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Study on Hudson River finds unsafe sewage pollution

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A sail boat motors north on the Hudson River near Cold Spring on Sunday, July 24, 2011. Constitution Marsh occupies much of the upper third of the photograph, taken from Storm King State Park. / Darryl Bautista/Journal file

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Written by **The Associated Press**

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CROTON-ON-HUDSON, Westchester County — Sewage pollution makes the Hudson River unsafe for swimming 21 percent of the time at sites from New York City to Troy — three times as often as beaches nationwide, according to a report issued today.

The report, by the environmental group Riverkeeper, is based on monthly samples taken between 2006 and 2010 that were tested for bacteria linked to sewage. The samples came from 75 sites along the length of the 155-mile river.

There are only four designated swimming beaches on the Hudson, but more than 100 places where people go into the water, the group said.

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The report says investments in infrastructure since the Clean Water Act of 1972 "have gone a long way toward cleaning up our

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river." And it says the nation and state have set worthy goals since then, but "we have failed terribly to meet these goals."

The study was done with scientists from Columbia University and Queens College, the report says.

It says when there is testing, the results are not always shared with the public.

The study found that sewage pollution varied greatly, even on the same day and within a quarter-mile. That shows sewage contamination to be "typically a local problem," the report said.

Last month, area beaches and fishing were affected when about 200 million gallons of raw sewage spewed into the Hudson from the North River Wastewater Treatment Plant in Manhattan, which had been taken offline following an engine room fire.

Not surprisingly, the overall study found higher pollution rates near shore than in the middle of the river. "This is because the shoreline is where the people are — and where the sewage typically enters the river," the report says.

It also found unacceptable ratings more often — 25 percent of the time — near points where sewage treatment plants send partially treated wastewater into the river.

But the plant in Yonkers, and the one at 125th Street in Manhattan, had consistently low bacteria counts, the report said. However, it noted that often after rain, sewage often does not get to the plants because of overflows.

Tributaries that flow into the Hudson did not fare well in the study. Readings taken at the point where the tributaries meet the river found unacceptable levels of the bacteria 34 percent of the time. The problem could be illegal sewer hookups, leaking septic systems or leaking sewage pipes, the report said.

It said the tributaries may be the reason that the relatively rural area between Bear Mountain and Catskill had worse results than the suburban region of Westchester and Rockland.

The study also found that New York City did better than the Albany region, which has far fewer people. It said New York has been maintaining and upgrading its sewage treatment system and Albany uses a much narrower and shallower section of the river.

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