



Water Quality Monitoring

Ongoing and properly-conducted monitoring of water quality is one of the best ways to determine the health of our rivers and streams. It can detect trends in water quality, both good and bad, and help identify areas of concern that otherwise may be overlooked. Monitoring can measure dissolved oxygen levels, amount of suspended solids, temperature, pH, nutrients, turbidity and bacteria. Monitoring is conducted in the Pack River Watershed depending on the availability of funding and manpower.

You may have noticed some of the items listed here and wondered whether they indicated a water quality problem.

What is the cause of :

Murky, green colored water? This is most likely due to an algal bloom. Algae are microscopic plants that are natural components of rivers. When conditions are right, one species of algae will outgrow the others and become so abundant that the water becomes murky or green colored. This is generally not cause for concern.

Yellow-green dust? Pollen from trees and shrubs usually accumulates on the river surface in early summer and can look like algae. Eventually the pollen will sink from sight and usually has little effect on water quality.

Foam? Foam or "soap suds" on the surface or along the shore usually occurs from a natural process and is generally not pollution from laundry detergents. Foam is created when water near the surface of a river contains natural organic compounds and is then mixed with air by wind and currents. Large quantities of foam may be found on windward shores or bays. Unless foam is accompanied by a noticeable perfume smell, it is most likely natural and no cause for concern.

Green cotton candy-like clouds floating in shallow water? This is a type of algae common in some rivers that may appear after heavy runoff in the spring or following a long, hot spell in the summer. It does not always indicate a water quality problem. However, concentrations of this type of algae only in specific areas may indicate a local pollution source such as a contaminated stream or failing septic system(s). If a river develops this type of algae around its entire shoreline, it may be the first indication of a river-wide phosphorus problem.

Oily sheens? Thin oily sheens on the river surface can be caused naturally by bacteria and/or the decay of organic matter, but may also be caused from petroleum products like oil and gasoline. If you see sizeable thick oily sheens that do not appear to be natural, report them to the Idaho Dept. of Environmental Quality at (208) 769-1422.

