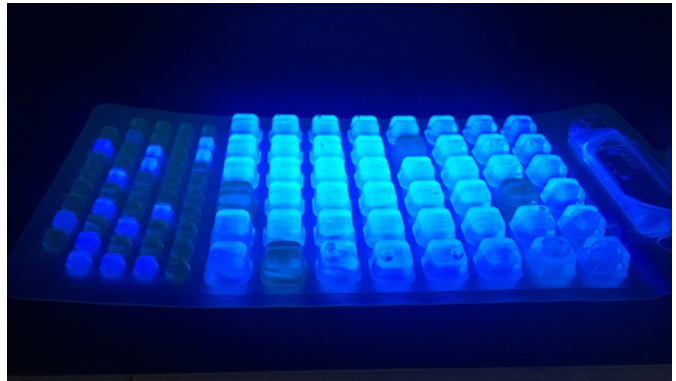


SAN MATEO COUNTY BLUE WATER TASK FORCE

2025 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 fecal indicator bacteria that signal the possible presence of human or animal waste in the water. Elevated levels of these bacteria increase the likelihood that other harmful pathogens that can make people sick may also be present.



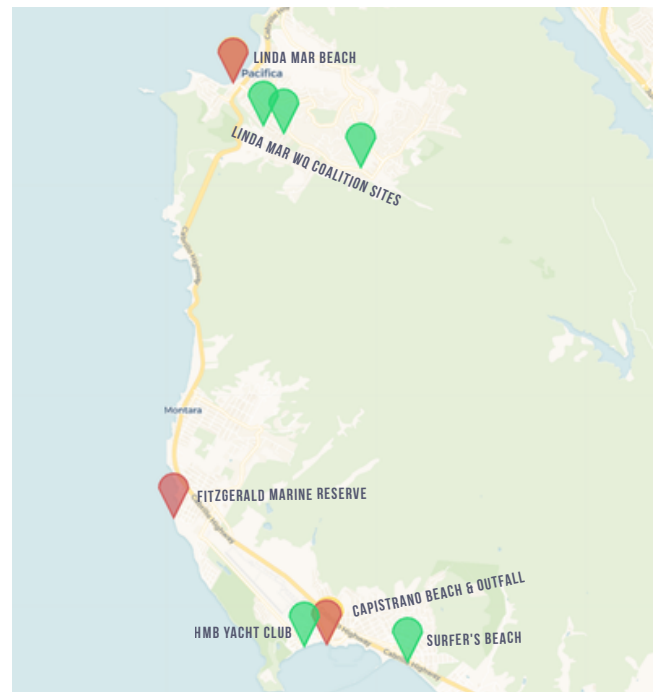
Water sample under UV light used to assess bacteria levels at local beaches.

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 and avoid any areas where warning signs for high bacteria are posted.

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 the Chapter's BWTF lab in Pillar Point Harbor, where they are processed and analyzed for enterococcus bacteria.

While the San Mateo County Health Department also conducts regular beach water testing, typically early 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.



SMC BWTF RESULTS

Site Name	Total Samples	% High Bacteria (>104 MPN/100ML)
Surfer's Beach/Princeton Jetty	39	10%
HMB Yacht Club	39	26%
Linda Mar Beach/San Pedro Creek	39	72%
Capistrano Beach	39	74%
Fitzgerald Marine Reserve/San Vicente Creek	38	82%
Capistrano Outfall	39	100%

Table 1. Shows the percentage of total samples taken at respective sites in 2025 that exceeded the San Mateo County Health Department’s standards for issuing swim advisories due to Enterococcus bacteria (>104 mpn/100mL).

KEY OUTCOMES

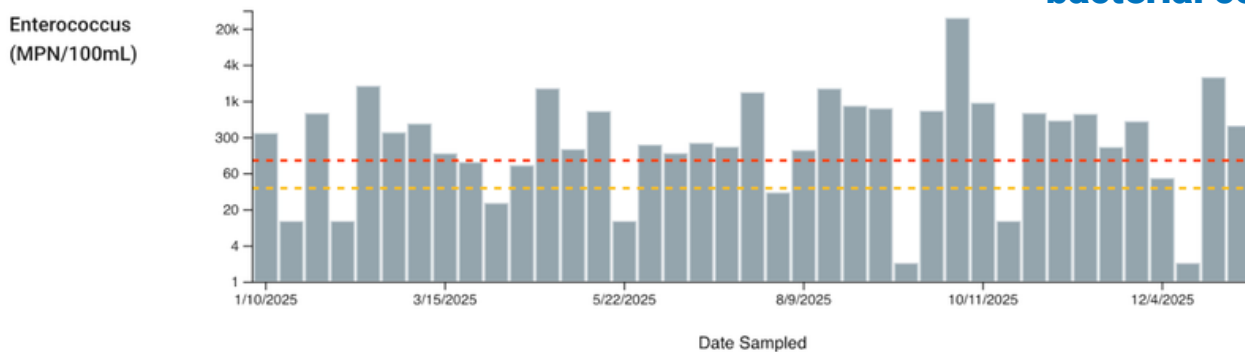
In 2025, SMC BWTF tested 233 water samples for enterococcus bacteria from six sites. At four of these locations, over 50% of the samples exceeded the water quality standard (Table 1). The sites with consistently elevated bacteria levels—Linda Mar Beach near San Pedro Creek, Fitzgerald Marine Reserve 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.

PRIORITY SAMPLE SITE: SAN PEDRO CREEK MOUTH AT LINDA MAR BEACH

The SMC BWTF has monitored water quality at the mouth of San Pedro Creek at Linda Mar for more than 12 years. 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. In 2025, the water samples collected failed to meet state and federal health standards for fecal indicator bacteria 72% of the time, meaning nearly three out of four samples contained bacteria levels considered unsafe for swimming and surfing.

72%
of samples in 2025 exceeded health standards for bacterial counts



WORKING TOGETHER FOR CLEANER WATER

Seeking to bring about real change, Surfrider volunteers joined forces with a diverse coalition of environmental and surfing organizations to address the ongoing pollution problems at San Pedro Creek and Linda Mar Beach. The [Linda Mar Water Quality Coalition](#) is a grassroots alliance consisting of the [Surfrider San Mateo County Chapter](#), [Salted Roots](#), the [San Pedro Creek Watershed Coalition](#), [Cultivar Foundation](#), and the [Pedro Point Surf Club](#). Volunteers from these organizations are working together to raise awareness and generate water quality data that will inform and hopefully motivate solutions.



Weekly enterococcus and E. coli testing is being performed at four sites along San Pedro Creek to identify bacteria hot spots and hone in on where pollution is entering the creek (Table 2).

Site Name	Total Tests Enterococcus	% High Enterococcus (>104 MPN/100ML)	Total Tests E.coli	% High E.coli (>320 MPN/100ML)
Creek Mouth	51	86%	49	55%
Peralta Bridge	53	92%	51	47%
Adobe Sanchez	49	79%	50	20%
Linda Mar Bridge	51	76%	46	41%

Table 2. Shows the percentage of total samples taken at respective sites in 2025 that exceeded the San Mateo County Health Department’s standards for issuing swim advisories due to Enterococcus and E.coli bacteria.

In July 2025, they also launched DNA-based testing to pinpoint specific sources of pollution in the watershed. This cutting-edge approach allows them to distinguish between humans and specific species of animals that are contributing to the fecal bacteria load, and provides data that could guide targeted solutions in the watershed. The preliminary results so far indicate a high level of human fecal contamination during and after rainstorms. You can learn more about the coalition’s work in this great article from [Coastside News](#).

The Linda Mar Water Quality Coalition is continuing to raise awareness and educate the public about the pollution challenges at community events, including the Earth Day Ecofest, the San Pedro Surf Club’s Big Chill Out, Grom Fest, and monthly San Pedro Creek Cleanups with the Pacific Beach Coalition. At these events, coalition members are speaking directly to the public about the need for local pollution solutions and how beachgoers can take steps to protect their families’ health, such as:

- Surfing and swimming away from the mouth of the creek. Water quality conditions are usually safe north of the Taco Bell, except after storms.
- Follow rain advisories and stay out of the water for 72 hours after it rains.
- Don’t let your kids play in the creek!



Volunteers collect and process water samples from San Pedro Creek and Linda Mar/Pacifica State Beach. Photo credit: Kathryn Wheeler

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Surfrider Foundation San Mateo County Chapter and the Linda Mar Water Quality Coalition would like to thank the Rose Foundation, the Stone Family Foundation, and the Resources Legacy Fund for supporting our work at Linda Mar Beach and in the San Pedro Creek.

MEET MITCH, SMC BWTF COORDINATOR

Learn more about the people behind our water quality work and community efforts. Click [here](#) to read Mitch's Activist Spotlight.

