



## Anchorage Waterways Council

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[www.anchoragecreeks.org](http://www.anchoragecreeks.org)

## Anchorage Waterways Council's Creek Report Card

*"No creek left behind."*

Dear Government Hill Community Council:

The Municipality of Anchorage is about 2,000 mi<sup>2</sup> and has approximately 2,250 miles of creeks and rivers. These creeks and rivers are often listed as some of Anchorage's premier amenities. During the summer of 2012, 70-hardy citizen volunteers surveyed nearly 175 miles of these creeks for issues, problems, access, suggestions for projects and repairs and general comments. These volunteers "graded" the creeks on a variety of criteria, including human impacts, recreational opportunities, natural processes, and aesthetics. Specific findings will be provided to the appropriate agency or organization.

This survey was modeled after the Anchorage Park Foundation's Park Report Card as well as another 50+ citizen creek surveys around the U.S. and a number in other parts of the world. These citizen creek report cards have been encouraged by a number of organizations including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and American Rivers. The Anchorage program was sponsored by the Bullitt Foundation and the USFWS.

Additionally, the Anchorage Waterways Council has volunteer water-quality monitors along our creeks, and is the only organization that routinely monitors the water quality of our creeks.

With this note, the Anchorage Waterways Council (AWC) would like to provide information to you about the "state of the creeks" in your Community Council area. They are one of our urban assets, and **we ALL need to be involved in protecting and enhancing our creeks.**

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas J. Eley, Ph.D.

Creek Report Card Coordinator

Anchorage Waterways Council is a non-profit, membership organization

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Community Council(s): **Government Hill**

Creek(s): ***Ship Creek***

Water Quality Monitoring: **Consistently since 2000 at miles 1 and 3 from the mouth, and beginning in 2011 in Arctic Valley**

Issues:

- Ship Creek was surveyed from Arctic Valley to its mouth at the Port of Anchorage with the exception of one training area on Fort Richardson.
- The water was generally turbid and sediment filled due to the rainy summer. Water levels ranged from average to filled to the top of its banks, particularly after the September 2012 wind and rain storm.
- Ship Creek supports populations of anadromous fishes (particularly salmon) and it is fished intensely during the open season. Few barriers exist to the fish except the Ship Creek dam.
- From Arctic Valley to Post Road, Ship Creek showed minimal visual human impacts and trash, other than gold balls in the creek.
- From the Glenn Highway Bridge to the mouth the State of Alaska, Department of Environmental Conservation considers Ship Creek an “impaired water” due to high fecal coliform counts and pollution with petroleum, hydrocarbons, oils, grease, petroleum products and urban runoff (<http://www.dec.alaska.gov/water/wqsar/Docs/2010impairedwaters.pdf>).
- Monitoring water quality at Arctic Valley and Post Road have found relatively low fecal coliform bacteria counts but closer to the mouth at mile 1, the fecal coliform counts have increased dramatically. Fecal coliform bacteria (*Escherichia coli*) counts are higher in the summer months on most creeks due to increased runoff from rain events. Little pet waste was seen so the source of the bacteria is not entirely clear.
- Considerable trash was found in and along the creek below Post Road, including bicycles, tires, construction materials, pallets, household debris and plastic bags. In addition, a homeless camp was located between Reeve and Post Roads, but the camp was relatively neat. A well-worn train ran from the homeless camp to the creek.
- Extensive bank trampling is occurring along the area between Post and Reeve Roads, which is exacerbating bank erosion.
- Flooding was noted along much of the creek due to downed trees from the September 2012 wind storm.
- All water quality measurements made by AWC’s monitors found Ship Creek to generally meet the State’s water quality standards. However, pH values ranged from 6.59 to 8.38. The highest readings were from February to May and lowest ones in late May and December. Both monitoring sites downstream of Post Road tended to show the same trends and magnitudes in pH. The pH findings for Ship Creek did not exceed the State standards of a minimum of 6.5 and a maximum of 8.5 for wildlife and the growth and propagation of fish and other aquatic life, but the pH certainly closely approaches the limits.
- The biggest threat to Ship Creek is most likely from storm water runoff from roads, commercial properties and yards. Many of the commercial properties have little natural vegetative buffers between their property and the creek. Heavy equipment is parked on some of the property close the

fence between the property and Ship Creek. Storm water runoff, and whatever it carries with it in the way of pollutants, ultimately ends up in our creeks and rivers and **is not routed** through the sewage treatment plant.

- Ship Creek receives considerable recreational use and “salmon fishing in downtown Anchorage” is used as an inducement to tourists. The Municipality of Anchorage should work with the State of Alaska to get Ship Creek off the Impaired Waters List, particularly if you encourage people to eat the salmon from the creek.
- Lastly, “what to do with Ship Creek” is a current topic being talked about around the Municipality, and the Mayor is interested in seeing commercial use of certain vacant properties along the lower part of the creek. It is important that any development projects be conducted in a way that they do not result in further endangering Ship Creek.