

Plume of contamination prompts no-swim advisory for South Yuba River, Englebright Lake

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The South Yuba River at Bridgeport shows signs of contamination Saturday.
Photos courtesy Nevada County OES



A plume of yellow sediment spotted in the South Yuba River Friday quickly prompted a no-swim advisory that was extended past Englebright Lake by Sunday afternoon.

The Nevada County Office of Emergency Services late Friday issued an advisory noting the river, from below the Town of Washington to Lake Englebright, appeared to have high level of sediments of unknown origin suspended in the water that was creating potentially unsafe river conditions for all people and animals.

The cause remains under investigation, spokeswoman Taylor Wolfe said. Local officials including Nevada County, South Yuba River Citizens League, State Parks, and Nevada County Consolidated Fire District met to discuss current river conditions Friday, and officials from Nevada County Environmental Health went to various river locations to take water samples for testing. Full test results will take three to four days, Wolfe said.

Due to possibly unsafe swimming and recreation conditions, a no-swimming advisory was issued Friday for the South Yuba River from below Washington to Englebright Lake. On Saturday, the advisory was extended to include Englebright Lake and the county issued an update indicating that preliminary test results showed dangerous levels of E.coli.

E.coli levels were identified as double the safe recommended levels by the Environmental Protection Agency, and are toxic to humans and animals, a release stated. The no-swimming advisory included swimming, ingesting, bathing and recreational activities.

The county also was testing for toxic metals such as arsenic, lead and mercury, the Saturday release stated, noting that with Nevada County's history of mining, these metals are frequently found in the area and may be in the sediment flowing down the river and into Englebright Lake. Full test results for metals testing will take about three to four days.

Nevada County worked with the California Highway Patrol to fly a helicopter upstream Friday and went out again Saturday, according to the press release. The source appears to be above the Highway 49 Bridge on the South Yuba River, and officials continued to work on confirming a direct source with the assistance of SYRCL, California State Parks, California Highway Patrol, the State Water Board, EPA and Nevada County Consolidated Fire District.

On Saturday, SYRCL staff and volunteers helped collect additional water samples for testing in various locations from Humbug Creek to Englebright Lake, Wolfe said. Volunteers from the Yuba River Cleanup helped to post No Swim Advisory signs near common river recreation locations. The Army Corps of Engineers and Skippers Cove Marina also helped notify boaters on Englebright Lake.

The advisory continued through Sunday, with more test results expected to be available Monday.

“The no-swim advisory is for the public’s safety,” said Nevada County Sheriff’s Capt. Jeff Pettitt, adding that SYRCL has been a great partner to Nevada County and that both SYRCL and OES “understand what a valuable resource the South Yuba River is for our community.”

Updates can be found at www.MyNevadaCounty.com/YubaRiverAdvisory.

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