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### **E. coli limits for major D.C. rivers illegal, court rules**

*EPA's pollution limits for Anacostia, Potomac and Rock Creek are too high*

Washington, D.C. — The E. coli pollution limits the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved for the Anacostia River, Potomac River, Rock Creek, and their tributaries in the District of Columbia violate the Clean Water Act, the United States District Court for the District of Columbia [ruled](#) Monday night. The decision means the so-called total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) of fecal bacteria pollution allowed in these major D.C. water bodies will have to be redone within a year so that rivers and tributaries are safe for people to canoe, kayak and fish in.

E. coli is a type of fecal bacteria that is used as a proxy to estimate the presence of harmful illness-causing pathogens in rivers and creeks. Exposure to these pathogens in water can cause vomiting, indigestion, diarrhea, and fever, as well as earaches, pink eye, rashes, and skin infections.

“This is a major victory not just for the regional environment, but most importantly, for all those across the metropolitan area who use these rivers for livelihood and recreation,” **said Seth Johnson, Earthjustice attorney.** “We have long said the current limits fail to ensure the District’s water quality standards are met. This violates the law, and means men, women and children have been at risk of serious illness.”

Under current TMDLs, bacteria concentrations in the rivers and creeks of D.C. exceed standards as often as 42 percent of the time. Sources of pollution to these waterways include the Blue Plains wastewater treatment plant, which treats sewage from the District and several suburban areas, and discharges effluent that is still high in bacteria into the Potomac. In addition, the combined sewage overflow system that is connected with Blue Plains by design dumps untreated raw sewage straight into outfalls along both the Potomac and Anacostia during storms.

The ruling stems from a lawsuit filed in 2016 on behalf of the Anacostia Riverkeeper, the Kingman Park Civic Association, and the Potomac Riverkeeper Network by Earthjustice attorneys Jennifer Chavez and Seth Johnson.