E. COLI
IN AN URBAN WATERSHED

Alliance of Rouge Communities
OURS TO PROTECT
Working together, restoring the river

UNDERSTANDING *E. COLI* IN WATERSHEDS: SOURCES AND SOLUTIONS

Escherichia coli (E. coli) is a type of bacteria, one of the most widely monitored indicators of water quality. Most strains of *E. coli* are harmless bacteria naturally residing in animals, but their presence in streams, rivers, and lakes serves as a warning sign. Higher levels can mean fecal contamination.

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

E. coli reaches surface water through two main pathways:

Point sources:

discharges from a single location, such as a water treatment facility, or municipal systems that have combined sewage and stormwater which can overflow during heavy rain.

Nonpoint sources:

discharges from undefinable locations, such as runoff over land, including farms, wildlife, pet waste, and failing septic systems

Rainfall washes accumulated pet and wildlife feces deposited near or on sidewalks and streets into waterways, rapidly increasing *E. coli* levels. Rainfall also increases river flow, kicking up bottom sediment that contains previously washed off *E. coli* and feces.

WHY DOES *E. COLI* MATTER?

1. **Human Health Risks:** Swallowing or exposing open wounds to contaminated water can cause illness.

2. **Economic Impacts:** High bacterial loads lead to unsafe water, closed swimming beaches, restricted kayaking and fishing, and higher water treatment costs.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO REDUCE *E. COLI* IN THE ROUGE:

Pick up your pet waste! In an urban watershed such as the Rouge, pet waste is a major source of *E. coli*

Don't feed wildlife! In an urban watershed such as the Rouge, feeding wildlife can cause harm as animals become too numerous, dependent on humans, cluster close to feeding areas and get hit by cars.

Plant native plants! Planting native plants or even installing a rain garden can absorb rainfall before it turns into run-off. Buffer zones of plants along waterways prevent animal feces from being washed directly into surface waters. Native plants have especially long roots and absorb more water than turf grass.

For more information on water quality in the Rouge, please visit:
allianceofrougecommunities.com