

The Pack River  
Watershed  
Council  
presents...

# The River Ranger

Volume 3, Issue 1

Summer 2011

## Featuring:

- ◆ Water Quality
- ◆ What You Can Do to maintain your septic system

## Inside this issue:

Shoreline Planning & Zoning	2
WaterLife Discovery Center	2
Septic Survey	3
IDAHO Snapshot	3
Upcoming opportunities...	3

Contact us at:  
(208) 263-5310

## Water Quality

### Septic System Care\*

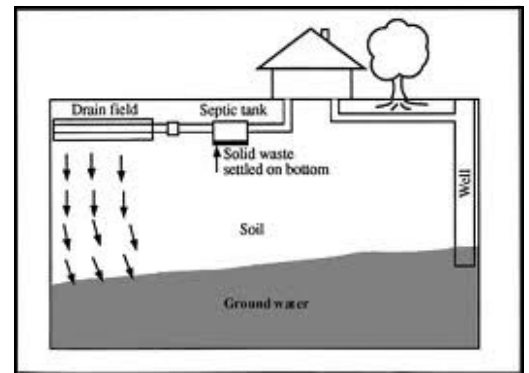
Too much sediment, and the nutrients nitrogen and phosphorous, are the major threats to the Pack River's water quality. Improperly installed and poorly maintained septic systems can significantly contribute nutrients and bacteria to the river.

Proper care and maintenance of your septic system is cost effective for you and for good water quality. Overloaded or improperly installed systems can provide a direct and constant source of nutrients to the river, causing excessive algae growth, depleted oxygen levels, and foul odors. A permit is required to install a septic system.

A septic tank collects and separates household wastewater, and a septic drainfield leaches the water and filters pollutants. The system relies on natural microorganisms to consume much of the waste. If the tank is too full or the microorganisms are dead, solids will wash into the drainfield and clog the system. Malfunctioning systems will cause bacteria and nutrients to be flushed directly into the river or into groundwater that flows into the river.

Remember what you put down your drain can have a direct impact on the water quality of Pack River, so be aware and use care. Questions about your septic system should be directed to the Panhandle Health District Environmental Services at (208) 265-6384.

\* Excerpt from "The Pack River Watershed: A Resident's Guide for Water Quality".



Household septic system in relation to groundwater hydrology

## What Can You Do?

If you use a septic system, consider the following:

- Have your septic system inspected and pumped when floating solids and sludge fill about 30% of the tank (average every 2-3 years for year-round residents and 5-6 years for seasonal residents).
- Use phosphate-free detergents to prolong the life and efficacy of your system.
- Minimize water usage and give the system time to "rest" after heavy use: the less water you use the better your system will work.
- Do not drive or park vehicles, or build structures, over a septic system.
- Make sure storm water runoff from roofs, foundation drains, and driveways does not flow into the septic tank or flow over the drainfield.

- Drainfield setback should be at least 100 feet from the river or even greater distance depending on soil type, slope, and distance to groundwater.

It's best to keep the following things out of your septic system:

- Waste from garbage disposal that can overburden the system.
- Cooking oils and grease, cigarette butts, paper towels, sanitary napkins, and diapers that fill up a system and can not be broken down.
- Strong cleaning agents such as bleach and drain cleaners, paint, and chemicals, automotive oil and petroleum products that contaminate water and kill the natural microorganisms that break down waste in your tank.

*"When the well is dry, we learn the worth of water."*

~ Benjamin Franklin

## Shoreline Planning & Zoning

Bonner County adopted new impervious surface standards for waterfront properties during a land use code update in 2008. After nearly three years of working with these shoreland regulations, county planning staff has suggested to the Planning & Zoning Commission that these new rules be reviewed. The Bonner County Planning and Zoning Commission would like to hear from waterfront landowners on this topic before considering any recommendations for changes to the code.

Impervious surfaces are areas that prevent or retard the entry of water into the soil as under natural conditions prior to construction. Impervious surfaces increase surface water runoff, which can intensify soil erosion onsite, create erosion off site and deliver pollutants to waterways. Some common impervious surfaces are rooftops, walkways, and gravel and compacted dirt roads.

Current standards limit the percentage of shoreland that can be converted to impervious surfaces in an effort to protect soil and water resources. Larger lots are allowed a smaller percentage of total impervious area than smaller lots. A bonus is allowed for lots where all structures are setback 75 feet or more from the shoreline.

Some options under consideration by the Planning and Zoning Commission include the following:

- Amending the definition of impervious surface to address decking and pervious pavers.

- Clarifying the limit of impervious surface coverage is the "shoreland" (all lands extending 200 feet from surface water bodies).
- Using a single percentage for all lands of 35%, rather than 15% for lots greater than 1 acre; 25% for lots 10,000 square feet to 1 acre; and 35% for lots less than 10,000 square feet.
- Allowing landowners to calculate "grandfathered" impervious surface coverage when rebuilding. (For example, if a landowner decides to tear down an existing structure that covers 40% of the lot, the reconstruction of the site would be allowed to match the grandfathered impervious surface coverage of 40%.)

A Planning & Zoning public workshop is scheduled for August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at 5 PM at the County Administration Building, 1500 Highway 2. Comments can be submitted in writing prior to the meeting or in person at the workshop. Call the Bonner County Planning Department at (208) 265-1458, or email [planning@co.bonner.id.us](mailto:planning@co.bonner.id.us), for more information.

Jamie Brunner  
Associate Planner  
Bonner County Planning Department  
1500 Highway 2, Suite 208  
Sandpoint, Idaho 83864  
208-265-1458



Underwater viewing area

## WaterLife Discovery Center

The WaterLife Discovery Center is a habitat education and interpretive area on the shores of the Pend Oreille River near Sandpoint, Idaho. Its mission is to create a self-guided educational facility which provides an enjoyable outdoor recreational experience for people of all ages to better understand and appreciate the importance of water.

The WaterLife Center is located at the historic Sandpoint Fish Hatchery on the Pend Oreille River. It combines the fish hatchery with nature trails, overlook bridges, wild life watching platforms, interpretive signs, and under-water viewing opportunities. The Center is a valuable resource for teachers, students, and families where they can connect

with the natural world and learn how their lifestyles and choices affect the world around them.

This unique grassroots project is supported by Idaho Fish and Game, the Idaho Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the local community. It has taken many years of planning and development and is still a work in progress. As the physical improvements continue to take shape along the waterfront, we invite you to take a closer look and become part of the development team.

The WaterLife Center is located just south of Sandpoint across the Pend Oreille River. To get there from Sandpoint, take Highway 95 south over the Long Bridge and turn west on Lakeshore Drive. Travel 1.5 miles to the hatchery site on the right. The nature trails are on the left side of the road.

# You Can Help Protect Water Quality

## Septic Survey

In the 2007 survey titled "Understanding Your Views on Lake Pend Oreille Water Quality," lakeshore property owners stated they considered the single greatest threat to water quality to be pollution from sewage and septic systems (Figure 1).

Three large waterbodies in Bonner County currently listed by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) as "impaired" by nutrients are Lake Pend Oreille, Pend Oreille River, and the Pack River.

To further investigate the threat of nutrient pollution from sewage systems to these waterbodies, Tri-State Water Quality Council is conducting an additional survey of waterfront property owners. Homeowners may receive this confidential survey in the mail starting the week of July 25<sup>th</sup>. Additionally, homeowners have the option of providing contact information to become eligible for up to 50% of the cost to inspect their septic system and to pump their septic tank.

If you are a shoreline property owner with a septic tank and do not receive a survey in the mail, you can complete the survey online at [www.tristatecouncil.org](http://www.tristatecouncil.org). Thank you!

Reg Crawford  
Program Director  
Tri-State Water Quality Council  
208-265-9092

### Landowner Survey: "What is the single greatest threat to your water quality?"

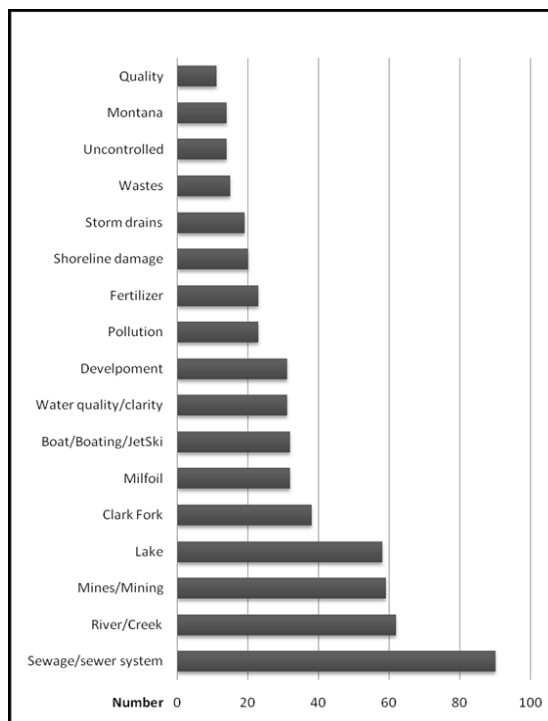


Figure 1: Dana M. Coombs, Research Assistant & Nick Sanyal, Ph.D., Associate Professor, U of I

*"The health of our waters is the principle measure of how we live on the land."*

~ Luna Leopold

## IDAHO2O Fall Snapshot Sampling Event...

Twice each year, all IDAH2O Master Water Stewards across the state of Idaho have the opportunity to sample their registered stream sites on the same day. This provides a state-wide "snapshot" of our water quality. So far, Pack River Watershed Council has one registered site on the Pack River.

The first fall Snapshot sampling event will occur this Sep-

tember. At this event, each site registered through the IDAH2O Master Water Steward Program will test for Nitrate, total Phosphorus, and total Coliform/E.coli. bacteria. Each water sample will be analyzed at the University of Idaho Coeur d'Alene Center's Water Lab.

If you are interested in participating in this sampling event, please contact Jessica, PRWC Watershed Coordinator.

## Opportunities...

- Aug 14** Water Quality Monitoring, 9:00 am @ Hwy 200 Bridge over the Pack River
- Sept 11** Water Quality Monitoring, 9:00 am @ Hwy 200 Bridge over the Pack River
- Oct 9** Water Quality Monitoring, 9:00 am @ Hwy 200 Bridge over the Pack River
- Nov 13** Water Quality Monitoring, 9:00 am @ Hwy 200 Bridge over the Pack River

Let us know if there is a topic you are interested in seeing in the River Ranger or if you would like to submit an article about your land and relationship with your watershed. Please contact Jessica, PRWC Watershed Coordinator (208) 255-5545.

Also If you would rather receive our newsletter by e-mail, please contact Jessica at [yogini\\_jess@yahoo.com](mailto:yogini_jess@yahoo.com).



## Pack River Watershed Council

### **The Pack River Watershed Council**

c/o Bonner SWCD

1224 Washington Ave., Suite 101

Sandpoint, ID 83864

208-263-5310



## Pack River Watershed Council

### **The Pack River Watershed Council**

c/o Bonner SWCD

1224 Washington Ave., Suite 101

Sandpoint, ID 83864

208-263-5310

### **Tri-State Water Quality Council**

101 N. 4th Ave.

Sandpoint, ID 83864

208-265-9092

### **Bonner Soil & Water Conservation District & NRCS**

1224 Washington Ave., Suite 101

Sandpoint, ID 83864

208-263-5310

***“The mission of the Pack River Watershed Council  
is to improve water quality and riparian habitat in  
the Pack River watershed for people, fish , and  
wildlife through education, collaboration, and  
cooperative projects.”***

***Thanks to Avista Watershed Council Funding, we are  
able to print and distribute this newsletter***

*For more information about the Pack River Watershed Council  
contact Jessica Erickson, Watershed Coordinator (208) 255-5545*