



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Harpeth Conservancy launches river advisory system— Tennessee Water Watch

“Before you play, check the water for the day!”

May 2024, BRENTWOOD, Tenn—In a groundbreaking initiative to safeguard river enthusiasts in Middle Tennessee, Harpeth Conservancy proudly unveils the launch of its river advisory system: Tennessee (TN) Water Watch, which functions similarly to a weather forecast but offers users a forecast of water quality.

Dedicated to raising awareness about water pollution and protecting public health, TN Water Watch forecasts the levels of *E. coli* at select, highly recreated river access points in Middle Tennessee and compares it to thresholds set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in order to provide insight into the relative health risks of the water. As people make recreation plans, they can use this tool to make informed decisions about when and where to recreate and to appropriately gauge safety precautions.

While conventional water sampling offers limited insights, leaving recreational users vulnerable to unseen risks, TN Water Watch harnesses years of past *E. coli* samples collected by our citizen scientists and real-time data on environmental conditions from the U.S. Geological Survey and local weather stations. Through advanced modeling, the tool predicts microbial levels; the data refreshes hourly to allow for more accurate predictions that can inform the adoption of appropriate safety measures while recreating.

TN Water Watch is pioneering in this area since there isn't a current system in Tennessee that provides up-to-date, real-time water quality information for recreational users.

In addition to providing helpful information for recreational users, the data helps identify hotspots – areas within the river where bacteria levels are notably higher. We can then look at the surrounding area to identify sources of pollution and seek science-informed policy solutions. Moreover, our tool is rooted in community participation as we engage volunteer participation in collecting water samples every summer. Opportunities to learn and gain experience will expand to processing samples in our new on-site laboratory as we add new sampling sites and begin testing for additional contaminants.

Dr. Jackwood shared, “As individuals and families plan their recreational activities this summer – paddling, fishing, swimming, etc. – our tool will inform them of the potential risks in the water quality for each of the river access points on our map for that particular day. Our communities should enjoy Middle Tennessee’s rivers or streams without fear of getting sick!”

SCIENCE-BASED CONSERVATION FOR THE RIVERS OF TENNESSEE

Harpeth Conservancy is a Tennessee non-profit corporation and a 501(c)(3) organization.

All donations are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

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Recent incidents investigated by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) underscore the urgency of such initiatives. In 2014, a waterborne salmonellosis outbreak linked to water recreation prompted statewide water quality assessments. Similarly, in 2017 and 2018, legionellosis and *E. coli* outbreaks underscored the importance of proactive monitoring.

Harpeth Conservancy underscores that while predictions serve as vital tools, they carry inherent uncertainties. Despite indications of safety, risks may persist, emphasizing the need for cautious water usage. The advisory tool will go live for public use as of its launch at the Richland Creek Clean Up event on June 8, 2024. At this event, Dr. Jackwood will be on hand to share more information with attendees and provide insight into data collected at the Richland Creek location. Press and community members are invited to attend.

For more information on TN Water Watch, please visit <https://tnwaterwatch.org>

ABOUT HARPETH CONSERVANCY

Founded in 1999, Harpeth Conservancy is a science-based non-profit conservation organization. Harpeth Conservancy's mission is to restore and protect clean water and healthy ecosystems for rivers in Tennessee by employing scientific expertise and collaborative relationships to develop, promote, and support broad community stewardship and action. Harpeth Conservancy's success is driven by working with landowners, businesses, community, local, state, and federal decision-makers and members to foster solutions that reduce pollution and maintain healthy areas.

To learn more about Harpeth Conservancy, its mission, and its upcoming events, please visit its website at www.harpethconservancy.org.

For more information or to arrange interviews, please contact:

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