

Pollution still hurting Kentucky River

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FRANKFORT, Ky. — Pollution problems in parts of the Kentucky River and its feeder streams haven't improved over the past four years, according to a report released Friday.

The Kentucky Division of Water found more than 250 miles of streams in the Kentucky River basin have poor water quality in terms of supporting aquatic life. That was an increase from 213 miles in 2006, though officials said the increase resulted, at least in part, from expanding the monitoring area.

Other streams that originate in eastern Kentucky's coal mining region, including the Big Sandy River, also show varying levels of pollution. In some streams, high bacteria levels make swimming a bad idea.

Division of Water environmental scientist Randall Payne said water quality in some streams has improved in recent years while worsening in others.

"It's really a mixed bag," Payne said.

Kentucky, like other states, is required to assess water quality and report the findings to Congress. The information released Friday will be part of that report.

Researchers found that more than 3,000 miles of streams statewide could pose a risk to swimmers, primarily because of fecal and E. coli bacteria that come from human and animal waste.

In the Kentucky River basin, 219 of 939 miles of streams tested were clean enough for swimmers, while more than 500 miles were questionable.

The researchers found water quality in more than 300 miles of streams in the Big Sandy River basin questionable for swimming.

Kentucky has nearly 92,000 miles of streams, including the Ohio and Mississippi rivers that meander along an 850-mile route.

So far, researchers have assessed nearly 10,000 miles of Kentucky streams for quality of aquatic habitat. More than 5,000 miles of streams "fully support" aquatic life while 4,800 miles do not.

Researchers reported that since 2008 the number of miles of tested streams not "fully supporting" aquatic life has increased about 1 percent.

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