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Fort Myers City Council to Discuss Bacterial Contamination of Billy's Creek

FORT MYERS - April 11, 2018 - Fecal bacteria levels in Billy's Creek pose an extremely serious public health risk. The enterococci bacteria can cause gastrointestinal illness, infections and rashes.

The Florida Department of Health (FDOH) calls for beach closure when enterococci levels reach a threshold of 71 parts per 100 milliliters of water (MPN/100 ml) and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) sets its threshold level at 130 MPN/100 ml. In early March, Calusa Waterkeeper sent samples from nine sampling stations distributed along the entire length of the Creek to a certified laboratory. The lab found elevated bacteria levels with one as high as 4,352 MPN/100 ml. This is 61 times higher than the FDOH threshold level and 33 times higher than FDEP's threshold level.

Calusa Waterkeeper notified the Fort Myers City Council, Lee County Commission, FDEP and FDOH last January of this threat after our initial review of government records indicated elevated levels dating back to 2001. Yet the various government agencies have failed to take meaningful action—such as identifying and addressing the source of the problem or notifying the public of the serious health risk. They engage instead in finger pointing.

The Fort Myers Public Information Officer indicated to WINK News that the Creek is "safe" for recreation. But, it is not safe for kayakers and paddle boarders who use the Creek, in part to visit Calusa Blueway points of interest. It is not safe for children and pets who live on or near the Creek and may come in contact with the water.

The Calusa Waterkeeper will discuss the Billy's Creek contamination at the Fort Myers City Council meeting on Monday, April 16th starting at 4:30 pm in City Hall. Calusa Waterkeeper strongly encourages the public to attend this meeting and voice your concerns. If you cannot attend, please call or write your City Council Member and County Commissioner.

Calusa Waterkeeper calls on state and local officials to:

1. Post adequate public notice, including signage, that indicates all appropriate recreational concerns and risks (swimming, wading, boating) and why.
2. Increase the frequency of sampling per the Florida Administrative Code, Chapter 62-302.530 (minimum 10 samples per month for calculating a geometric mean).
3. Conduct enteric bacteria tracing to determine source of contamination (human vs. animal) and to guide remediation.
4. Develop a restoration plan with appropriate timelines.



Protect and Preserve the Caloosahatchee River from Lake Okechobee to the Coastal Waters.

Calusa Waterkeeper is a member of Waterkeeper Alliance, the largest and fastest growing nonprofit solely focused on clean water with 370 member groups worldwide.