

Purgatory Creek



Purgatory Creek has three headwaters: Lotus Lake in Chanhassen, Silver Lake in Shorewood, and wetlands in Minnetonka. After these forks join, the creek flows through the Purgatory Recreation Area and Staring Lake before eventually reaching the Minnesota River.

Keeping Purgatory Creek healthy requires several tools and strategies. Conducting projects to stabilize streambanks and restore stretches of stream is one strategy. Cleaning and slowing rainwater runoff before it reaches the creek is another. Before either of these can be done, we need to understand how the creek is doing and where it needs the most help.

District staff have monitored Purgatory Creek since the 1970s. The District developed a tool to assess the creek: the Creek Restoration Action Strategy (CRAS). The CRAS uses water quality data, as well as information on erosion and habitat, to rank which creek stretches (sections) are doing the best and which are doing the poorest. CRAS scores for each stretch of stream are located on the next page.

The three major types of data used in creek monitoring



Water quality

District staff take samples at five sites during the summer. They gather information about nutrient levels (phosphorus), sediment, pH, and dissolved oxygen. This data lets us know how clean the water is and if it's healthy for plants, animals, and people.



Erosion

Every three years, staff walk sections of the creek. They note sites with erosion, its severity, and whether any structures like houses or bridges are at risk. Erosion is also a problem because any soil that erodes into the creek is a pollutant.



Habitat

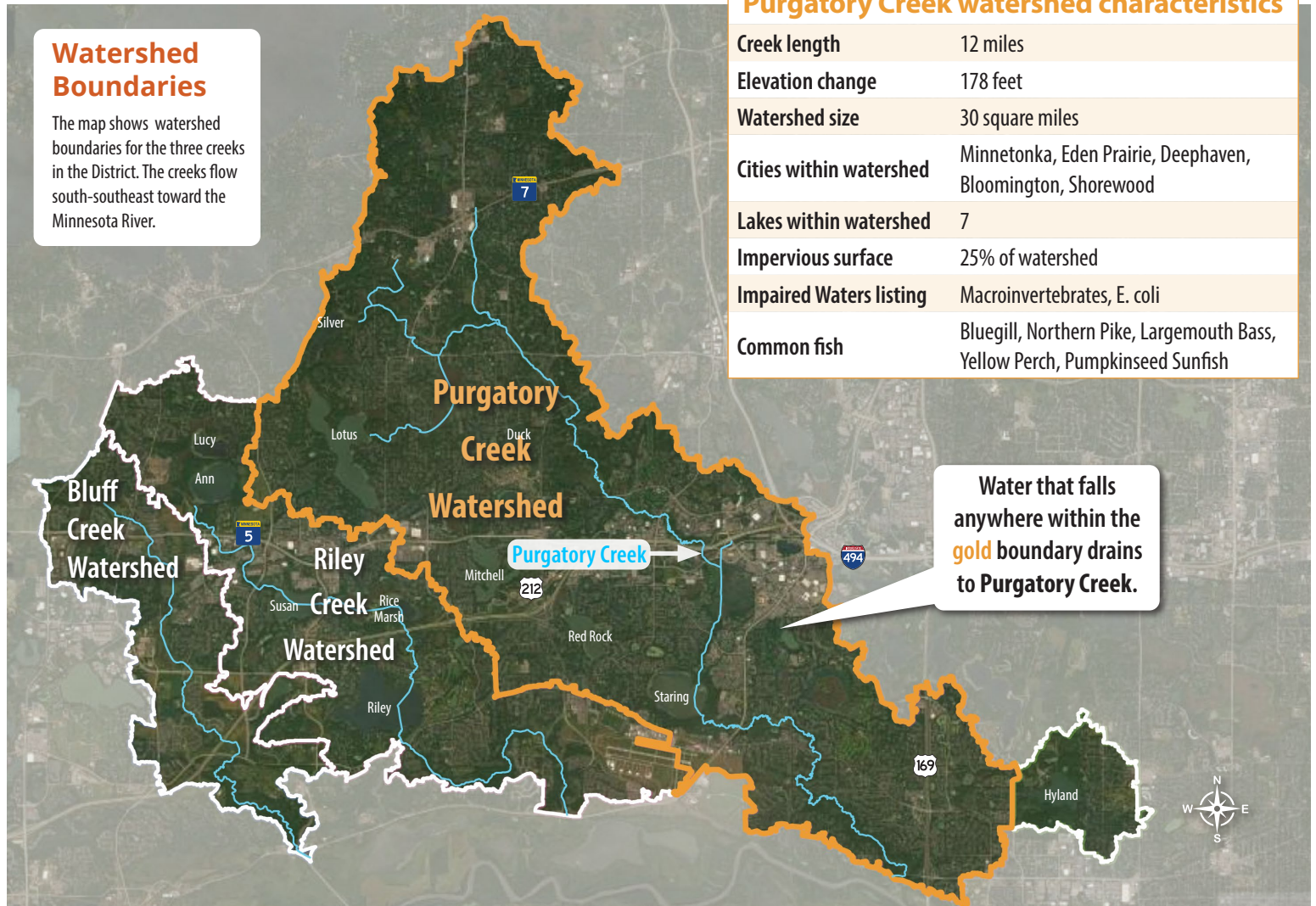
Creeks are important habitat for insects, plants, fish, birds, and other animals. When staff check for erosion, they also assess the habitat. Reaches receive a score based on the quality of habitat they provide and whether it needs to be restored.

Purgatory Creek watershed characteristics

Creek length	12 miles
Elevation change	178 feet
Watershed size	30 square miles
Cities within watershed	Minnetonka, Eden Prairie, Deephaven, Bloomington, Shorewood
Lakes within watershed	7
Impervious surface	25% of watershed
Impaired Waters listing	Macroinvertebrates, E. coli
Common fish	Bluegill, Northern Pike, Largemouth Bass, Yellow Perch, Pumpkinseed Sunfish

Watershed Boundaries

The map shows watershed boundaries for the three creeks in the District. The creeks flow south-southeast toward the Minnesota River.



2024 Stream Monitoring Results

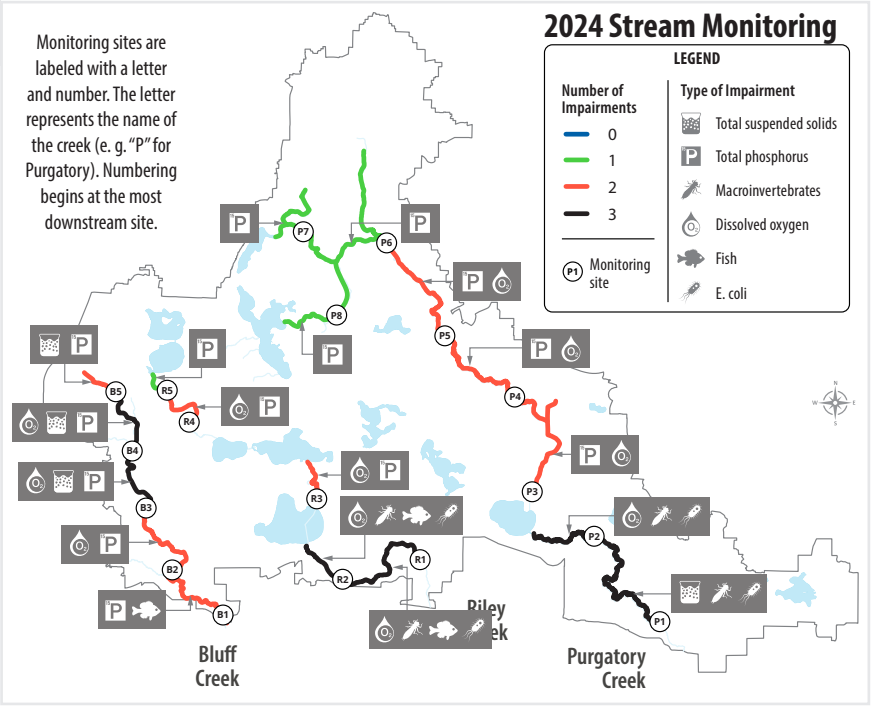
Stream Water Quality Monitoring

In 2024, RPBCWD and its partners collected water quality samples and performed data analysis on 28 sampling sites in total along Riley Creek, Bluff Creek, and Purgatory Creek. Eighteen of these were regular water quality monitoring sites visited biweekly April to September. The District monitors six impairment categories based upon standards set by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

Stream water quality fell slightly in 2024 from the previous year. In summary:

- Bluff Creek had 12 impairments
- Riley Creek had 13 impairments
- Purgatory Creek had 15 impairments

None of the regular creek sampling sites met all water quality standards. Phosphorus was the most frequent impairment (14 of 18 regular sites). Four sites failed to meet the total suspended solids standard, and 11 sites fell below the dissolved oxygen standard. The lower reaches of both Riley and Purgatory creeks had macroinvertebrate and *E. coli* impairments, and the lower reaches of Riley and Bluff creeks had fish impairments.

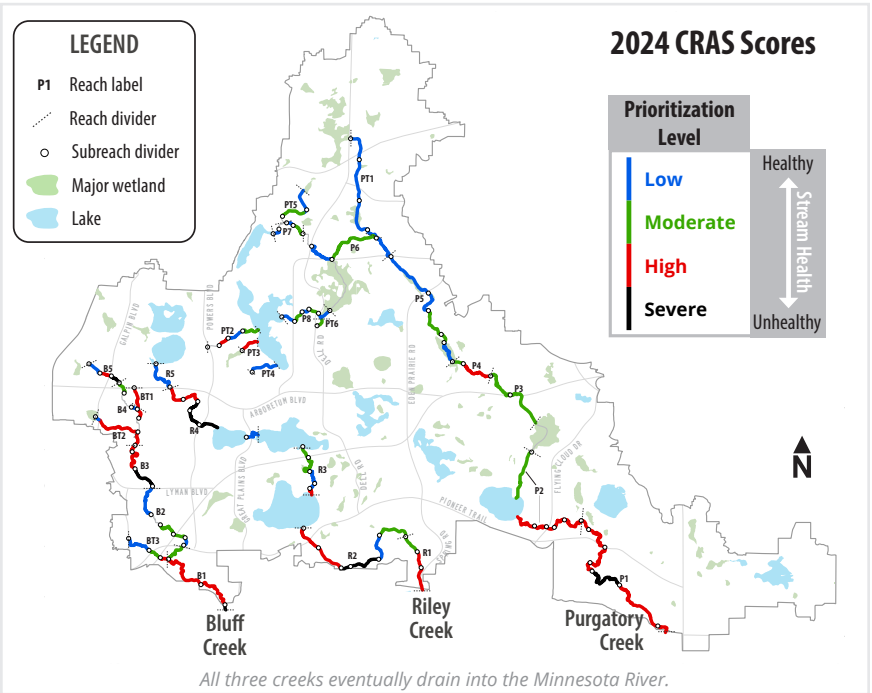


CRAS Scores for Stream Restoration Planning

The District developed the Creek Restoration Action Strategy (CRAS) to prioritize creek reaches, sub-reaches, or sites, in need of stabilization and/or restoration. The District identified eight categories of importance for project prioritization:

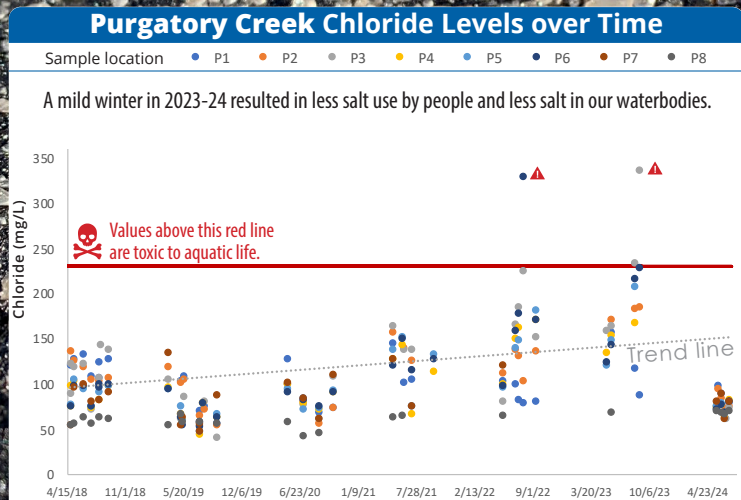
- Infrastructure risk
- Erosion and channel stability
- Public education
- Ecological benefits
- Water quality
- Project cost
- Partnerships
- Watershed benefits

These categories were scored using methods developed for each category based on a combination of published studies and reports, erosion inventories, field visits, and scoring sheets from specific methodologies. Final tallies of scores for each category, using a two-tiered ranking system, were used to prioritize sites for restoration/remediation.



Chloride Pollution

Chloride permanently pollutes our lakes, ponds, and streams. Winter de-icers, water softeners, and fertilizers all contribute to chloride pollution.



What can I use instead of winter de-icers?

All affordable & effective residential de-icing products contain chloride, even those labeled as "eco-friendly" or "pet safe."

Focus instead on reducing build-up of ice on your property:

- Shovel early & often
- Prevent ice formation, avoid driving or walking on snow
- Pile snow where it won't melt & refreeze on walkways



Learn more rpbcwd.org/salt