

GREENFIELD

After delay, swimming area opens for season

Changing climate
impacts water quality

By **ANTHONY CAMMALLERI**
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GREENFIELD — The Green River Swimming and Recreation Area opened its swimming area this weekend, after the original opening date of June 1 was delayed due to a water quality test that showed elevated levels of E. coli.

As required by the state Department of Public Health (DPH), the swimming area is tested weekly for bacteria levels. On May 30, tests showed 259 cells of E. coli bacteria per 100 milliliters of water at the Green River Swimming and Recreation Area — nine cells above the threshold that is deemed safe for swimming. The Greenfield Recreation Department took to Facebook on May 31 to notify the community that swimming would not be allowed for the first weekend of the month.

Results from a water quality test conducted last Tuesday, however, showed only 89 bacteria per 100 milliliters, allowing the beach to open over the weekend. Although the beach is closed Monday through Friday this week, as it has only been opened on weekends thus far, Recreation Director Christy Moore said starting Saturday, the swimming area will be open seven days a week.

The bacteria, Moore explained, is caused by contaminated runoff that floods the river into the swimming area during heavy rainstorms. She

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said as climate change brings about more frequent severe weather events each summer, the beach has seen an increase in closures.

"This is just part of the standard procedure to keep the public safe," Moore said. "With climate change, which is very evident in our world today, we have different weather patterns. We've had hurricanes out here, we've had heavy rains for significant periods of time and other summers we've had drought, so climate change has had a big impact on our community and our water flow."

In 2021, the swimming area was closed for exceeding safe E. coli levels in seven out of 23 weekly beach tests, according to data published by the Department of Public Health. In 2020, the beach exhibited excess E. coli levels once out of 13 weekly tests, and in 2019, the beach only saw one test above the E. coli limit.

Moore said that on weeks where the region faces heavy rains, the Recreation Department will delay testing "as

much as [it] can" without violating the state's required weekly testing.

"It changes each year. We do our best to operate the facility as much as possible for the community, but I can't predict the weather and I don't have a magic wand," Moore said. "We're thankful that we can reopen."

Triathlon athlete Emma Wilder Sadowski, who was visiting the Green River Swimming and Recreation Area on Monday, said she aims to use the beach once a day during the week to train. However, her swim training is sometimes put on pause based on the water's test results. In 2022, the swim portion of the Greenfield Triathlon was canceled.

Precinct 5 City Councilor Marianne Bullock, who was also at the recreation area on Monday, said with increasing variables presented by climate change, the city may want to consider alternative recreation solutions in the future.

"At some point we'll probably have to look at the costs of keeping this place open in



STAFF FILE PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

The Green River Swimming and Recreation Area, pictured last summer, opened its swimming area this weekend, after the original opening date of June 1 was delayed due to a water quality test that showed elevated levels of E. coli. Although the beach is closed Monday through Friday this week, as it has only been opened on weekends thus far, Recreation Director Christy Moore said starting Saturday, the swimming area will be open seven days a week.

the face of changes with climate and pollution in the river," Bullock said. "Realistically, we should be looking at a municipal pool, but not in a flood zone."

For more information about the swimming area, including information on admis-

sion and hours, visit tinyurl.com/GreenRiverSwimming. The swimming area will close for the season on Labor Day weekend.

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