

Presented to an advisory committee of the DRBC on October 14, 2026. Contents should not be published or re-posted in whole or in part without the permission of DRBC.

Recreational Use (Bacteria)

Criteria Updates

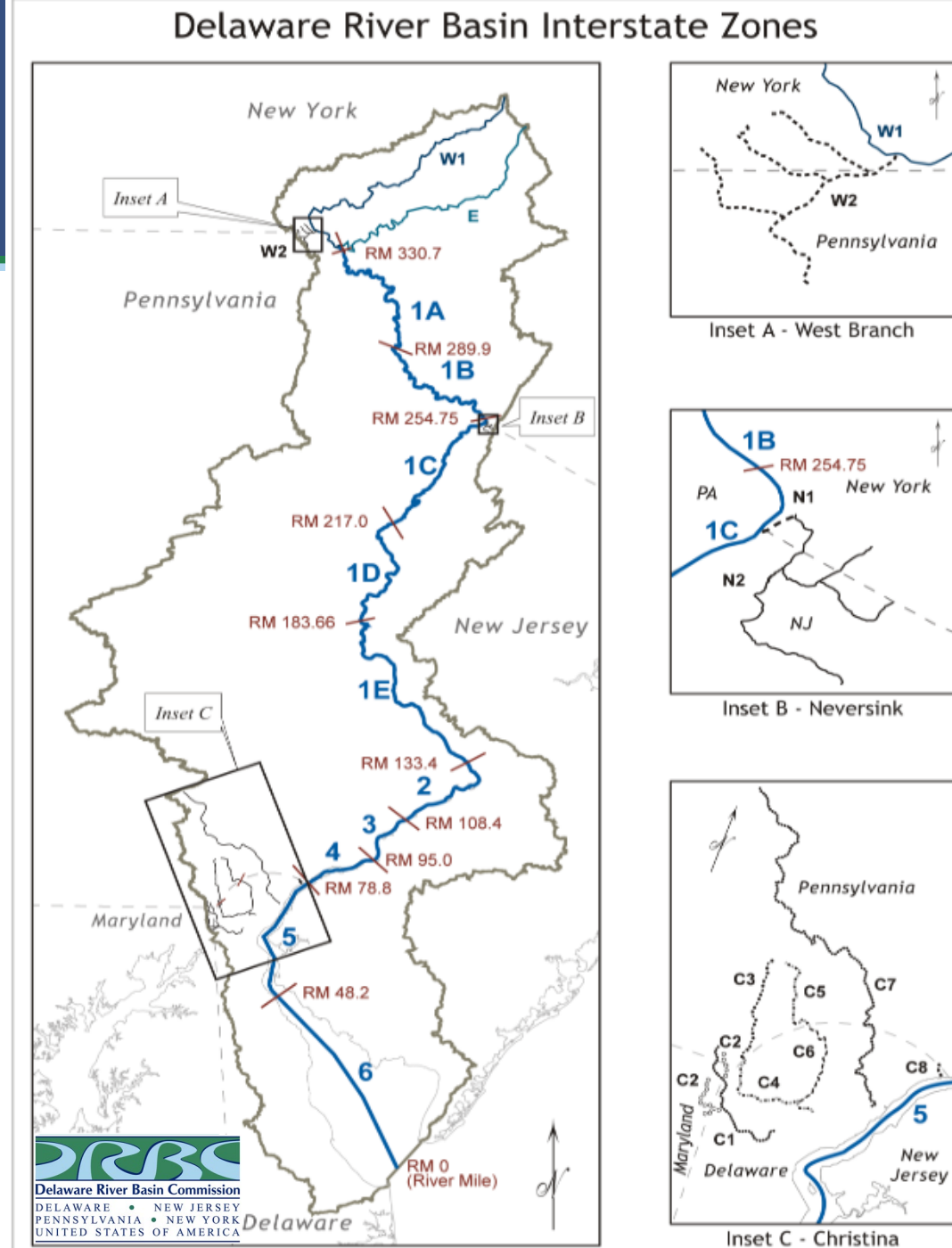
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Water Quality Advisory Committee
October 14, 2026



DRBC is revising its Surface Water Quality Criteria for Bacteria

- Apply to all Water Quality Zones
 - Mainstem: 1A–E, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
 - Other Interstate: E, W1, W2, N1, N2, C1–C8



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 - Zone 3 and Upper Zone 4 designated secondary contact due to higher ambient bacteria levels



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- Revisions to numeric criteria values for both Primary & Secondary Contact Uses
 - Zone 3 and Upper Zone 4 designated secondary contact due to higher ambient bacteria levels
- *This* proposed action will **NOT** change designated uses
 - Different and separate from the initiative to upgrade from secondary to primary contact (Recreational Use Strategy)
 - Does not preclude changing the uses in the future



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- **All states have adopted EPA 2012 guidelines** for primary contact recreation, with some variations.
- EPA has published additional guidance on developing non-primary contact exposure scenarios:
 - EPA published White Paper for non-primary contact exposure in 2022 ([823-B-22-001](#))
 - EPA published a user guide for Adopting WQC for SCR in 2024 ([820-B-24-001](#))

Elements of the Anticipated Criteria Proposal

- Revisions to fecal indicator bacteria:
 - *E. Coli* for freshwater (WQ Zones 1–4, E, W, N, C)
 - *E. Coli* is not appropriate for marine waters because of salinity toxicity
 - *Enterococci* for marine water and transitional waters (WQ Zones 5 and 6)

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- **36** illnesses per 1000 primary contact recreators
 - EPA presents options for 32 or 36, both provide equivalent protection
 - PA and NY: 36/1000 statewide, NJ: 32/1000 statewide
- Geometric mean (GM) and statistical threshold value (STV) of 90th percentile

Proposed Bacteria Criteria

EPA	<u>Primary</u> Contact	
	GM (cfu/100mL)	STV (cfu/100mL)
<i>E. Coli</i> (Zones 1–4)	126	410
<i>Enterococci</i> (Zones 5 and 6)	35	130

Zones 1–4, E, W, N, C: Freshwater

Zones 5, 6: Marine and transitional waters

Proposed Bacteria Criteria

EPA	Primary Contact		Secondary Contact*	
	GM (cfu/100mL)	STV (cfu/100mL)	GM (cfu/100mL)	STV (cfu/100mL)
<i>E. Coli</i> (Zones 1–4)	126	410	258	839
<i>Enterococci</i> (Zones 5 and 6)	35	130	N/A	N/A

Zones 1–4, E, W, N, C: Freshwater

Zones 5, 6: Marine and transitional waters

Proposed Ratio

$$\frac{I_{Primary}}{I_{Non-Primary}} = \frac{34.8}{17.0} \approx 2.047$$



* Secondary contact use applies to Zone 3 and upper Zone 4.

Assessment Approach

(Not a required component for WQC update, but common question from the regulated community.)



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 - Cycle through each mainstem Zone (1A–1E, 2–6), sampling each at least **once every 5 years**
 - Sample **fixed locations** in each Zone on at least 5 dates within a 30-day window (mid-June to mid-Sept)
 - Consider combining with other available data (e.g., beach assessments)

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 - Sample **fixed locations** in each Zone on at least 5 dates within a 30-day window (mid-June to mid-Sept)
 - Consider combining with other available data (e.g., beach assessments)
- Details will require additional coordination with states.

What questions do you have?

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