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Tuesday November 14, 2006

## Group to discuss finding of E. coli in Dix River watershed

By **LIZ MAPLES**  
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High levels of E. coli, the same bacterium that caused the recent fresh spinach recall, have been found at several spots along Clark's Run and at the mouth of Hanging Fork, according to preliminary water sampling results.

The Dix River Watershed Council will meet at 6:30 p.m. today at Danville city hall to discuss testing and possible sources of the pathogen.

E. coli can be found in the intestinal tracts of both humans and animals. Waterway contamination can come from several sources, including pet waste, cattle pastures, failing septic systems or problems with waste water treatment. The council is considering doing further tests that will determine whether the E. coli came from animals or humans.

Dix River watershed starts in southern Mercer County and includes eastern Garrard County, most of Boyle County and northern Lincoln, Casey and Rockcastle counties. It also includes Herrington Lake, Clark's Run and Hanging Fork.

The Kentucky Department of Water chose the Dix watershed as one of five priority watersheds in the state. Nine of 12 months of planned sampling has been completed. The council, along with public input, plans to formulate a plan to improve water quality within the watershed.

KDOW's Lee Colten, the project's primary point of contact, said he wishes there was more involvement from the agriculture community and local governments within the watershed.

Water samples done in the watershed found high levels of E. coli. Especially high levels have been found in Clark's Run and at the mouth of Hanging Fork. Any samples with more than 240 E. coli colonies per milliliter is a matter of concern, Colten wrote in an e-mail. Several local spots tested had more than 1,000 colonies.

This still is fewer colonies than were found in waterways around California farms where the contaminated fresh spinach was traced. Some waterways there had more than 10,000 colonies. E. coli infection can cause diarrhea and sometimes kidney failure.

The majority of infections come from ingesting undercooked ground beef, but it can also be contracted by swimming in sewage contaminated water, according to

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the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

### Tests to determine if E. coli is coming from humans or animals

The Dix River Watershed Council has decided to do a series of tests to determine if the E. coli is coming from humans or animals. These tests, microbial source tracking, are relatively new, Colten said.

Finding specific sources can be difficult. In an area rich with cattle, it might, at first, seem the livestock are causing the problem, but it could also be houses in the area that are discharging sewage, Colten explained. The council recently asked local health departments if there were any suspected sources of the E. coli, but were told no specific straight pipes or failing septic systems could be identified.

In the 1970s when the Clean Water Act was passed, the sources of water pollution were more obvious, pipes discharging industrial waste and sewage into a waterway. Today most of those sources have been remedied, and the sources of water pollution are less obvious. Pollutants come from lawns, parking lots, housetops, construction sites and pastures. This is known as non-point source pollution.

Those on the Dix Watershed Council believe the problems come from fecal matter of either cattle or humans. Waste in the water can reduce oxygen and increase phosphorous, hurting aquatic animals and plants, and it also can make waterways unsafe for recreation.

When the source of the pollution is identified then the watershed council will work on writing a plan to repair the watershed.

Colten said the group wants community involvement. He said he wishes there was more involvement from people in agriculture and local governments from Lincoln, Garrard, Mercer and Boyle counties. The state has hired Third Rock Consultants, from Lexington, to do water monitoring, modeling and analysis on the project.

**On the Net:** [www.dixriverwatershed.org](http://www.dixriverwatershed.org).

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