



Water Quality Standards Triennial Review

Focus sheet

Standards and Protection

Washington's [surface water quality standards](#)¹ establish goals to protect rivers, lakes, streams, and marine water. These goals are called designated uses. The water quality standards include numeric and narrative criteria to protect and support the designated uses.

Along with designated uses and criteria, the antidegradation part of our water quality standards protect high quality waters. For Washington's highest quality waters, the Clean Water Act allows us to designate Outstanding Resource Waters, which provides extra protection from future sources of degradation.

What is a Triennial Review?

Section 303(c)(1) of the federal Clean Water Act requires we regularly hold public hearings to review state water quality standards and, as appropriate, adopt new or modified standards. This process is called a Triennial Review.

A Triennial Review is not a rulemaking process, but a public involvement opportunity that helps inform our work plan for the next three years.

Triennial Review process

As part of a Triennial Review, we present a draft list of actions we expect to take related to state water quality standards. We then hold a public comment period to gather feedback on our plan as well as suggestions for other changes to the water quality standards. We hold a public hearing during this time to listen to feedback and suggestions.

Following the public comment period, we consider all comments received and modify our work plan as appropriate. We then schedule priority rulemakings based on our updated plan and available resources.

Each rulemaking has its own process for the public to formally comment on proposed rule changes.

Why does Ecology regularly review the water quality standards?

We review and revise our state water quality standards to:

- Align with federally-recommended criteria
- Respond to public feedback
- Address new scientific information

¹ <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-201A>

What are some actions Ecology is considering for the next three years?

Our draft work plan includes the following rule-related actions for the next three years.

- Complete current rulemaking to [update freshwater criteria for dissolved oxygen and fine sediment](#)²
- Initiate rulemaking to update our Aquatic Life Criteria for toxics.
- Respond to external requests, such as outstanding resource water nominations, use attainability analysis submittals, and requests for variances.
- Initiate any rule revisions necessary to comply with legal requirements.

Initiation of rulemaking is just the beginning. Rules typically take 18 to 24 months to finalize so the final work plan will include rulemaking activities that may extend beyond the three-year plan.

You can read more about our draft work plan in the [2021 Triennial Review Draft Plan](#)³.

How can I comment on Ecology's plan?

Our [water quality standards webpage](#)⁴ has information on our draft work plan, how to submit comments, and how to attend our public hearing.

Related Information

- [Water Quality Standards webpage](#)⁵

To request this document in another language, please contact Marla Koberstein, at 360-407-6413 and ask for an interpreter, or email marla.koberstein@ecy.wa.gov.



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To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6600 or email at marla.koberstein@ecy.wa.gov, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341

² <https://ecology.wa.gov/SalmonHabitatRule>

³ <https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/ezshare/wq/standards/2021TriennialReviewDraftPlan.pdf>

⁴ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-quality/Water-quality-standards/Updates-to-the-standards>

⁵ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-quality/Water-quality-standards>