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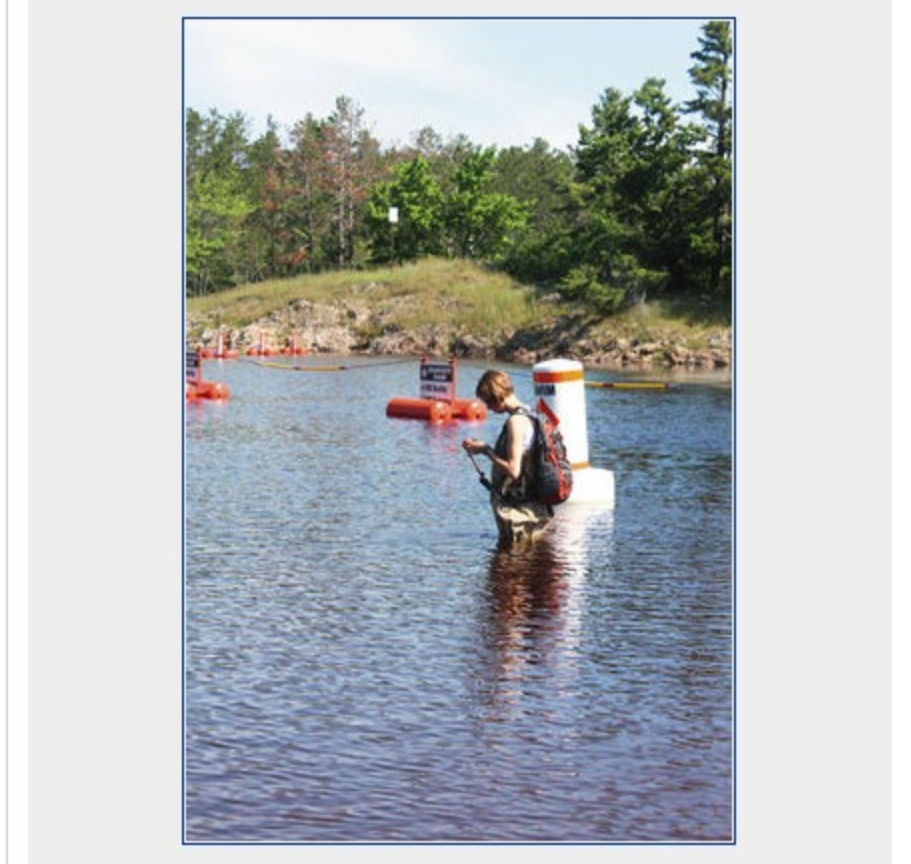
June 27, 2013
ADELLE WHITEFOOT - Journal Staff Writer (awwhitefoot@miningjournal.net) , The Mining Journal

MARQUETTE- After numerous beach closures last summer, water testing is being done more frequently at one Marquette beach.

The city of Marquette and the Superior Watershed Partnership are testing five city beaches every week for E. coli levels. Four beaches will be tested twice a week: McCarty's Cove, North Beach, north of Picnic Rocks and -new this year - the Tourist Park Basin. South Beach is the fifth beach tested, and it's tested five days a week.

"We're testing South Beach five times a week because of the high levels of E. coli that occurred last summer," said Geri Grant, senior planner at the Superior Watershed Partnership.

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Last summer, South Beach was closed on five separate occasions, once in July and four times in August, until it was closed for the season Aug. 30.

If the average of three samples from a single beach shows more than 300 parts E. coli per 100 milliliter of water, state regulations indicate the beach must be closed until the levels decrease. Last summer, South Beach samples ranged from 338 parts E. coli to 552 parts.

"We started monitoring on June 3 and so far, the levels are low," Grant said. "We'll continue to monitor the levels until Sept. 1."

According to Grant, there were various factors that led to the high E. Coli levels at South Beach last year. Factors included the hot water run off from the power plant, a shortened winter, geese on the beach, a lower beach level and the record high temperatures of Lake Superior.

The beach testing done in Marquette is not mandated by the state, but is done in conjunction with a grant from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. Michigan law stipulates the closure of beaches with 300 parts E. coli per 100 ml of water.

"But I want people to know that even at 300, the number of bacteria is low compared to other places, like Milwaukee," Grant said.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources website, only advisory signs are posted whenever the water quality exceeds 235 parts E. coli per 100 ml. The beaches are only closed when E. coli levels exceed 1,000 parts E. coli per 100 ml.

In both states, beaches aren't reopened until the levels decrease below the state regulations.

In Marquette, after a water sample is taken, it is brought to the water treatment plant and results take about 24 hours to get back.

"With the results taking so long to receive the beach could be closed for a whole day when the level could be low enough for it to be reopened, or it could be open during a high level day," Grant said. "But this year, we are trying a new test that will take only a few hours to get results back."

The new water quality test was developed by the Environmental Protection Agency and allows the city to determine the quality of the water sample in three hours. Grant said even though the water is being tested constantly, the SWP is focusing on education to make sure the levels stay by there being less pollution on the water.

"There are quite a few sewer drains in the city that lead to Lake Superior and many people might not know that," Grant said. "If someone throws a cigarette out of their window and it ends up in the sewer drain, that butt will end up in the lake and on the beaches."

Plates were placed next to some of the drains that lead to Lake Superior indicating so. Some ways to help prevent pollutants from entering these drains are to dispose of pet waste properly, wash cars on the lawn or at a car wash facility and to sweep up any fertilizer that lands on the sidewalk, driveway or road.

"You can even get your soil tested because you might not even need fertilizer," Grant said.

For current E. coli levels at beaches around the county, visit www.deq.state.mi.us/ beach.

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