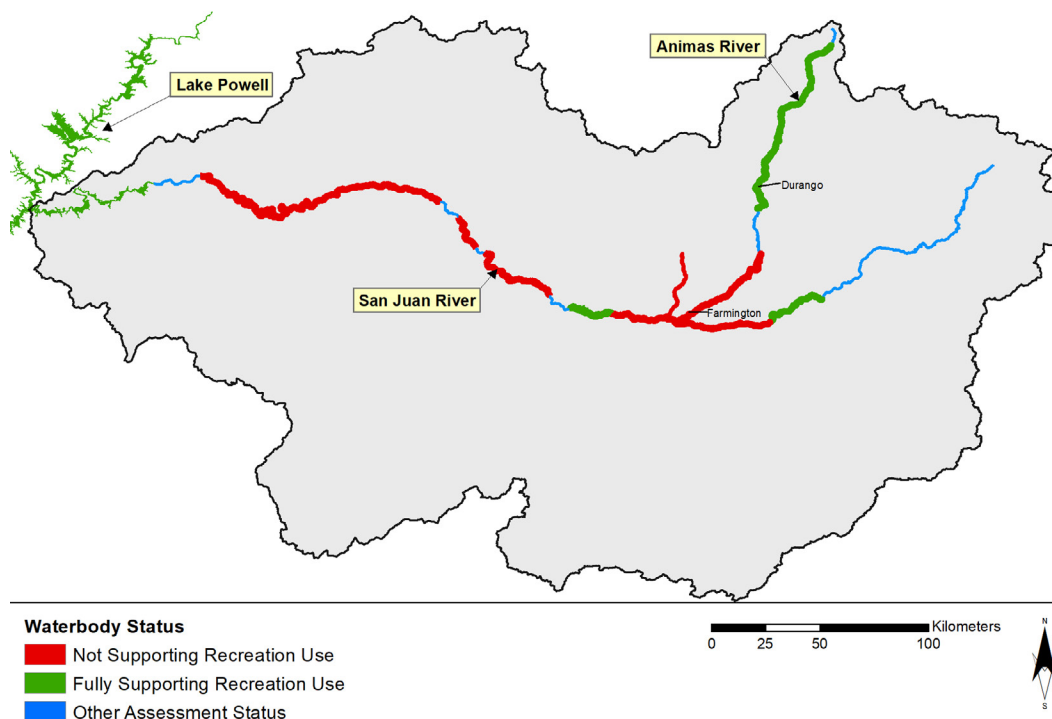


Under the Clean Water Act (CWA), EPA regulates the quality of and discharges of pollutants into our nation's surface waters. States and tribes regularly monitor and assess surface water quality, communicate water quality conditions to the public, and work to address natural and human-caused water quality issues. The San Juan Watershed in the southwestern United States comprises the San Juan and Animas Rivers and their tributaries. The headwaters of the Animas River lie in a naturally ore-rich mineral belt that was the site of significant historical mining activity. While some metals in the waters of the upper Animas River are naturally occurring, many come from acid mine drainage and runoff from mining disposal piles.

The lower Animas River is diluted by incoming waters with lower levels of metals as the Animas flows southward through Durango, CO to Farmington, NM where it joins the San Juan River. The Animas is the largest free-flowing perennial tributary to the San Juan and can have an important influence on San Juan water quality.

The San Juan River is a source of water and power for over 4 million people. The river crosses diverse landscapes and receives waters from multiple tributaries before it reaches Lake Powell and converges with the Colorado River.







## STATE AND TRIBAL ASSESSMENTS<sup>1</sup>



This map presents state and tribal assessments of water quality relative to the standards they established under the CWA for recreational uses such as swimming, boating, and fishing. These standards ensure that the waters are safe for recreation and protect people from illnesses associated with ingesting or being in the water and consuming fish caught in these waters. Green segments of the waterbody are meeting established standards for recreational uses. Red segments are not meeting established standards for recreational uses. Blue segments were not assessed or not reported or are in the process of being assessed.

<sup>1</sup> This map does not include information for Ute Mountain Ute or Southern Ute Indian Tribes. The Southern Ute was authorized as treatment in a similar manner as a state (TAS) for CWA Section 303(c), and as of July 2020, is in the process of preparing their water quality standards package for EPA review and approval. The Ute Mountain Ute have tribally-adopted and federally-approved water quality standards and are in the process of developing an assessment methodology. The tribes can be contacted directly with any questions related to water quality.

## KEY POINTS

-  EPA, states, tribes, and other federal, non-profit, and local entities have conducted extensive monitoring to evaluate watershed condition. For recreational use, water samples are analyzed for metals and bacteria such as *E. coli*. Fish tissue may be analyzed for mercury and other pollutants that could pose a human health risk if consumed in high quantities.
-  The states and tribes in the watershed have assessed surface water quality based on their respective standards under the CWA. Assessments are updated periodically in accordance with established state and tribal assessment cycles.
  - According to CWA reporting for 2020, Colorado determined that assessed waters in the upper Animas River are meeting established state standards for recreational uses.
  - According to CWA reporting for 2018 to 2020, New Mexico determined that the Animas River and middle and lower San Juan River in New Mexico were not meeting state surface water quality standards for recreational uses, due to high levels of *E. coli* bacteria.
  - According to CWA reporting for 2011 to 2017, Navajo Nation determined that portions of the San Juan River and certain tributaries to the San Juan River were not meeting established tribal standards for recreational use due to levels of certain metals in the water.
  - According to CWA reporting for 2016, Utah determined that assessed waters in the lower San Juan River and Lake Powell were meeting established state standards for recreational uses.
-  A study to identify the sources of bacterial pollutants in this area of the watershed determined that human and ruminant (e.g., cattle, sheep, deer) bacteria were significant contributors to bacterial levels at most sampling sites, particularly in the San Juan River.<sup>2</sup> Additional research is needed to better identify and manage the major sources of bacteria, such as stormwater runoff and direct discharges into the rivers.
-  A 2018 EPA report found that contaminant levels in fish tissue do not exceed recommended consumption concentrations.<sup>3</sup>
-  A 2017 Navajo Nation EPA report found that contaminant levels in fish tissue do not exceed recommended consumption concentrations.<sup>4</sup>
-  From 2018 through 2021, EPA is working in collaboration with states and tribes to collect water quality and sediment samples at 39 locations across the watershed. These samples are analyzed for metals and other parameters.
  - Metals in the Animas and San Juan Rivers are generally well below guidelines for recreational exposure.
  - Some metals, including nickel and copper, are prevalent in higher concentrations in the upper Animas due to mining activities, but diminish further downstream.
  - All available data from these monitoring efforts can be found on [EPA's San Juan Watershed website](https://www.epa.gov/san-juan-watershed).

<sup>2</sup> San Juan Basin Bacteria Source Tracking Project. San Juan Watershed Group, San Juan Soil & Water Conservation District, and Animas Watershed Partnership. Sampling conducted 2013-2014.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. EPA. November 2018. Analysis of Biological Data Collected from the Animas and San Juan Rivers Following the Gold King Mine Release. EPA/830/R-18/003.

<sup>4</sup> Navajo Nation EPA. November 2017. San Juan River Fish Contaminant Study.