

# Water Quality Standards Triennial Review

## Focus Sheet

### Standards and Protection

Washington's [surface water quality standards](#)<sup>1</sup> establish goals to protect rivers, lakes, streams, and marine waters. 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 guide our work to keep the water quality standards current with Clean Water Act recommendations and state priorities.

### Triennial Review Process

As part of a Triennial Review, we present a draft list of actions we plan to begin related to state water quality standards over the next three years. 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 also welcome any new information available about Tribal reserved rights applicable to Washington

waters that we should consider when updating our water quality standards, as required under the federal Tribal reserved rights rule adopted in 2024.

We will hold a public hearing during this process 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. Each rulemaking will also complete an Environmental Justice Assessment (EJA) as required by the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act, Washington's environmental justice law.

EJAs help us to formally document environmental justice impacts and how those impacts inform decisions about the rulemaking action, such as how to reduce environmental harms and address environmental and health disparities in communities.

### 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 feedback from Tribes and the public
- Address new scientific information

<sup>1</sup> <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:

- Develop criteria for toxins related to harmful algal blooms.
- Develop criteria for nutrient pollution in lakes.
- Complete the [performance-based approach](#) methods document for deriving natural conditions criteria for marine dissolved oxygen.
- Respond to external requests, such as outstanding resource water nominations, use attainability analysis submittals, and requests for variances.

Initiation of rulemaking is just the beginning. Rules take typically take 1.5 to 3 years 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 [2025 Triennial Review Draft Plan](#)<sup>2</sup>.

## How can I comment on Ecology's plan?

Our [water quality standards webpage](#)<sup>3</sup> has information on our draft work plan, how to submit comments, and how to attend our public informational webinar and public hearing.

### Related Information

- [Water Quality Standards webpage](#)<sup>4</sup>

### Translation Services

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](mailto:marla.koberstein@ecy.wa.gov).



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<sup>2</sup>

<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2510003.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-quality/Water-quality-standards/Updates-to-the-standards>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-quality/Water-quality-standards>