



A New Swim Alert Plan

Eagerly awaiting another summer of fun in the sun and in the water, Lake Watch of Lake Martin remains committed to protecting our lake and all who recreate in the lake. Last fall, Lake Watch tested and reported high *E. coli* for the first time in the lake upstream of the U.S. Route 280 Bridge, above the lake's confluence with Coley Creek. We sent out a call for help to recruit more water monitors and, to our delight, around 30 people answered the call. Since then, 17 have gone through training and been certified by Alabama Water Watch in either bacteriological monitoring or water chemistry monitoring, or both. This new batch of volunteers more than doubles the number of water monitors we now have on the lake and its watershed.

You may wonder – what's the big deal about a few bacteria in the lake? A few are not such a big deal, but when you get 100s to 1000s per cup of lake water, and they are *E. coli* from feces of warm-blooded animals or humans, that becomes a problem – a public health problem. If contacted and ingested (by swallowing some contaminated water), *E. coli* may result in serious illness, including fever, nausea, vomiting, hemorrhagic diarrhea, anemia, dehydration, renal failure, seizures and even death (www.medicinenet.com/e_coli_0157h7/article.htm). *E. coli* could certainly ruin a weekend on the lake.

Lake Watch has identified about 20 strategic sites on the lake, streams and the Tallapoosa River flowing into the lake to assign to these new monitors. Several of these will be Swim Alert sites that we will upload to the Swim Guide at www.theswimguide.org. We plan to use Swim Guide as the medium to broadcast bacteriological test results to the Lake Martin community and

beyond. Swim Guide is a web-based one-stop shop for swimming-area water quality information and the most popular beach information service in the world. It provides free up-to-date water quality information for more than 8,000 beaches, lakes, rivers and swimming holes throughout North America and several other countries.

Our Swim Alert sites will be locations that are regularly used for swimming and typically have a swim beach, such as Wind Creek State Park, DARE Park, Camp Alamisco and Camp ASCCA or swimming areas on streams like the one at Hillabee Creek above the state Route 22 bridge. We plan to monitor the sites regularly and will promptly post the results on the Swim Guide website. We plan to sample monthly and after significant rain events. The post-rain event sampling is particularly important since that is when we typically find higher levels of bacterial contamination in the streams, the river and the lake. This is

because of fecal material flushing off the landscape into the water with runoff during rain events.

We plan to feature the Swim Guide postings on a Swim Alert webpage on our website (www.lakewatch.org). The page, featuring the latest bacteriological test results, will be shared with Lake Martin Homeowners and Boat Owners Association, Lake Martin Resource Association, municipalities and others, so results will be widely available to the public in a timely manner.

Our bacteriological test results will be posted as easy-to-interpret icons used by Swim Guide: green for safe – go swimming; and red for not safe – stop and consider swimming elsewhere since the water is contaminated with *E. coli*. Following the Alabama Department of Environmental Management standard, an *E. coli* concentration above 235 per 100 milliliters



LAKE WATCH
BY ERIC REUTEBUCH

(approximately a cup of water) is unsafe for human contact.

View an example of a Swim Guide beach webpage for Lake Jackson in Florala, Alabama, that reported safe swimming conditions at www.theswimguide.org/beach/5394. The green swim icon tells you that bacterial contamination (*E. coli*) was below the level that would be a health risk to swimmers. Note: The icon indicates 'historical status.' When viewing Swim Guide reports, check the date below the icon for when the water was tested – the most recent Florala data was from October 2021 (bacteriological testing in Alabama at swim areas isn't usually done in the winter, as folks aren't swimming then).

We believe the Swim Alert will help keep everyone safer as we work to resolve bacterial contamination issues that arise. We anticipate that the vast majority of the time throughout the lake, we will not find significant contamination in the water since our lake is a very clean lake. But when contamination is detected, we want to protect the public as best we can through Swim Alert, so folks could avoid contaminated waters.

Our ultimate goal beyond Swim Alert is to work toward tracking down bacterial contamination sources as they occur and resolving them at their sources. For updates on all of Lake Watch's efforts, join us at our annual meeting on April 24. Visit our website for details. I hope to see you there.

Eric Reutebuch is president of Lake Watch Lake Martin. Learn more at lakewatch.org.



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