

E. coli closes beach, swim areas at

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers could know by Thursday whether beaches and campgrounds closed by elevated E. coli bacteria levels can reopen at Lake O' the Pines, the reservoir manager reported Monday.

Seven designated swimming areas closed this past Friday after routine sampling revealed bacteria levels beyond limits set by the state, lake manager Bobby Hamrick said.

No illnesses or other physical harm have been reported to the Corps of Engineers, which built and oversees the reservoir.

There also are no health implications for Longview, Lone Star, Hughes Springs or other cities that drink water

from Lake O' the Pines.

"In terms of water supply, it's of no significance to Longview and our (customer network) cities," Northeast Texas Municipal Water Supply District Manager Walt Sears said. "Our water treatment for both (customer groups) require that the water be disinfected. So, we use chlorine or some disinfectant that treats the water."

The closed areas are Sandy Beach and Long Beach, the Brushy Creek, Alley Creek and Johnson Creek campgrounds, and day use areas at Shady Grove and Johnson Creek.

Hamrick said the ban affects only shoreline activity. The standard for banning offshore much higher than contaminant levels that affect onshore decisions, he said.

"The guidelines for the water is 10 times what they are for the beach area," Hamrick said. "(Bacterial) organisms are everywhere. They are in the water all the time."

He said 70 new shoreline samples were taken early Monday.

"We will review those, and if they are within state standards we'll reopen the beach (in the sample)," he said. "We didn't want people to go in until we find that the numbers are good."

He estimated learning results of Monday's tests by Thursday, when the Fourth of July weekend will still be a week away.

"I know it, I know it—everybody wants to get in the water," he said. "(Testing) is generally a four-day process."

See E. COLI, Page 6A

Lake O' the Pines



KEVIN GREEN/Longview News-Journal

A FAMILY PLAYS in the water Monday at Johnson Creek Park at Lake O' the Pines.

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Continued from Page 1A

Meanwhile, he stressed that only shoreline recreation is curtailed.

"The fish are still the same, the skiing, boating — all the other recreation are the same," Hamrick said. "We don't have any information as to any illness or anything associated with this bacteria. If we do, we will report it."

The closed areas comprise all of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers designated swimming areas. Other shoreline stretches, and for that matter the deeper waters, have a different threshold for such alerts to be enacted because they don't draw such concentrations of people, Hamrick said.

The corps does not test other shoreline areas, though staff with the Texas Commission

on Environmental Quality do monitor water quality up and down Lake O' the Pines as part of the Clean Rivers Program and other initiatives. No other closings have been issued through those channels.

Sears and Hamrick credited heavy rains two weeks ago with washing bacteria found throughout the region's soil toward the lake. Chicken litter and other residue from local confined animal production historically have been primary sources of pollutants draining into the entire Big Cypress Creek Watershed including Lake O' the Pines.

"That kind of heavy rainfall will migrate dirt that has bacteria in it," Sears said, adding that rising temperatures then foster growth of bacteria.