2026 CLEAN WATER REPORT CARD

Central New Jersey's Water Quality at a Glance

Five years of community science data reveal modest but broad declines across the region's monitored streams and lakes—with road salt, turbidity, and pH driving the trend.

Data: Jan 2021 – Dec 2025 | Central New Jersey | 100+ Volunteer Monitors

THE BOTTOM LINE

Water quality across central New Jersey's monitored streams and lakes slipped modestly but broadly between the 2020–2024 and 2021–2025 assessment periods. Declines outnumbered improvements: 22 of 31 subwatersheds and 20 of 26 municipalities saw their overall scores decrease, though most shifts were small. pH, turbidity, and chloride showed genuinely widespread declines in score, while dissolved oxygen, nitrate, and *E. coli* had a few sharp local drops.

20 / 26
Municipalities with overall scores declining

3
Parameters in widespread decline: pH, turbidity, chloride

11 / 31
Subwatersheds where pH dropped at least one category

Each five-year assessment window overlaps four years with the prior one, so these shifts reflect one new year of data replacing one older year — a gradual trend, not a sudden change in stream health.

AREAS OF NOTE

Greatest Concerns & Bright Spots

Greatest Concerns

Full-category drops (subwatersheds): Bear Brook, Beden Brook, Fiddlers Creek, Heathcote Brook, Little Shabakunk Creek

Full-category drops (municipalities): Millstone Township, Trenton City

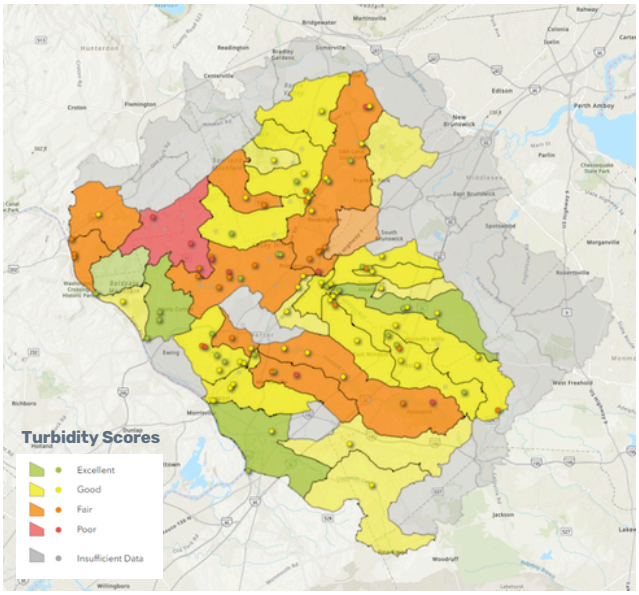
pH: Most widespread decline — 11 of 31 subwatersheds dropped; Heathcote Brook, Little Shabakunk Creek, Upper Crosswicks Creek, and Alexauken Creek fell into Poor

Bright Spots

Strongest gains: Cranbury Brook (subwatershed) and East Windsor Township (municipality)

Temperature: Improved in several areas, including Trenton City, Lawrence Township, and Princeton (Good→ Excellent)

Cranbury Brook: Improved across multiple parameters, including turbidity and E. coli



SCORING FRAMEWORK

How to Read These Results

For each water quality parameter, volunteer-collected data are evaluated against the applicable NJ DEP Surface Water Quality Standards and scored as Excellent (4), Good (3), Fair (2), or Poor (1). For subwatersheds and municipalities with multiple monitoring sites, site scores are combined using a geometric mean to calculate the regional score. Trend results are based on assessment scores rather than raw water quality measurements. A declining trend indicates a worsening score over time.

Scan here to see the full report:

PARAMETER	SCORE TREND	NOTABLE AREAS
Temperature	Stable	Lower Assunpink & Lower Crosswicks improved; Royce Brook slipped
Turbidity	Declined	11 subwatersheds dropped a category; South Brunswick Twp fell two categories
pH	Most widespread decline	11 of 31 subwatersheds & 8 of 26 municipalities dropped; several fell into Poor
Dissolved Oxygen	Sharp local declines	Bear Brook & Heathcote Brook fell Excellent into Poor 3 municipalities dropped several fell into poor
Nitrate	Relatively stable	East Windsor Twp dropped two categories; Princeton & Lawrence Twp improved
Phosphate	Little change	Most sites remain chronically in Poor range
Chloride	Consistent decline	6 subwatersheds & 9 municipalities dropped, none improved; road salt cited as driver
Macroinvertebrates	Essentially flat	Most data-limited parameter — 7 subwatersheds lack sufficient data
E. coli	Modest shifts	Beden Brook & Rock Brook dropped; Cranbury Brook improved

PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

Three Decades of Community Science

Since 1992

StreamWatch has monitored regional waterways

~60

Streams & lakes monitored

100+

Trained volunteer monitors

Data is shared with municipal and state leaders, including NJDEP, to support regulatory action under the Clean Water Act.

STREAMWATCH ACTION TEAMS

CAT — CHEMICAL ACTION TEAM

Monthly Chemical Monitoring

Volunteers measure chemical parameters and collect samples monthly using a handheld meter and the Watershed's own lab. Tracks ongoing water quality changes.

BAT — BIOLOGICAL ACTION TEAM

Spring Macroinvertebrate Assessment

Volunteers assess habitat and sample benthic macroinvertebrates each spring, sent to an external lab for genus-level ID. NJDEP-accredited for regulatory use.

BACT — BACTERIAL ACTION TEAM

Weekly Summer Bacterial & HAB Monitoring

Volunteers monitor for HABs and E. coli for 15 summer weeks, testing for E. coli, nutrients, turbidity, and chloride. Results posted weekly to the BACT Dashboard.

GET INVOLVED

Volunteer with the Watershed

Scan here or visit thewatershed.org/volunteer to apply: