

SAN MATEO COUNTY BLUE WATER TASK FORCE

2024 Water Quality Monitoring Annual Report

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Blue Water Task Force (BWTF) is the Surfrider Foundation's volunteer-run water quality monitoring program that provides critical information to help protect public health at local beaches. Water samples are tested for enterococcus, a fecal indicator bacteria that signals the possible presence of human or animal waste in the water. Elevated levels of enterococcus increase the likelihood that other harmful pathogens, which can make people sick, may also be present.

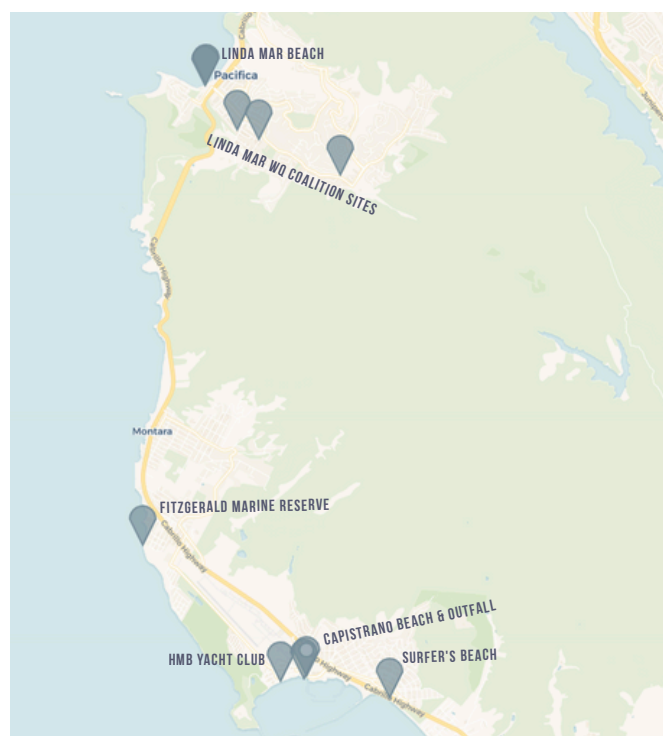


The goal of the Blue Water Task Force is to fill in monitoring gaps and quickly communicate with the public where it's safe to get in the water. Water quality results from the San Mateo County BWTF are compared to the standards used by the San Mateo County Health Department to issue swim advisories, specifically when levels exceed 104 colony-forming units of enterococcus per 100 mL sample (104 CFU/100mL). Beachgoers should take precautions when swimming, surfing, or recreating after heavy rain events. Avoid any areas where warning signs for high bacteria are posted. Water quality data is available at bwtf.surfrider.org.

WHERE AND WHEN WE TEST

San Mateo County (SMC) BWTF conducts weekly water quality testing at six coastal sites. These locations were selected based on their popularity with the public and local Surfrider members, as well as historical concerns about water quality. Trained volunteers collect water samples from each site and transport them to our lab in Princeton, where they are processed and analyzed for enterococcus bacteria.

While the San Mateo County Health Department also conducts regular beach water testing, typically earlier in the week, the BWTF program complements this by sampling later in the week. This additional sampling helps provide a more complete picture of water quality trends throughout the week and empowers the community with timely data to make informed decisions about when and where to recreate.



RESULTS

SITE NAME	TOTAL SAMPLES	% HIGH BACTERIA (>104 MPN/100ML)
Surfer's Beach/Princeton Jetty	39	5%
HMB Yacht Club	36	19%
Capistrano Beach	38	45%
Linda Mar Beach/San Pedro Creek	38	71%
Fitzgerald Marine Reserve/San Vicente Creek	38	74%
Capistrano Outfall	38	92%

Table 1. Shows the percentage of total samples taken at respective sites that exceeded the San Mateo County Health Department’s standards for issuing swim advisories due to Enterococcus bacteria (>104 mpn/100mL).

KEY OUTCOMES

In 2024, SMC BWTF tested 227 water samples from six sites. At three of these locations, over 50% of the samples exceeded the enterococcus water quality standard (see Table 1). The sites with consistently elevated bacteria levels—Linda Mar Beach near San Pedro Creek, Fitzgerald Marine Reserve near San Vicente Creek, and the Capistrano Outfall and Beach—are all located near creek mouths or stormwater outfalls, which are known pathways for pollution entering the ocean. These elevated bacteria levels may be attributed to land-based runoff from upland areas.

High bacterial counts indicate the presence of human and/or animal waste in these waters, which may threaten public health. Potential sources of pollution include failing wastewater infrastructure, animal agriculture, pets, birds, and other wild animal waste. These data are important in identifying chronically polluted sites that should continue to be prioritized for public health and safety. Families, ocean users, and the public should be aware of areas with poor water quality conditions and seek to avoid them.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR CLEANER WATER: LINDA MAR WATER QUALITY COALITION

In 2024, Surfrider San Mateo County joined the Linda Mar Water Quality Coalition—a grassroots partnership working to improve water quality at Linda Mar Beach and in the San Pedro Creek watershed. Coalition members include Surfrider San Mateo County, Salted Roots, the San Pedro Creek Watershed Coalition (SPCWC), the Cultivar Foundation, and the Pedro Point Surf Club.

Volunteers with the coalition test water for fecal indicator bacteria every week at the mouth of San Pedro Creek and at upstream sites. Test results are shared with the public and local stakeholders to provide more information on pollution issues in the watershed so targeted solutions can be found to restore clean water and protect public health.

Linda Mar is one of the Bay Area’s most visited surfing beaches, but it’s also consistently ranked among the most polluted beaches in California. The beach regularly fails to meet state health standards for recreational water, mostly likely due to contamination from San Pedro Creek, which channels stormwater runoff from the Linda Mar neighborhood straight to the ocean.

You can view testing results and learn more about the coalition’s work, including upcoming events, by visiting the [Linda Mar Water Quality Coalition Webpage](#).

