

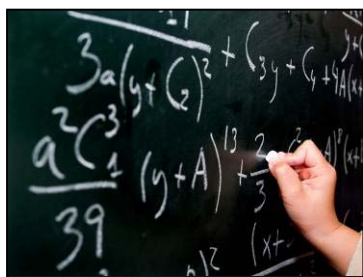
# Straight to Implementation

## Cleaner Water Faster

### Introduction

When a stream is impaired, the typical way of addressing it is by developing a water quality improvement report. These reports are also known as total maximum daily load (TMDL) reports. A TMDL includes a study that shows how much a pollutant in a water body needs to be reduced to protect public and environmental health, and an implementation strategy to explain how to get the water body there. They're usually complex, resource intensive, and can be more than what is needed for smaller, rural watersheds where the problems are fairly apparent. The Clean Water Act requires action to address water quality impairments. Usually this action is to develop a TMDL.

However, at Ecology's Eastern Regional Office (ERO) we successfully piloted a new approach to handling pollution that is faster and more implementation-focused.



### The problem: One-size solution doesn't fit all

TMDLs are usually the best tool we have for getting the job done, but they're often big, expensive projects that use many resources, and can take a long time to finish. They may be appropriate in large, complex watersheds with multiple sources of the pollutant, but sometimes they are more than is needed. ERO was having a harder time finding the resources to do TMDLs in smaller watersheds, and some water quality problems were starting to slip through the cracks. It was time to re-think the approach.

### Creative approach

Not all watersheds or pollution problems are alike. In smaller, rural watersheds, the pollution problems are often easier to understand and fix, and don't always need a TMDL. Sometimes a few simple management changes can make a big difference to water quality. We realized that if we rolled up our sleeves and helped landowners implement water quality best management practices (BMPs) first, we might avoid the need for a TMDL altogether. We called this new approach "Straight to Implementation."

A typical "Straight to Implementation" project starts with Ecology staff selecting a watershed with water quality impairments to work in, and contacting the local conservation district (CD) to partner with them. We tour the watershed and identify stream reaches most in need of restoration or BMPs. We outline what BMPs will be necessary to address the water quality issues, and encourage the CD to contact the landowner first and offer their services. If the CD's efforts are not successful at fixing the problem, we will contact the landowners to offer technical assistance and encourage them to collaborate with the CD and seek Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation and funding programs. If it's apparent the site is impairing water quality and the landowner refuses to cooperate, enforcement may be pursued, but this is a rare occurrence. Most of the time, the landowner accepts the financial and technical assistance and, in the end, actually sees benefits to their operations because of the changes.

### Milestones and outcomes

Using the "Straight to Implementation" approach, we've worked with local watershed groups, agencies, and landowners to restore roughly 300 miles of creek across six counties in eastern Washington. Although relatively new, this process has already delivered some impressive water quality improvements.



BEFORE



AFTER



Streams on Washington's Clean Water Act list of impaired water bodies were also removed from the list. In January 2009, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved changing the status of 29 stream segments, where "Straight to Implementation" was implemented, from impaired to being addressed through water quality improvement activities. This approval demonstrated that in watersheds where we tried this approach, we were successfully addressing the problems that lead to the impairment.

## Helping hands

The stars of the show are really the participating landowners, local watershed groups, and conservation district staff. The list of names is too long to mention here, but without their cooperation and assistance, success would have been impossible. A "Special Mention" should go to Ecology's Chad Atkins 509-329-3499, [catk461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:catk461@ecy.wa.gov)) who has been ERO's point man on implementation work for over ten years. His tireless work has been instrumental in making "Straight to Implementation" happen.

## Funding

Of course, all this good work isn't free. Usually, funding has been found through Ecology's Centennial/319 and Terry Husseman grants or through the National Resource Conservation Service's (NRCS) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), or Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). In addition, landowners sometimes take money from their own pockets to add to the pot, and often volunteer their time and equipment to help with restoration.

## For more information

Please see the following publications for some examples of our "Straight to Implementation" efforts:

- Asotin County's Couse Creek: [www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0510017.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0510017.html)
- Garfield County's Deadman Creek: [www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0510049.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0510049.html)
- Columbia County's Middle Tucannon River: [www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0810036.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0810036.html)
- Garfield County's Upper Alpowa Creek: [www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0510066.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0510066.html)

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