



Project Briefing

www.stmarysriverkeeper.org

Horsepen Creek



- Our monitoring disclosed significant pollution from leaking septic systems a few years ago.
- We worked with local officials to obtain a grant to locate and replace the problem systems. Our frequent monitoring showed continual improvement.
- Today parts of the creek are showing a complete turnaround - with living species appearing in the clearing water.
- Click here for the full [Horsepen Creek 2020 Water Quality Monitoring Summary Report](#).

Summary

Horsepen Creek -- a tributary in Camden County, GA -- has shown excellent progress from the remediations that we have helped enact. In January, 2020, two crawfish -- a keystone species -- made an appearance, indicating for the first time the normally mucky, opaque water is finally clearing up and returning to its intended purpose. We also recorded macroinvertebrates for the first time at this site, indicating much improved water quality. Our monthly data backed up what our eyes told us - a dramatic decrease in fecal coliform levels.

Horsepen Creek was known to have a problem with leaking septic systems as early as 2015. It took two years for the EPA to grant funding to the county to pump out

or replace the faulty septic systems. As a partner organization, we began monitoring the health of the watershed during the replacement process in 2018.

Our job entails taking monthly samples at seven sites. They are sampled at the same time of day but at varying tidal stages. Samples are tested for *Escherichia coli* levels in accordance with Georgia Adopt-a-Stream bacterial sampling protocols. *E. coli*, a species of fecal coliform, is considered a good indicator of the presence of pathogens. We also collect observational data such as tidal stage, recent rainfall, water clarity, and surface water conditions.

The Camden County Department of Health began septic system inspections and pump outs there in the spring of 2018, and septic system replacements in 2019. They were recently awarded another \$212,000 to continue work on the project.

“Camden County received grant funding to repair septic systems in the Horsepen Creek watershed and to date, over 20 systems have been replaced,” said Terry Ferrell, Camden County Coastal Environmental Health Manager. “Testing by the Riverkeeper has shown a decrease in fecal coliform bacteria following these replacements. This is a joint project with several government and community groups and the St. Mary’s Riverkeeper has been instrumental in its success by documenting water quality conditions and improvement in the area. The Riverkeeper’s ongoing support and assistance is greatly appreciated.”