



Focus on Cleaning Up Water Pollution

Water Quality Program – Watershed Management

Water Quality Standards

Washington’s surface water quality standards set limits on pollution in our lakes, rivers, and marine waters in order to protect the uses we enjoy such as swimming and fishing.

List of Polluted Waters

The Clean Water Act established a process to identify polluted waters and clean them up. Every two years, states are required to prepare a list of water bodies that do not meet water quality standards. This list is called the 303(d) list because the process is described in Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act.

To develop the list, the Department of Ecology uses its own water quality data and invites other groups to submit water quality data they have collected. Groups that have submitted data in the past include Indian tribes, state and federal agencies, local governments, industries, and citizen monitoring groups. All data submitted are reviewed to ensure that they were collected using appropriate scientific methods before they are used to develop the 303(d) list. Once the list is put together, the public has a chance to review it during a public comment period and a series of public meetings. The final list is formally submitted to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which has the authority to approve or disapprove it.

The following table is an example of what a 303(d) list looks like. The listings are taken from the 1998 303(d) list.

WRIA	Waterbody Name	Parameter	Township	Range	Section	Lat	Long	New ID#	Old ID#
1	Anderson Creek	Fine Sediment	38N	04E	19			MU69PG	WA-01-1120
1	Anderson Creek	Temperature	38N	04E	6			MU69PG	WA-01-1120
1	Bellingham Bay	Acenaphthene				48.745	122.495	390KRD	WA-01-0050
7	French Creek	Dissolved Oxygen	28N	06E	29			XZ24XU	WA-07-1052
7	French Creek	Fecal Coliform	28N	06E	23			XZ24XU	WA-07-1052
9	Elliott Bay	Arsenic				4585	122.355	390KRD	WA-09-0010
15	Private Creek	pH	21N	01E	36			NO-ID	WA-15-3030
15	Purdy Creek	Fecal Coliform	22N	01E	12			UM57RJ	WA-15-1015
28	Fifth Plain Creek	Fecal Coliform	02N	03E	7			QO04UK	WA-28-2024
35	Snake River	Temperature	14N	43E	32			YB863O	WA-35-1010
37	Wide Hollow Creek	DDT	12N	19E	8			EB21AR	WA-37-1047
52	Sanpoil River	Dissolved Oxygen	36N	33E	7			JM31YT	WA-52-1010

The list can be found on the web at:

http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/303d/1998/wrias/1998_water_segs.pdf

The TMDL or Water Cleanup Plan

The Clean Water Act requires that a Water Cleanup Plan must be developed for each of the water bodies on the 303(d) List. The technical name for a water cleanup plan is a Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMDL. A Total Maximum Daily Load is the maximum amount of pollution that a water body can receive without violating state water quality standards.

A water body stays on the list until a TMDL has been developed for it, the pollution problem is addressed through some other pollution control process, or it meets water quality standards. The state monitors the effectiveness of TMDLs after the actions identified in the Water Cleanup Plan have been put in place. If the water is still not meeting standards, it goes back on the 303(d) List, and more stringent pollution controls are required.

In 1996, the EPA was sued by a consortium of environmental groups because it was not requiring Ecology to produce TMDLs more quickly. As part of the settlement agreement for that case, EPA and Ecology developed a memorandum of agreement stipulating that water cleanup plans for all of the water bodies on the 1996 303(d) list would be completed by 2013. The 1996 list identified 1566 separate pollutants impairing 666 water bodies in the state. As you can see from those numbers, many water bodies are affected by more than one pollutant.

All TMDLs/Water Cleanup Plans have these main components:

1. Identification of the type, amount, and sources of water pollution in a particular water body.
2. Targets for how much the pollution needs to be reduced or eliminated to achieve clean water.
3. Actions for reducing the pollution to target levels.
4. A monitoring plan to assess effectiveness.

How does Ecology assure that Washington's waters are getting better?

For pollution coming from point sources, once the amount of pollutant a point source will be allowed to discharge has been determined, Ecology implements the TMDL by placing the necessary pollutant limits in pollution discharge permits. The permit prevents wastewater dischargers from causing or contributing to the violation of water quality standards.

For pollutants coming from nonpoint sources, the TMDL or Water Cleanup Plan identifies the source or sources of the pollutants. Methods to control the pollutants, referred to as "best management practices" (BMPs), are identified and chosen with the assistance and agreement of local landowners.

Nonpoint sources are more difficult to identify and control than point sources, since they are generated by a wide variety of sources, mostly individual actions. Nonpoint sources of pollution include run-off from land activities such as logging, urbanization, and farming. To assist in implementing the chosen BMPs, there are a variety of federal, state, and local tools including education, technical and financial assistance, planning processes, regulatory programs, and voluntary activities.

Since individuals' actions in their own backyards are a significant contribution to water pollution problems, TMDLs must engage whole communities in order to achieve success. Ecology must draw on the energy, expertise, and commitment of local governments, citizens, and non-profit groups to create innovative partnerships and solutions. Washington has a long way to go in our work to clean up the state's waters, but we're making progress because we are working together and learning how to do things better all the time.

To learn more about the cleanup of polluted waters in Washington, contact Ann Butler at (360) 407-6480, or e-mail anbu461@ecy.wa.gov

If you require this publication in an alternate format, please contact us at (360) 407-6404 (Voice) or (TTY) at 711 or 1-800-833-6388.