2025.

Hollydale Park is part of the Freshwater Fails List for the third consecutive year, receiving an F annual grade in 2025, and was tied as the worst site in 2025 with the L.A. River below the Rio Hondo Confluence site. The *E. coli* SS exceedance rate increased from 82% in 2024 to 100% in 2025 (Appendix F and Appendix M). Similar to the previous site, in 2023, Hollydale Park had a 67% SS exceedance rate, revealing the trend of consistent exceedances and unsafe levels. The median *E. coli* concentration decreased from 2489 MPN/100MPN/100mL to 1236 MPN/100mL in 2025. Although the median *E. coli* concentrations decreased, Hollydale Park still had the highest *E. coli* concentration across all sites included in this report, which is 247 times higher than the Upper East Fork site in the Upper San Gabriel River Watershed, which had the lowest median across all sites, 5 MPN/100mL.

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Compton Creek joins the L.A. River just over five miles upstream of the river's outlet into the ocean, traveling through heavily urbanized areas in South L.A. Two sites are monitored here: Compton Creek before its confluence with the L.A. River and just below the confluence. In 2024, below the Compton Creek Confluence ranked as the first site of the Freshwater Fails List, followed by Compton Creek, which ranked the fourth-worst site. For the third consecutive year, both sites have received an F annual grade (**FIGURE 17** and Appendix J).

Below Compton Creek Confluence holds the second-worst site in L.A. County and has remained on the Freshwater Fails List for three consecutive years. In 2025, the median *E. coli* concentration was 937 MPN/100mL, consistently receiving F weekly grades. This was an increase from the median *E. coli* concentrations in the previous year, 835 MPN/100mL, and an increase in the exceedance rate, from 92% in 2024 to 100% in 2025 (Appendix F and Appendix M). This indicates that this site is still impacted by bacterial pollution and exhibited a continual decline in water quality, in both the median *E. coli* concentrations and the exceedance rates.

In 2025, the site at Compton Creek saw growth in vegetation, which could signal some potential for natural water filtration, which may improve water quality. Despite this potential to alleviate bacterial pollution load, this site experienced a decrease in water quality, with the *E. coli* SS exceedance rate increasing to 89%, from 85% in 2024, and a median *E. coli* concentration at 988 MPN/100mL in 2025 from 2019 MPN/100mL in 2024 (Appendix F and Appendix M). This indicates that this site is still heavily impacted by bacterial pollution.

Lastly, Willow Street is located in the southernmost freshwater section of the L.A. River, before the water enters the Pacific Ocean at the Port of Long Beach. Like the other sites in the Lower L.A. River Watershed, Willow Street is on the Freshwater Fails List for the third consecutive year, receiving an F annual grade and ranking the third-worst site in L.A. County. This site continued to experience poor water quality in 2025. In 2024, this site showed more variability, with 8.0% of the sampling days achieving an A+ grade, 8.0% achieving a C grade, and 84% receiving an F grade, whereas in 2025, 90% of the sampling days achieved an F grade and 10% achieved a D grade (**FIGURE 17**). Additionally, the SS exceedance rate in 2023 was 63%, increased to 83% in 2024, and finally to 100% in 2025. Even though the median *E. coli* concentration decreased from 3565 MPN/100mL in 2024 to 806 MPN/100mL in 2025, the consistent SS exceedances are a concern across the entire Lower L.A. River Watershed (Appendix F and Appendix M).

The patterns observed across all Lower L.A. River Watershed sites indicate high exceedance rates, which are specifically concerning, as communities rely on this area for recreation, with activities such as running, walking, and biking along the river paths. Additionally, unhoused individuals and community members living within the river canal often use the river for bathing and washing out of necessity. Furthermore, the water flowing from the L.A. River ultimately flows to the ocean, where recreators across the county may be impacted by bacterial pollution. This reinforces the urgency of addressing water quality concerns in this part of the watershed, as these community members deserve access to clean and safe water.

These persistent poor grades indicate a need for action and change in this area. It is no surprise that this entire channelized section of the downstream portion of the L.A. River exhibits the worst water quality and annual grades, compared to the rest of the watershed. Without sufficient natural filtration to mitigate pollution and without proper management of urban runoff and other illicit discharges, the river will continue to pose significant risks for recreational activities and other essential beneficial uses that are critically needed by the Angeleno community.

conclusions

The 2025 RRC highlights a decrease in water quality at many of L.A. County's freshwater recreation sites. Challenges persisted in urbanized areas, such as the Lower L.A. River Watershed and parts of the Upper L.A. River Watershed, where trash accumulation and urban runoff continue to degrade water quality, while improvements were evident in the Malibu Creek Watershed and the Upper San Gabriel River Watershed. The Palisades and Eaton fires emphasize the impact of climatic variability and anthropogenic factors that continue to influence water quality conditions. After over 10 years of water quality testing at Heal the Bay, it is clear that Ongoing monitoring, enhanced methodologies, trash removal, and community engagement will be key to ensuring safe and enjoyable freshwater recreation for all.

Water quality across various watersheds showed an overall decline in 2025, while excellent water quality persisted in open spaces upstream, such as the Upper San Gabriel River Watershed and the Malibu Creek Watersheds. Although water quality in the Recreational Zones of the L.A. River Watershed had generally safe-to-swim grades, they were lower in 2025 than in 2024 because weekly exceedance rates increased. Water quality also declined further downstream, particularly in the Lower L.A. River Watershed, where increased runoff has continually led to F annual grades. Additionally, two recurrent sites and three new sites from the Upper L.A. River Watershed are heavily impacted by urban runoff. With no major rain events during summer 2025, some sites higher in the watershed experienced improvements, while others, particularly downstream, saw declines. This highlights the importance of anthropogenic activity and land use and their influence on bacterial pollution around sampling sites.

Increased temperatures, prolonged periods without rainfall, climatic variability, and increased wildfire risks can significantly impact the hydrological conditions and ultimately affect water quality in L.A. County. FIB pollution growth is known to coincide with elevated air and water temperatures, suggesting a growing concern with climate change.[19] Although downstream sites in all the watersheds receive significant urban inputs that contribute to elevated FIB levels, the interaction between temperature, altered hydrology, land use, and fire disturbances can also influence water quality. Targeted monitoring efforts downstream of fire-impacted areas are strongly encouraged to better distinguish the existing urban sources of bacterial pollution from those of wildfire impact. Similarly, expanding existing monitoring efforts downstream in all watersheds will help to shed insights on the episodic and chronic contamination impacting the river.

With proper management strategies, water quality can be improved, as evidenced by the ten sites that achieved an annual A+ grade, demonstrating consistently excellent water quality and earning a place on our prestigious Honor Roll List. While these sites are located in more natural, open spaces with limited anthropogenic alterations to the surrounding area, other attributes can be implemented at sites with poor water quality to improve them. For example, developing nature-based solutions to reduce stormwater runoff, enabling the infrastructure to mimic natural filtration with vegetation, will help reduce contaminants before reaching the L.A. River. Nature-based solutions can also help to maintain a healthy and balanced ecosystem by providing habitat to wildlife.

19 Paul, M.J. et al., 2019

The Recreation Zones represent an intermediary zone, as this section of the river has a semi-soft bottom, which allows for some vegetation and other wildlife to grow in this area of the river. While it is not completely channelized, like the Lower L.A. River Watershed, it is also not considered natural, like the sites in the Upper San Gabriel River Watershed and even some sites in the Upper L.A. River Watershed. This dynamic portion of the river reflects the duality between natural and anthropogenic spaces, evident in the variability in annual grades in 2025 and years prior. The safe-to-swim grades in years prior, and the most recent declining grades, underscore the potential for improved water quality through nature-based solutions that seek to align the river with a system more in tune with a natural filtration process. Leaning on the natural elements from the soft bottom in the Recreation Zones may allow for improvements in water quality.

Despite the successes higher in the watersheds, other challenges still persist downstream, where urban runoff continues to contribute to declining water quality. The Lower L.A. River Watershed was the most impacted by bacterial pollution this year. This section of the river channel, which is completely covered in concrete, is within highly urbanized areas, leaving little to no opportunities for natural filtration to occur. Because these sites in the Lower L.A. River Watershed are cut off from the natural water cycle, they are unable to benefit from many of the natural processes that can help maintain good water quality.

In addition to FIB, trash accumulation along the L.A River and the San Gabriel River pose significant challenges to water quality through L.A. County's waterways. In the L.A. River, particularly in upstream sections and areas with minimal flow, trash not only detracts from the natural beauty but also may contribute to elevated bacterial levels as it degrades. Trash can clog channels, disrupt natural flow, and provide breeding grounds for harmful bacteria, increasing the risk of waterborne illnesses. Additionally, the breakdown of plastics contributes to microplastic contamination, further degrading water quality and potentially harming aquatic life.

Based on observations throughout the watersheds, it would be beneficial for watershed managers to implement more effective trash mitigation plans. Enhanced maintenance and strategically placed trash receptacles along the river paths, along with more street sweeping and catch basin management, could further improve the health and cleanliness of L.A. County's waterways. This can be paired with the development of effective trash cleanup programs that involve the city and the community. These cleanups can target "trash hotspots," which have already been identified as being heavily impacted by litter or highly popular for visitors. For example, this year, the Stream Team partnered with the Office of Hilda Solis, L.A. County Board of Supervisors, to help clean a section of Whittier Narrows Recreation Areas as part of the California Coastal Cleanup Day efforts. These efforts will be important for future events, such as the 2026 Men's World Cup and the 2028 Olympics, which will be hosted in L.A. and will make use of the Sepulveda Basin Recreation Area and the Whittier Narrows Recreation Area. Therefore, trash cleanup is essential for improving water quality, restoring the ecological health of these river systems, and improving the aesthetic value to the community.

Water quality monitoring is essential for safeguarding public health and maintaining ecosystem integrity. By regularly assessing water bodies, we can identify contaminants and pollution levels that pose a risk to both human and environmental health. Sites with high levels of bacterial pollution are also likely to be impacted by other pollutants from stormwater runoff. Heal the Bay will continue working with LASAN, L.A. City, LAWRMP, and SGRRMP to keep informing the public about these water quality issues. Together, L.A. County can work towards healthier waterways and a brighter future for our communities. In the summer, visitors are encouraged to consult Heal the Bay's RRC (by visiting healthebay.org/riverreportcard) for weekly water quality grades before recreating at a freshwater site in L.A. County. Grades are updated weekly during the summer months, based on the most recent sampling data.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Heal the Bay recommends the following actions to protect beneficial uses and public health.

- **Stay Informed**: check the RRC for more information about freshwater recreation sites, including weekly grades during the summer.
- **Better Maintenance of Our Waterbodies**:
  - **Protect and Restore our Waterways:** expand freshwater monitoring near fire-prone locations where data collection is limited, as well as areas not typically associated with recreation (further downstream), support watershed restoration efforts to improve natural filtration and climatic resilience, and prepare for wildfire impacts on freshwater systems.
  - **Increase Community Engagement:** improve public notification systems for water quality exceedances, expand public awareness of freshwater monitoring efforts, especially in sites not typically associated with recreation, and focus on community-based stewardship, empowering residents to participate in local initiatives.
  - **Strive for Safe, Clean Water:** address urban runoff, focusing on nature-based solutions and stormwater capture programs, to prevent pollutant loads from entering our waterways, and strengthen trash reduction programs in urbanized areas where debris often accumulates
- **Preparation for International Events**: with the 2026 Men's World Cup and the 2028 Olympics in the near future, proper preparation to help mitigate trash pollution from large-scale events is necessary to limit environmental impacts in L.A. County.

Want to recreate safely? Here are some safety measures while recreating in a freshwater site.

- Do not enter the water if you have/had diarrhea in the last two weeks.
- Clean up after your pets. Bacteria from fecal matter, such as pet waste, can wash into our rivers and streams.
- Use restroom facilities before visiting a recreational site.
- Put trash in appropriate receptacles, especially trash that can introduce fecal waste into streams (diapers, pet waste, toilet paper).
- Keep an eye on children in swim diapers and change the diapers regularly.
- Avoid water contact if your immune system is compromised (small children and the elderly are at higher risk of contracting illnesses).
- Avoid swimming during a rain event and for at least 72 hours after.

Want to make a big impact on reducing water pollution? Start at home! Here are some practical ways to minimize polluted runoff and protect our waterways:

- Swap out impervious surfaces, like traditional driveways and sidewalks, for porous pavement materials, which let water soak through. Trade high-maintenance grass lawns for native plants that could thrive naturally and save water.
- Sweep up leaves, dirt, and debris instead of hosing them away. Turn yard waste into rich compost to nourish your garden.
- Clean up responsibly.
- Always pick up pets and store, use, and dispose of household chemicals safely.
- Keep your car in check. Regularly inspect your vehicles for leaks and recycle motor oil and antifreeze during changes. Make use of professional car washes that prevent runoff instead of washing your car in the driveway.
- Care for your septic system. If you have a septic system, have it inspected and pumped every three to five years. Save water where you can, keep the system running smoothly, and extend its lifespan.

River and Watershed News

Bowtie Wetland Demonstration, Elysian Valley Recreation Zone
Photo: The Nature Conservancy

Inell Woods: Community Scale Green Infrastructure

Heal the Bay celebrated the opening of Inell Woods Park in 2025, after 17 years of community advocacy and planning. Built on a formerly vacant lot in South L.A., the new park provides long-awaited green space and recreation opportunities for local residents while also serving as a stormwater capture project designed to improve water quality in the L.A. River watershed. Community members played a central role throughout project development, shaping the vision, priorities, and features to ensure it truly reflected neighborhood needs. Throughout the process, Heal the Bay coordinated with local leadership and community partners to support those efforts and help deliver multiple environmental and community benefits.

Inell Woods Park, Lower L.A. River photo: Heal the Bay

Inell Woods Park was strategically chosen as a site that could help improve local water quality. Compton Creek is one of the last tributaries that reaches the L.A. River. This site, and other sites in the Lower L.A. River Watershed, consistently receive failing letter grades in Heal the Bay's River Report Card due to high bacteria concentrations. Heal the Bay sought to reduce the pollutant load that entered Compton Creek, and subsequently into the Pacific Ocean, recognizing that parks in inland communities can serve as a natural buffer to reduce pollution before entering the waterway. Additionally, a new park at this location would transform a vacant lot to serve the surrounding community. This project demonstrates how green space in inland communities can serve as a natural buffer against urban runoff while creating safer, healthier neighborhoods.

During storm events, Inell Woods Park is expected to capture between 104,000 to 120,000 gallons of stormwater, reducing polluted runoff and reusing treated water onsite for irrigation.[20] While smaller in scale than some regional infrastructure projects, Inell Woods highlights the importance of continuing to invest in neighborhood-scale green infrastructure, especially in communities that have historically lacked access to parks, environmental investment, and community resources. Inell Woods Park is proof of the success of community collaboration, environmental stewardship, and forward-thinking planning for all Angelenos.

20 https://healthebay.org/inell-woods-park/

Bowtie Wetland Demonstration: Construction Progress and Community Momentum

Bowtie Wetland Demonstration,
Elysian Valley Recreation Zone
Photo: The Nature Conservancy

The Bowtie Wetland Demonstration continues to take shape along the L.A. River in Elysian Valley, advancing the first phase of a transformative vision to convert a former 18-acre railyard into a multi-benefit park that supports water quality, wildlife habitat, climate resilience, and public access. Led by the Nature Conservancy in partnership with California State Parks, the approximately 3.5-acre project represents one of the most significant nature-based stormwater capture projects currently underway along the river.

Since breaking ground in September 2024, the project has made substantial progress. Soil remediation (critical for addressing contamination from the site's industrial past) was completed in fall 2024, allowing construction to move forward. As of early 2026, the project is approximately 65% complete. Crews have finished major excavation of the wetlands, grading across the site, and construction of pathways. Installation of the underground stormwater treatment system is ongoing, including placement of treatment vaults and backfilling with compacted, screened soil to stabilize the system. Irrigation infrastructure is also being installed, and native planting began on February 28th, 2026.

Once complete, the 3.4-acre constructed wetland will divert and treat stormwater from a nearby drain (SDL 30), a site previously identified by Heal the Bay as a source of elevated bacteria levels. Water will move through an underground treatment system and then through a series of wetland features above ground designed to slow, filter, and treat flows before discharging into the L.A. River, sustaining instream flows, enhancing downstream water quality to protect public health, and bringing long-overdue investment to communities surrounding the Bowtie parcel.

Beyond construction milestones, the project is already serving as a hub for community engagement. In March 2026, nearly 200 local residents attended a Community Welcome Day, where they toured the site, participated in education activities, and connected with partner organizations. Events like these highlight the project's role not only as infrastructure, but as a future community space that reconnects residents to the river.

With construction continuing through 2026 and park opening anticipated early 2028, the Bowtie Wetland Demonstration is on track to become a model for integrating nature-based solutions for stormwater management, ecological restoration, and community access in highly urbanized river systems.

Bowtie Wetland Demonstration, Elysian Valley Recreation Zone
Photo: The Nature Conservancy

Eaton Wash, Upper L.A. River / Photo: City of Pasadena

Eaton Wash: The Development of a Multi-Benefit Stormwater Capture Project

The City of Pasadena is developing the Eaton Wash Stormwater Capture Project, funded by the LA County Safe, Clean Water Program, to improve local water quality and reduce the pollution flowing downstream through Eaton Wash and into the Rio Hondo River, the L.A. River, and ultimately the Pacific Ocean. The project comes at an especially important time as communities continue to recover from the impacts of the 2025 Eaton Fire and face growing climate-related water challenges.

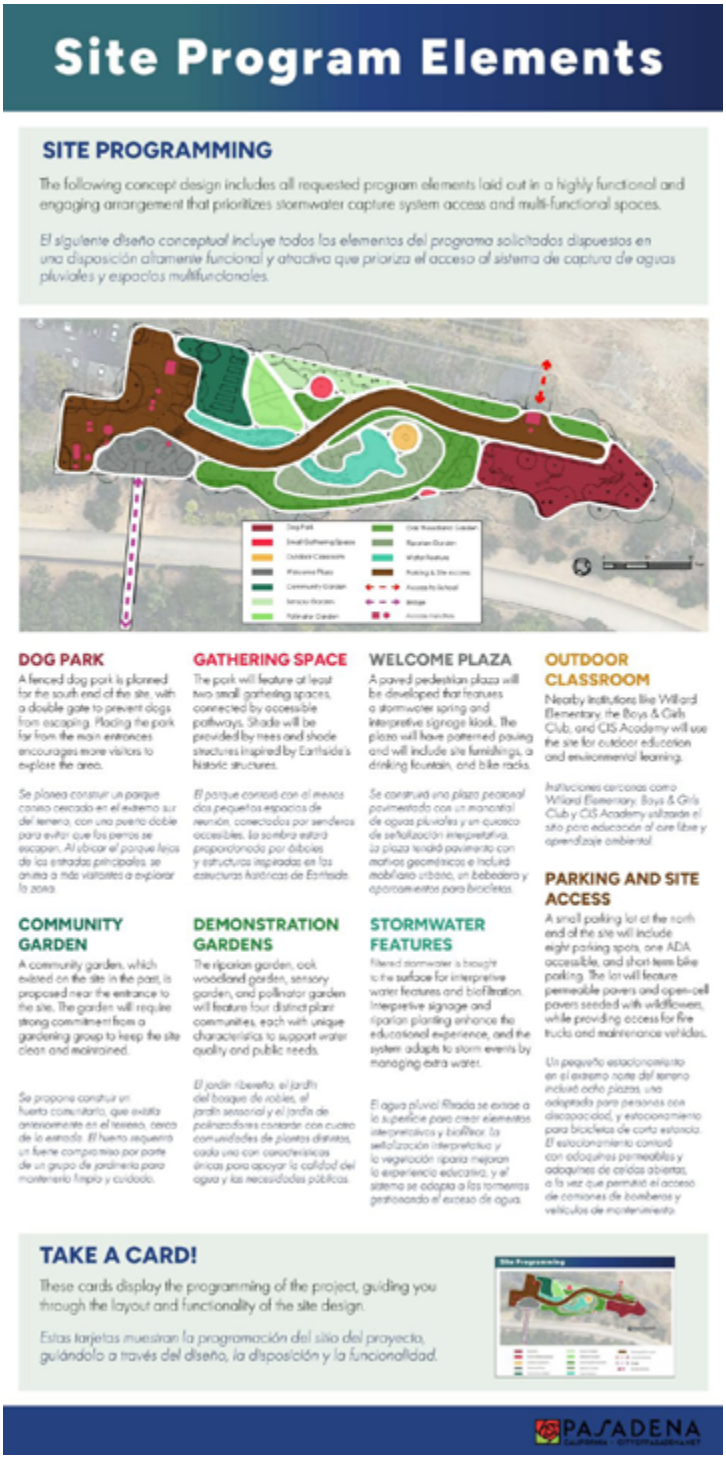
Located on a city-owned vacant parcel adjacent to Eaton Wash, the city will install an underground stormwater infiltration gallery that will capture six acre-feet, or approximately 1.9 million gallons, of water.[21] The system will capture and treat polluted urban runoff before it reaches local waterways, helping reduce bacterial pollution and other contaminants downstream. Some of the treated water will be stored for groundwater recharge and local water supply needs, including irrigation for the future park space, while the remaining treated water will be safely released back into Eaton Wash.

Beyond its water quality benefits, the project will create a multi-benefit community park designed to increase

21 https://www.cityofpasadena.net/public-works/engineering-and-construction/construction/eaton-wash-stormwater-capture-project/#project-documents

tree canopy, reduce the heat island effect, and expand usable park space. The city is continuing to work with local neighborhood groups and community-based organizations throughout the design process to ensure the project reflects local priorities and community needs. Project partners include the Boys and Girls Club of Pasadena, Amigos de los Rios, GroWORKS, and Willard Elementary School. Construction is expected to begin in 2027 and conclude in 2029.

In 2025, the Los Angeles Regional Watershed Monitoring Program began monitoring three sites adjacent to the Eaton Fire burn area, all of which received failing water quality grades in 2025, including one site in Eaton Wash. Projects like the Eaton Wash Stormwater Capture Project can help to improve future bacterial conditions by capturing and treating polluted urban runoff before it reaches local waterways. These benefits extend beyond Eaton Wash, helping protect downstream recreation areas and improve watershed health throughout the region. As climate change intensifies and communities continue to recover from the 2025 Eaton Fire, stormwater capture and diversion projects like this one will play an increasingly important role in reducing post-fire pollution impacts and building long-term climate resilience.



Eaton Wash, Upper L.A. River / Photo: City of Pasadena

Urban Orchard Park: River Revitalization Efforts in the Lower L.A. River

Southeast Los Angeles, a park poor-region facing impacts from air pollution, the heat island effect, and social vulnerability, received a brand-new park partially funded through the LA County Safe, Clean Water Program. Urban Orchard Park has been in development since 2016, and construction finished in the summer of 2025. In collaboration with the City of South Gate and Trust for Public Land, this project has created much-needed open space for the residents of Southeast L.A.

Nestled between the Lower L.A. River and the 710 freeway, this site converted a seven-acre stretch of post-industrial land into green infrastructure. One of the project's primary functions is the diversion and treatment of stormwater from the L.A. River through wetlands and onsite reuse systems. The park is expected to clean 32 million gallons of polluted stormwater, before it reaches downstream waterways.[22] These improvements are especially important for the Lower L.A. River Watershed, which has experienced chronic bacterial pollution for years, with frequent exceedances of state recreation standards. The development of projects like the Urban Orchard Park can help improve current conditions of the Lower L.A. River.

In addition to the diversion and treatment of stormwater, Urban Orchard Park's most notable features are its accessible recreation opportunities for residents. With over 200 fruit trees, educational gardens, and a nature-based playground, residents are able to gather for community events in a location where such opportunities were not previously accessible. Situated in a densely populated urbanized community, the Urban Orchard Park will address many underlying challenges including air pollution, water quality concerns, and limited access to green space. With intentional design and input from the community, Trust for Public Land implemented many features that the community desired.

Urban Orchard, Lower L.A. River / Photo: Trust for Public Land

Urban Orchard Park serves as a model for continued development of green space and nature-based solutions, especially in locations where communities are heavily burdened with environmental issues. Heal the Bay continues to support these types of river revitalization efforts that improve both water quality and access to safe outdoor spaces, especially where they are needed most.

Heal the Bay encourages residents who support projects like this to participate in the Safe, Clean Water Program's Community Strengths and Needs Assessment.[23] Community feedback helps inform future funding decisions and ensures that investments continue to reflect local priorities, improve watershed health, and expand access to cleaner, greener public spaces across L.A County.

22 https://www.tpl.org/our-work/urban-orchard

23 https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/f757166cd3dc44ac9528bf33a2270568

Appendices

Dig deeper into the River Report Card by accessing our Appendices.

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2025 Annual River Report Card

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