



California Creek Water Quality:

The Custer Drainage

What is fecal coliform bacteria?

Fecal coliform bacteria is found in human and animal feces. Although fecal coliform may be harmless, when it's detected in a stream or bay, it's a sign that human and/or animal wastes—and the harmful microorganisms that they may carry—are polluting the water.

Fecal coliform indicates that there is a public health risk because of the potential of direct contact with sewage. In addition, human and animal waste can contaminate shellfish and make them unsafe to eat.

How much bacteria is in your neighborhood creek?

To guard against public health risks, the state Department of Ecology has established water quality standards for bacteria in both fresh and marine waters. In your neighborhood creek, there are two standards that must be met: water samples must have less than an average of 100 fecal coliform colonies per 100 milliliters of water (100 FC/100 mL), and less than 10% of the samples can have more than 200 FC per 100 mL.

Between April 2006 and December 2007, Whatcom County collected 18 samples from your neighborhood creek. Lab analysis showed an average of 329 FC/100 mL—more than three times the allowed amount. Two-thirds of the samples exceeded 200 FC/100 mL—more than six times the allowed number.

Where does bacteria come from?

Possible sources in your neighborhood creek are:

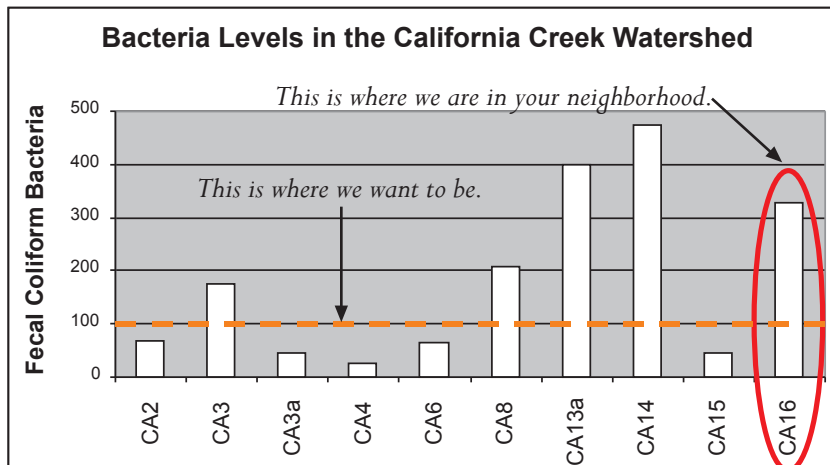
- Failing septic systems
- Leaks in municipal sewer system
- Hobby or small farms
- Large agricultural operations
- Pets and wildlife

In the creek that drains the Custer area, there are about 174 known on-site sewage systems, about 71 parcels that may have animals (small farms), and less than three large agricultural operations.

How is the County working on bacteria problems?

There are three county departments working on different aspects of bacterial pollution. You may receive mailings or visits from one or more of them, with information on what you can do to protect public health and water quality. Ultimately, your neighborhood's combined efforts will help preserve quality of life in this county.

- ◆ **Health Department**, 676-6724 - On-site sewage system operations & maintenance.
- ◆ **Planning and Development Services**, 676-6907 - Critical Areas Ordinance compliance.
- ◆ **Public Works**, 676-6876 - Water quality monitoring, community outreach, shellfish protection districts.



Facts about the Custer drainage

Size	1527 acres
Parcels	279
Land uses	Agriculture, rural residential