



How Can You Use Your Raritan River & Streams?

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Demand is Growing to Use the Raritan River

As the Raritan continues to improve, residents and elected officials increasingly ask:

- can we go in or on the river;
- can we wade in it, swim in it, touch it or eat the fish, and,
- can our kids play in their neighborhood stream?



What is the *Streams and River Uses Map* ?

This *Stream and River Uses Map* displays the Raritan River and the streams in this municipality. Stream and river water use information includes terms that may be unfamiliar to many. The uses listed on this map are defined by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). The box below each water body name on the map shows if the water body “supports” a particular use and if there is a known cause or causes for a water body’s inability to support that specific use. Importantly, also shown are the known indicators that the water can support a particular use (that is a good sign). As an example, some streams have levels of bacteria that do not prohibit aquatic life.

The Map includes information on three surface water “uses” related to water recreation, an important activity for our region. These uses are “Recreational, General Aquatic Life, and Fish Consumption.” Five other water uses that are not addressed here are drinking, agricultural and industrial water, shellfish harvesting and trout aquatic life. A brown colored water body signifies that it is “Impaired” for one or more of these three recreation-related uses. Impaired means that the water body cannot support that use.

1. “Recreational Uses” include activities involving “primary” or “secondary contact” with water. Swimming, wading and water skiing involve a significant risk of ingesting water and are primary contact activities. Boating and paddling are secondary contact activities. For many water bodies, there is not enough information for the NJDEP to determine its recreational uses. This is the case with the Lower Raritan River.

2. “Supports Fish Consumption and Supports Aquatic Life” also are considered recreation-related uses. These labels mean that humans can eat fish from the river or a stream within NJDEP restrictions (see <http://www.state.nj.us/dep> and look for the annual Fish Advisory). Besides fish, other aquatic life also may be found in a water body with this use.

These three important recreation-related uses have been affected by pollutants and the **other indicators** as shown on the map. These indicators are: 1. “**Bacterial**” (in human and animal bodily function wastes, such as pet poo; or 2. “**Chemical**” (as in pesticide residues and other chemical wastes). Other indicators that can affect recreational uses like fishing include water temperature, the water’s oxygen and salt content and the amount of sediment suspended in the water. The NJDEP evaluates these indicators to decide if a water body can support a particular use. For many water bodies, more sampling is needed to determine any or all of the causes of the three recreational use losses.

This not a NJDEP document. Data used in this map is from the NJDEP 2012 Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Report. For more information or to learn how to improve water quality and recreational uses in your area, contact your municipal Environmental Commission, the Rutgers Cooperative Extension in Middlesex County at (732) 398-5274, Rutgers Cooperative Extension at <http://water.rutgers.edu> or the NJDEP at <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/wms/bwqsa/index.html>.

Raritan River History

Your river has had its ups and downs . . . but mostly ups. The Raritan was an important path for commerce and mobilization during the American Revolution. In the days of great merchant ships, the river was the region’s superhighway, supplying New York, New England, Pennsylvania and points west. People increasingly came to the Raritan, and other area rivers and streams, for recreation — swimming, boating, park amusements, picnicking and fishing were popular. The Raritan Valley’s many resources and quality of life led to rapid manufacturing and residential growth and prosperity.

Unfortunately, before the outcomes were fully understood, rivers and streams were used as close, inexpensive and hidden outlets for the industrial, household and municipal wastes that came with much land development. Garbage was sent to the riverside landfills and wastes were pumped into the waters. The results of that era have consumed many resources, pulled down revitalization opportunities and taken several decades to turn around. More work remains to be done.

The Raritan is on its way back up, however. There is far less litter, dumping and hazardous waste discharges. Water quality is visibly improved and wildlife habitat has multiplied. There are new and varied locations for public access to the riverfront and more open spaces. Cleaner land uses replace those with hazardous pasts. Recreational interest and opportunities continue to broaden. *Find ways that you can help the Raritan on its way back up!* Contact the MCIA at www.mciauth.com, the Middlesex County Office of Planning, Division of Environment, Parks and Comprehensive Planning at <http://co.middlesex.nj.us/planningboard/strategic.asp> or the Sustainable Raritan Initiative at www.raritan.rutgers.edu.