

# Memo

**To:** Charleston County; Town of James Island; City of Charleston

**From:** Woolpert, Inc.

**Date:** November 22, 2021

**Subject:** James Island Creek Grab Sampling Results Memo  
Summer 2021 – data through September 2021

The James Island Creek TMDL for Enterococcus bacteria became effective in January 2020, and to maintain compliance with their NPDES General Permit, Charleston County, the Town of James Island, and the City of Charleston (the permittees) were required to submit a TMDL Monitoring Plan to SCDHEC within 12 months of the TMDL effective date (January 2021) and begin monitoring activities within 18 months of the TMDL effective date (July 2021). In accordance with the submitted TMDL Monitoring Plan, the permittees initiated monitoring activities in July 2021 and collected the first seasonal wet weather grab sample in August 2021. The sampling efforts have targeted both wet and dry conditions in order to assess bacteria concentrations in James Island Creek in response to storm events and during base flow conditions. This memo summarizes and discusses data collected through September 2021. It will be a cumulative document with new data added to the existing dataset as additional samples are collected. All sample results (August 2021 through September 2021) and notes about associated weather and tidal conditions are included in Appendix A.

Each grab sampling effort has involved taking samples at two strategic locations in the watershed. The upstream site (Riley Road) is located at the end of Riley Road, approximately 0.5 miles upstream of the Folly Road bridge over James Island Creek. The downstream site (Harbor View Bridge) is located at the bridge where Harbor View Road crosses James Island Creek. The contributing drainage area to both locations includes human influence from suburban, urban, and developed areas. Samples were analyzed by Trident Laboratory in Ladson, SC, an EPA-approved laboratory, for Enterococcus bacteria using the SM-9230D method and results were reported as the Most Probable Number of bacteria per 100 milliliter sample (MPN/100ml). Summary statistics for Enterococcus grab sampling results to date (through September 2021) are shown in **Table 1** for each sampling location and weather condition. As of this memo, limited sampling has taken place for Enterococcus, so the summary statistics are not representative of the water quality throughout the year and interpretation and discussion of the data will be limited until the sample size has increased.

**Table 1: Summary Statistics for Grab Sample Enterococcus Results - By Location and Weather Condition**

Sampling Location	Weather Condition	Summary Statistic (units of MPN/100ml)				# Samples
		Mean	Median	Maximum	Minimum	
Riley Road	Dry	603	525	1110	250	4
Riley Road	Wet	2059	510	8160	10	8
Harbor View Bridge	Dry	10	10	10	10	4
Harbor View Bridge	Wet	258	105	810	20	8

Due to the many factors that influence bacteria concentrations (e.g., potential bacteria sources, season, weather, rainfall intensity, antecedent rainfall, tides, timing of watershed storm response), it is important to consider individual storm results in their own context in addition to summary statistics. To facilitate this kind of assessment, figures were created

to illustrate the grab sampling results at each location along with approximate relative stage in James Island Creek, approximate rainfall data (for wet weather sampling), and observations about weather and tidal conditions. These figures were created for all sampling efforts and are located in Appendix B in chronological order. Available tide prediction and rainfall data were used to best approximate conditions in James Island Creek during sampling. Tide prediction data was obtained from NOAA station #8665530 "Charleston, Cooper River Entrance, SC" which is approximately 2.5 miles northeast from the Harbor View Bridge sampling location. For the wet weather sampling efforts, rainfall data was obtained from the Town of Mount Pleasant's Ravenel Bridge rain gauge, approximately 4.5 miles northeast of Harbor View Bridge. This gauge represents the closest source of incremental rainfall data that is available to approximate rainfall in the James Island Creek watershed. For the purposes of analysis and discussion, a "storm rainfall" was established which was a running sum of rainfall until 3 consecutive hours go by with zero additional precipitation that occurred closest to the time of sampling. In some cases, if there was additional rainfall outside the "storm rainfall" that was relevant to describing the watershed conditions, analysis may refer to a "total rainfall" or "largest storm rainfall" that is larger than the "storm rainfall" that occurred closest to the time of sampling.

## Overall Trends

The summary statistics as well as individual storm results were reviewed and compared to attempt to observe trends and/or correlations between bacteria concentration sampling results and a variety of potential associated factors. It is important to note that with this limited data set, the following discussion is not asserting statistical significance, but rather seeking to explore possible relationships in an effort to start to understand the complex natural aquatic system of James Island Creek. The summary statistics in **Table 1** indicate two overall trends with respect to Enterococcus concentrations: higher concentrations at Riley Road than at Harbor View Bridge and higher concentrations in wet conditions than in dry conditions. When comparing individual storm results in Appendix A (list form) and Appendix B (graphical form), it does appear that bacteria concentrations tend to be higher in wet weather conditions than dry weather conditions. However, a comparison of results for individual wet weather versus dry weather sampling efforts does not provide a clear trend; there is variation among both the wet weather events and dry weather events (e.g., some dry weather samples are slightly higher than some wet weather samples, contrary to the overall trend seen with summary statistics). This variation may be driven by some or all of the factors influencing bacteria concentrations mentioned previously. The limited dataset of grab sample results provides a glimpse of the water quality conditions that may also contribute to these variations. Though the dataset is limited, the following sections provide a discussion of specific sampling events and how they may or may not show potential trends for wet and dry weather conditions.

## Wet Weather Sampling

The goal of wet weather sampling is to quantify the bacteria levels present in stormwater runoff by collecting grab samples during or soon after storm events. In tidal systems, such as James Island Creek, it can be difficult to differentiate between stormwater runoff and tidal flow using only stage and rainfall data. For purposes of discussion, bacteria concentrations will be approximated as order of magnitude. From the available grab sampling data, wet weather results at Harbor View Bridge have been observed to vary by two orders of magnitude, typically in the "tens" (10-99 MPN/100ml) and "hundreds" (100-999 MPN/100ml). Wet weather results at Riley Road have been observed to vary by three orders of magnitude, sometimes as low as the "tens" and sometimes as high as the "thousands" ( $10^3$ ).

A brief description of each wet weather sampling effort during Summer 2021 is provided below.

- The August 2021 event (8/3/2021) had a rainfall total of 0.20" prior to sampling with samples collected from low to high tide, as the tide rose. The bacteria levels were relatively low, in the "tens" at Harbor View Bridge and varied between "tens" and "hundreds" at Riley Road. Additional rainfall was forecast to occur before and during the sampling window but did not actually occur until later in the day after the available sampling window (limited by laboratory hours).
- The September 2021 event (9/21/2021) had a rainfall total of 2.39" prior to and during sampling with samples collected from high to low tide, as the tide fell. This larger storm event correlated with relatively high bacteria levels (results in the "hundreds" at Harbor View Bridge and results in the "thousands" at Riley Road).

Comparing the two wet weather sampling events thus far, the event with more rainfall associated with sampling had higher observed bacteria concentrations. As additional data is collected, potential correlations between bacteria concentrations and tidal conditions, seasons, or other rainfall characteristics will be considered.

## Dry Weather Sampling

Dry weather sampling intends to provide some background, baseline bacteria levels in James Island Creek to represent conditions not influenced by stormwater runoff. These levels could be attributed to wildlife in or near the water, historic deposits, non-stormwater human contributions, or aquatic life. In order for sampling to be considered “dry weather,” at least 72 hours must have passed since the last instance of greater than or equal to 0.1” of rainfall.

Dry weather results at Harbor View Bridge were low, with all results being 10 or <10 MPN/100ml. Accordingly, the bacteria concentrations at Harbor View Bridge did not appear to be tidally influenced. Dry weather results at Riley Road were higher than at Harbor View Bridge, with all results in the “hundreds” or “thousands”. At Riley Road, the bacteria concentrations correlated with change in the tide, with highest values at low tide and decreasing values as the tide rose. Correlation between bacteria concentration and tide, as well as other environmental factors, at the two locations will continue to be assessed as additional data is collected.

## Microbial Source Tracking Results

While the presence of Enterococcus bacteria acts as an indicator to detect fecal contamination, it does not indicate the origins of fecal contamination. Understanding the sources of contamination is essential for identifying effective remediation measures (BMPs), complying with legal (permit) responsibility, and characterizing potential public health risks. The permittees included Microbial Source Tracking (MST) methods in their data collection efforts to target the source of the fecal bacteria through genetic markers in the bacteria. Host-associated genetic markers in gut bacteria have been identified based on the theory that the physiology in the gut of the host animal (e.g., diet, temperature, antibiotic treatment, etc.) is unique from one species of animal to another. These documented gut conditions and associated genetic markers of gut bacteria allow LuminUltra Technologies (formerly Source Molecular), an accredited MST laboratory, to use replicable methods to identify common hosts of gut bacteria and sources of fecal contamination.

The high cost (over 15 times the cost of a traditional bacteria sample) of MST reduces the feasibility of the permittees using this method for every bacteria sample. To capitalize on MST efforts, the permittees have conducted concurrent sampling for wet weather events where duplicate MST samples were collected along with standard Enterococcus bacteria samples. Enterococcus bacteria samples were analyzed first and then, based on those bacteria concentration results and collaborative discussion, MST analysis was conducted on the duplicate MST sample for select samples of interest. This ensured that the more expensive MST analysis was only performed on select samples that appeared likely to provide insight about fecal bacteria sources in James Island Creek. The permittees budgeted to conduct MST analysis for up to four total samples over the course of one year of sampling, so samples were selected carefully. In the Summer 2021 season, one sample (9/21/2021) was analyzed using MST, with the results shown in **Table 2**.

**Table 2: Microbial Source Tracking (MST) Results for Selected Samples**

Sample Date & Time	Site Name	Total Rainfall (inches)	Enterococcus Result (MPN/100ml)	MST Result Interpretation (# DNA Copies/100ml)			
				Dog	Bird	Human	Ruminant
9/21/2021 10:49	Riley Road	2.39	4110	Low DNQ*	Moderate 1.23E+05	Low DNQ*	Absent Not Detected

\*DNQ = “Did Not Quantify,” presence of DNA markers was detected but below the minimum quantification level.

Total Rainfall is included in **Table 2** as a general indicator of size of the rainfall event. Other parameters such as rainfall distribution and intensity, tidal characteristics, and time of sampling relative to rainfall are also important to understand the sampling conditions as additional MST analyses are included. Appendix C contains grab sampling figures showing these parameters for each event that included MST analysis, along with visual indication of which samples were analyzed.

The sample chosen from the September 2021 sampling effort was from the middle of the sampling period at Riley Road. It was collected during a high falling tide, the second falling tide that occurred during this extended period of rainfall. The Enterococcus concentration was relatively high, being of the “thousands” order of magnitude. As indicated in **Table 2**, the MST analysis indicated a stronger presence of Bird than the other sources. Dog and Human were present in the sample, but below the minimum quantification limit (DNQ). Ruminant (e.g., deer, goats, sheep) was not present in the sample. More MST data will be collected to add to observations about bacteria sources for other storms during different combinations of conditions and at other times of year.

MST analysis was also conducted by LuminUltra for two sampling efforts conducted by Charleston Water Systems (not associated with the permittees’ efforts). In an effort to capitalize on all data collection efforts in James Island Creek and increase the understanding of the watershed, Woolpert reviewed the results of these sampling efforts for inclusion in this memo. Samples were collected by Charleston Water Systems at three locations in the watershed on 3/4/2021 and 5/18/2021 and submitted to LuminUltra for MST analysis of Human, Dog, and Bird DNA markers. The results are summarized as follows with reference to historic rainfall data from the Ravenel Bridge Rain Gauge provided for context.

- 3/4/2021 samples were collected the day after 1.41” of rainfall occurred and indicated Low (but quantifiable) results for Human and Bird, and Low (DNQ) results for Dog at all three watershed locations.
- 5/18/2021 samples were collected under dry conditions (last rainfall was 1.06” on 5/12/2021) and indicated Low (but quantifiable), Low (DNQ), and No Detect results for Human, and a mix of Low (DNQ) and No Detect results for both Bird and Dog among the different watershed locations.

Regarding these two Charleston Water Systems sampling events, during wet weather sampling on 3/4/2021, the source results were generally consistent at different locations throughout the watershed. In comparison, the dry weather sample results on 5/18/2021 were more variable at different locations in the watershed.

As noted earlier, the trends and comparisons discussed in this memo are observations based on the limited dataset. This data is intended to provide the permittees with a preliminary understanding of the James Island Creek watershed and potential impacts of stormwater runoff on bacteria concentrations. The permittees intend to continue both wet weather and dry weather grab sampling, with MST analysis of up to four total select samples, to supplement these initial observations and continue to collect information about the dynamics of James Island Creek.

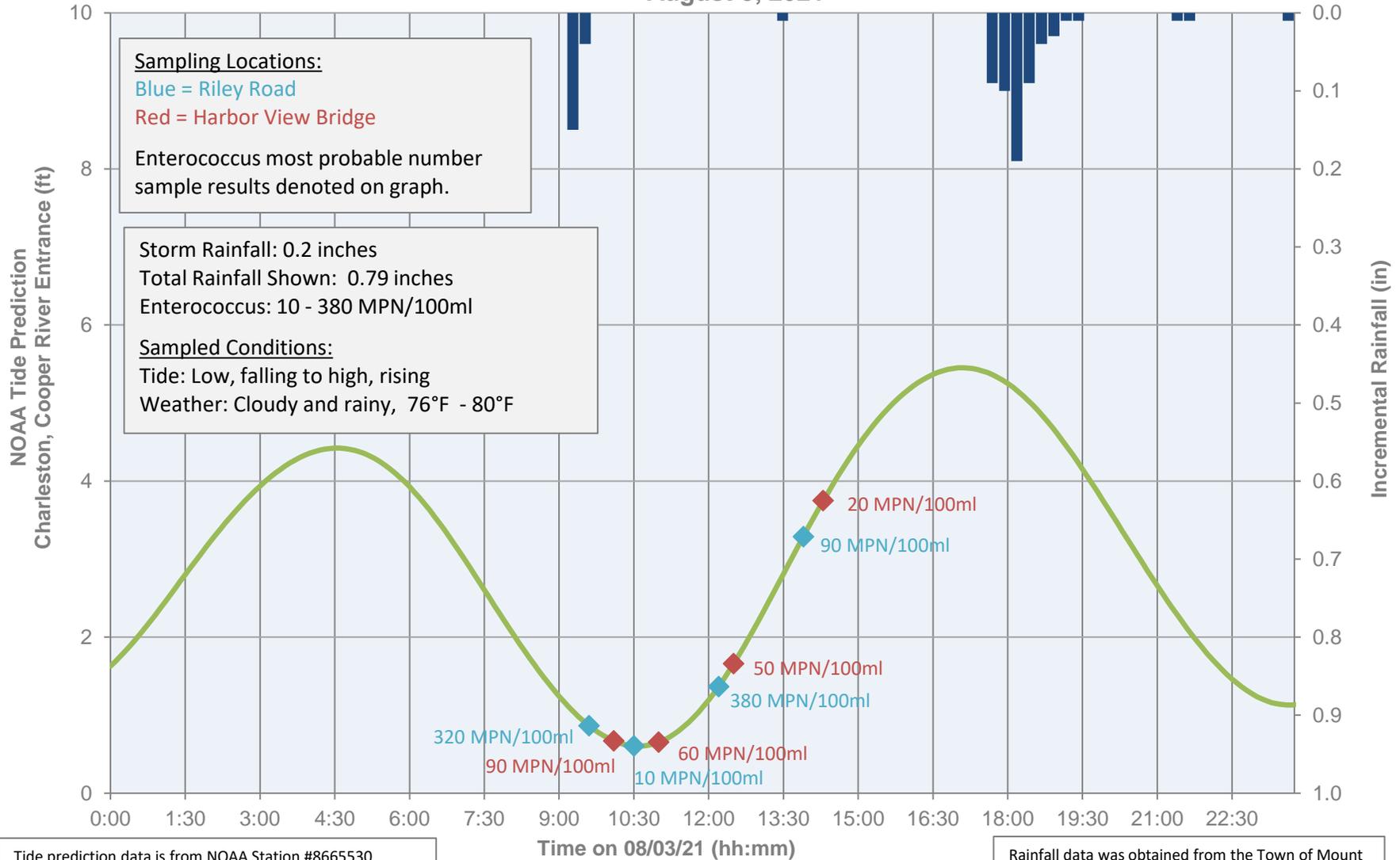
# Appendix A: Grab Sampling Results and Associated Field Conditions

Date	Time	Sampling Location (Riley Road/Harbor View Bridge)	<i>Enterococcus</i> Result (MPN/100 ML)	Tidal Conditions (High/Mid/Low, Rising/Falling)	Type of Sample (Wet/Dry)	Weather Conditions
8/3/2021	9:36	Riley Road	320	Low/Falling	Wet	Raining Total Rainfall = 0.20" Avg Temp = 78°F
8/3/2021	10:07	Harbor View Bridge	90	Low/Falling	Wet	
8/3/2021	10:33	Riley Road	10	Low/Rising	Wet	
8/3/2021	11:02	Harbor View Bridge	60	Low/Rising	Wet	
8/3/2021	12:15	Riley Road	380	Mid/Rising	Wet	
8/3/2021	12:30	Harbor View Bridge	50	Mid/Rising	Wet	
8/3/2021	13:56	Riley Road	90	High/Rising	Wet	
8/3/2021	14:20	Harbor View Bridge	20	High/Rising	Wet	
8/31/2021	9:29	Riley Road	1110	Low/Rising	Dry	
8/31/2021	9:52	Harbor View Bridge	<10	Low/Rising	Dry	
8/31/2021	10:45	Riley Road	580	Mid/Rising	Dry	
8/31/2021	11:04	Harbor View Bridge	10	Mid/Rising	Dry	
8/31/2021	11:44	Riley Road	470	High/Rising	Dry	
8/31/2021	12:03	Harbor View Bridge	<10	High/Rising	Dry	
8/31/2021	13:30	Riley Road	250	High/Slack	Dry	
8/31/2021	13:53	Harbor View Bridge	<10	High/Slack	Dry	
9/21/2021	9:30	Riley Road	640	High/Rising	Wet	Rainy Total Rainfall = 2.39" Avg Temp = 76°F
9/21/2021	9:50	Harbor View Bridge	120	High/Rising	Wet	
9/21/2021	10:49	Riley Road	4110	High/Falling	Wet	
9/21/2021	11:15	Harbor View Bridge	290	High/Falling	Wet	
9/21/2021	12:13	Riley Road	2760	Mid-High/Falling	Wet	
9/21/2021	12:30	Harbor View Bridge	620	Mid-High/Falling	Wet	
9/21/2021	13:15	Riley Road	8160	Mid-Low/Fallng	Wet	
9/21/2021	13:35	Harbor View Bridge	810	Mid-Low/Fallng	Wet	

# Appendix B: Figures of Individual Storm Grab Sampling Results

# Charleston County James Island Creek Wet Weather Sampling

August 3, 2021

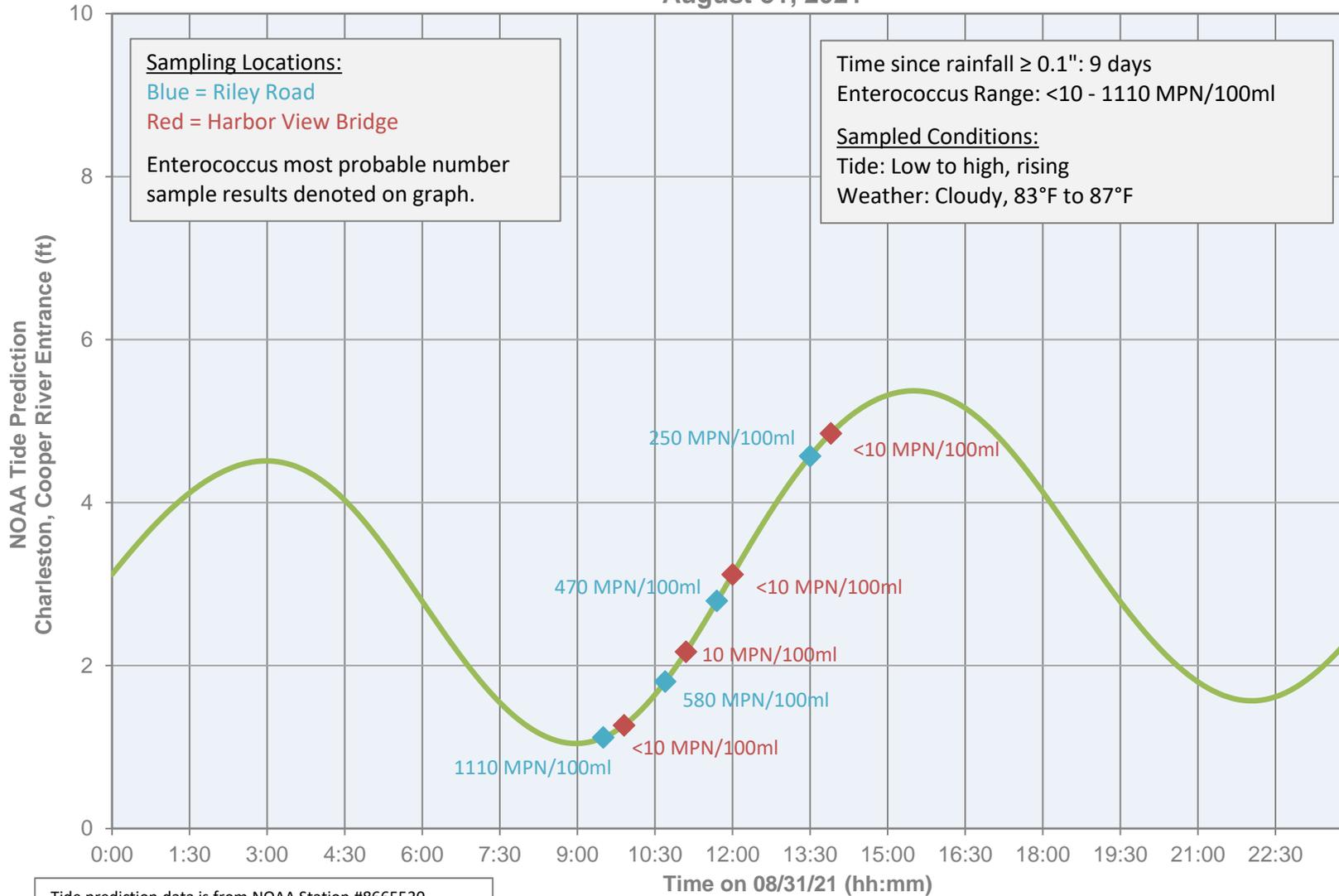


Tide prediction data is from NOAA Station #8665530 "Charleston, Cooper River Entrance, SC", approximately 2.5 miles northeast of the Harbor View Bridge sampling site.

■ 15 minute Rainfall (in)   
 — Stage (ft)   
 ◆ Sample

Rainfall data was obtained from the Town of Mount Pleasant's Ravenel Bridge rain gauge, approximately 4.5 miles northeast of Harbor View Bridge.

# Charleston County James Island Creek Dry Weather Sampling August 31, 2021



**Sampling Locations:**  
 Blue = Riley Road  
 Red = Harbor View Bridge

Enterococcus most probable number sample results denoted on graph.

Time since rainfall  $\geq 0.1$ " : 9 days  
 Enterococcus Range: <10 - 1110 MPN/100ml

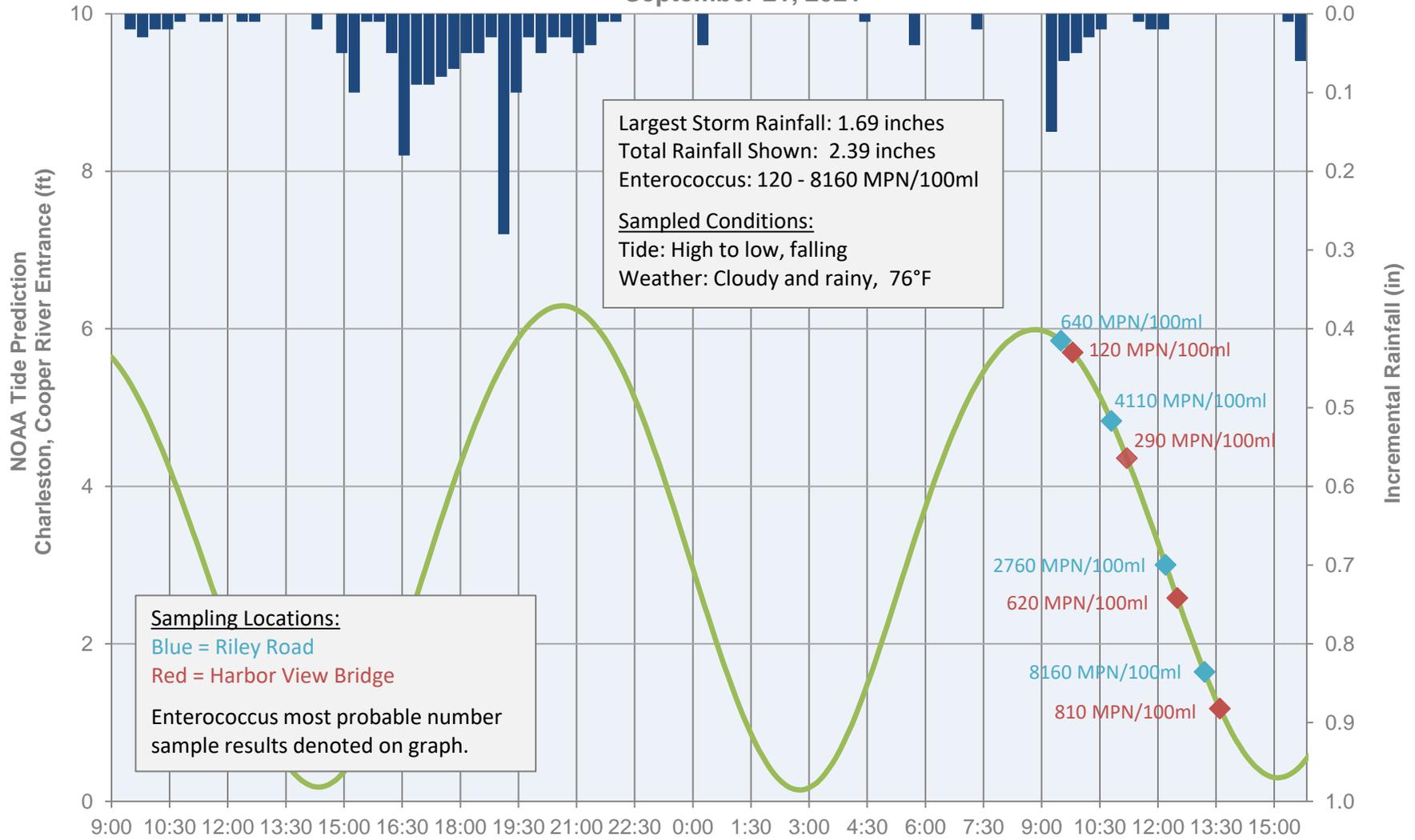
**Sampled Conditions:**  
 Tide: Low to high, rising  
 Weather: Cloudy, 83°F to 87°F

Tide prediction data is from NOAA Station #8665530 "Charleston, Cooper River Entrance, SC", approximately 2.5 miles northeast of the Harbor View Bridge sampling site.

— Stage (ft)      ◆ Sample

# Charleston County James Island Creek Wet Weather Sampling

September 21, 2021



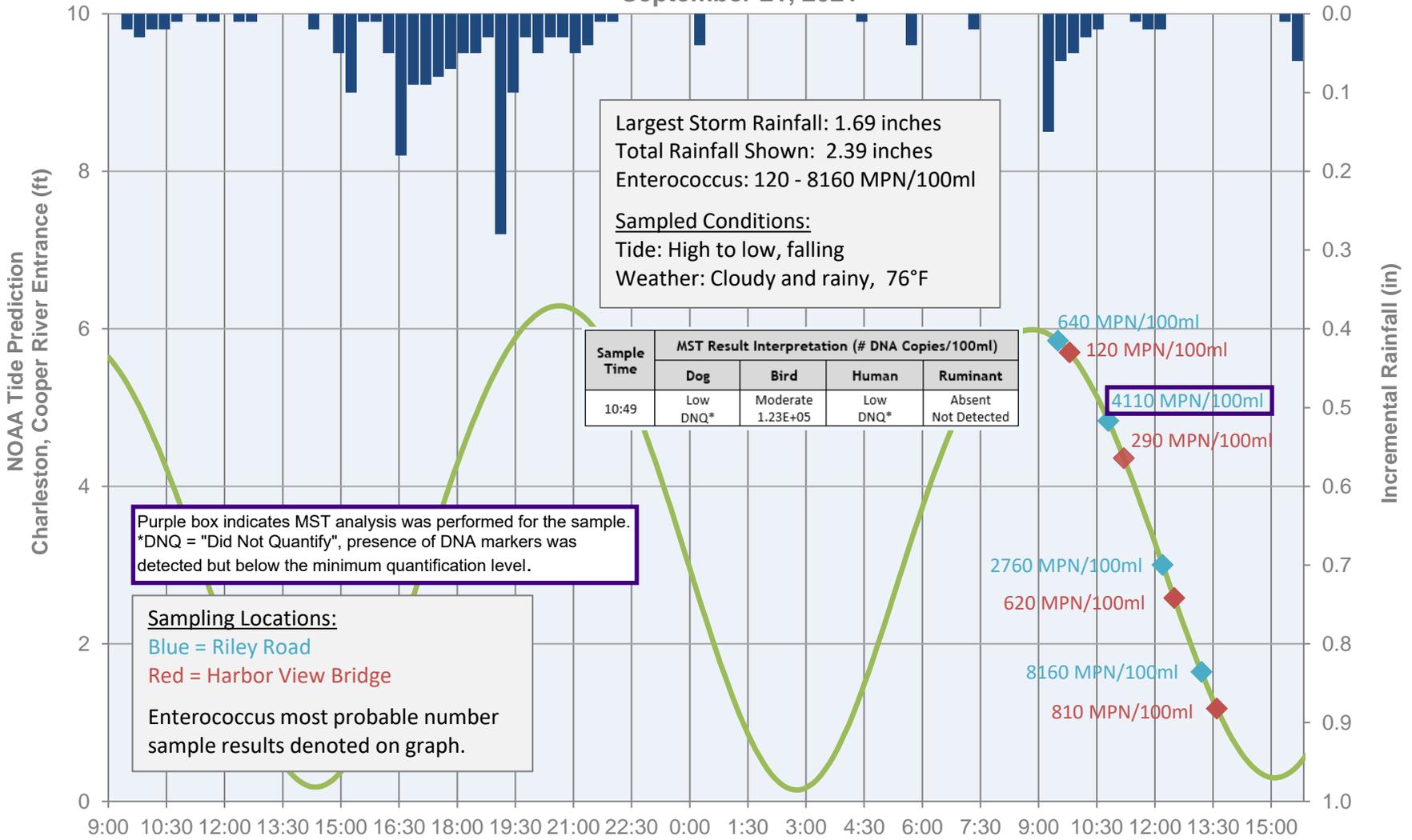
Tide prediction data is from NOAA Station #8665530 "Charleston, Cooper River Entrance, SC", approximately 2.5 miles northeast of the Harbor View Bridge sampling site.

15 minute Rainfall (in)    Stage (ft)    Sample

Rainfall data was obtained from the Town of Mount Pleasant's Ravenel Bridge rain gauge, approximately 4.5 miles northeast of Harbor View Bridge.

# Appendix C: Microbial Source Tracking Results Graphs

# Charleston County James Island Creek Wet Weather Sampling September 21, 2021



Largest Storm Rainfall: 1.69 inches  
 Total Rainfall Shown: 2.39 inches  
 Enterococcus: 120 - 8160 MPN/100ml

Sampled Conditions:  
 Tide: High to low, falling  
 Weather: Cloudy and rainy, 76°F

Sample Time	MST Result Interpretation (# DNA Copies/100ml)			
	Dog	Bird	Human	Ruminant
10:49	Low DNQ*	Moderate 1.23E+05	Low DNQ*	Absent Not Detected

Purple box indicates MST analysis was performed for the sample.  
 \*DNQ = "Did Not Quantify", presence of DNA markers was detected but below the minimum quantification level.

Sampling Locations:  
 Blue = Riley Road  
 Red = Harbor View Bridge

Enterococcus most probable number sample results denoted on graph.

Tide prediction data is from NOAA Station #8665530 "Charleston, Cooper River Entrance, SC", approximately 2.5 miles northeast of the Harbor View Bridge sampling site.

Rainfall data was obtained from the Town of Mount Pleasant's Ravenel Bridge rain gauge, approximately 4.5 miles northeast of Harbor View Bridge.