



Portland finds cryptosporidium in Bull Run testing but officials hopeful they won't need to build \$90 million treatment plant

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Portland's drinking water comes mostly from two reservoirs in the Bull Run watershed near Mount Hood, tapping streams that run through more than 100-square-miles of thick forest. The city also ships Bull Run water to suburbs from Gresham to Beaverton. The gauge measures water levels.

Portland's efforts to avoid building an expensive treatment plant at Bull Run took a surprising twist Thursday as **officials announced that testing Dec. 30 found the dreaded cryptosporidium parasite in two water samples.**

Even so, officials said there's no imminent health risk and they don't think the results will hurt **their chances to avoid building a \$90 million ultraviolet plant.**

"We hope not," said David Shaff, administrator of the **Portland Water Bureau.** "It shouldn't."

Portland officials faced a federal requirement to build the treatment plant but argued that it was unnecessary because **the city had not detected cryptosporidium** -- the potentially lethal parasite that prompted the regulations -- since 2002.

The Oregon Health Authority's Public Health Division cited those results in November in announcing that it probably would give Portland a pass.

Under the proposed exemption, the city would need to step up monitoring if it found cryptosporidium. If heightened testing found a second positive sample, the proposal says, state officials "may revoke the variance."

But that's getting ahead of things, as the state has until Jan. 31 to make a final decision on the variance itself.

Gail Shibley, the state's public health administrator, was unavailable for comment Thursday. Christine Stone, an agency spokeswoman, said only that the detection of cryptosporidium "is information we will be considering."

Preliminary lab results from Dec. 30 found one oocyst -- a hard-shelled structure from feces, not detectable by the naked eye -- from a 50-liter sample at Bull Run's raw water intake, according to the city. Another oocyst was found upstream in a 10-liter sample.

Testing from Jan. 1 and Jan. 3 didn't detect any cryptosporidium, the city reported.

"If this had happened after the variance was granted, we would be doing what we are doing today -- which is increased monitoring, increased sampling, investigating what's the cause, can we determine where it came from, and is there anything we can do about that," Shaff said.

In a letter to the state, Shaff wrote that Portland had collected over 725 samples from more than 19,269 liters since last finding cryptosporidium.

According to the state's proposal, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency calculated that Portland would need to analyze at least 10,250 liters of intake water "with zero oocysts detected" to demonstrate that no treatment is necessary.

Ty Kovatch, chief of staff to Commissioner Randy Leonard, who oversees the Water Bureau, suggested the results may have been triggered by a storm.

Kovatch said the results shouldn't be problematic, or even newsworthy if not for the variance request.

"If anything, it would have been unexpected not to see it for 10 years," he said. "It is what it is."

-- **Brad Schmidt**

More

The Oregonian's continuing coverage of Portland's long-sought variance on treating water for cryptosporidium.