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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

To: All Media
From: Joel Kwiatkowski, Environmental Health Manager – Bay County Health Department
Date: November 30, 2022
Re: **Bay County Health Department Completes Project to Map and Inventory Septic Systems within the Kawkawlin River Watershed Area**

BAY COUNTY, MICHIGAN – The Bay County Health Department (BCHD) in partnership with Amalgam LLC. completed a project to map and inventory all septic systems within the Kawkawlin River Watershed area. The project was made possible through a grant funded by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy.

The Kawkawlin River Watershed is a 144,049-acre sub watershed of the larger Saginaw Bay Watershed. For more than a decade, bacterial contamination in the Kawkawlin River Watershed has been a serious concern, impacting total and partial body contact recreation. Since 2005, the Kawkawlin River has been under public health advisories a total of 323 days for excessive levels of *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*). It is also on the 2016 303d list for total body contact recreation.

Mapping technologies provide a first-of-its-kind digital, to scale septic system inventory of all septic systems within the watershed area. Over 12,000 septic systems are mapped into Fetch Geographic Information System (FetchGIS) including every paper file containing septic systems data and system characteristics, such as, permit number, tank size, drain field type, age, install date, and much more.

With the use of computer technology via FetchGIS, the BCHD plans to identify, visit, and map septic systems with an emphasis on site visits to properties in critical areas with the highest risk to watershed contamination. An ongoing effort to map septic systems continues as unmapped systems are discovered during daily field visits. This allows for the discovery and management of any at-risk or failing systems, which can lead to an improvement in water quality by reducing human sources of bacteria.

BCHD invites all landowners in the watershed to work with the health department on raising awareness and improving water quality in the Kawkawlin River Watershed. Public access to onsite wastewater information makes it easy for homeowners, contractors, regulators, realtors, and others to view maps and information in an effort to better understand the health of systems within the watershed. Additionally, the FetchGIS mapping software is a useful tool for potential home buyers to search the history of a particular property and assess the health of a septic system or well.

Anyone can access the free, public map on a computer, tablet, or smartphone here:
<https://app.fetchgis.com/bayEHpublic>.

If you find that your septic system is not listed, have questions about well and septic systems, or the watershed project, please contact Joel Kwiatkowski at 989-895-4006, Monday through Friday, 8am-5pm. For more information visit: www.baycounty-mi.gov/Health/Kawkawlin-River-Watershed-Septic-System-Mapping-and-Outreach-Project.aspx

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