



June 2008

Inside this Brief

- Recent Legislation
- Staff and Agency Contacts

Legislative Committee Services
State Capitol Building
Salem, Oregon 97301
(503) 986-1813

Background Brief on ...

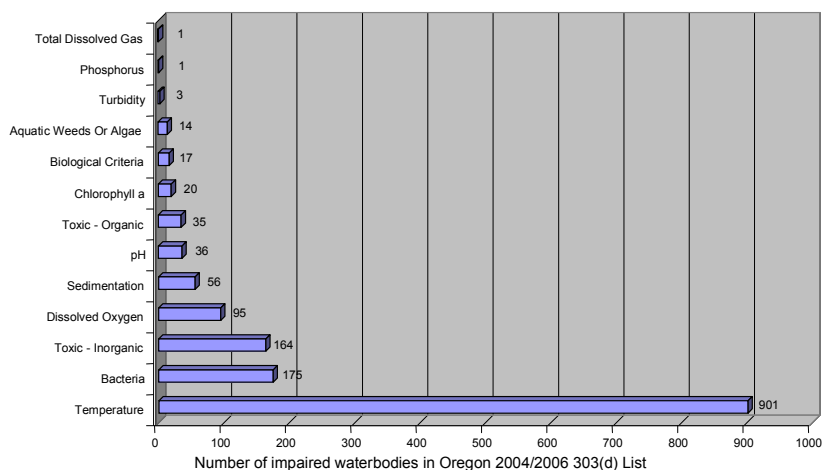
Water Quality

Prepared by: Beth Patrino

The federal Environmental Protection Agency (**EPA**) delegated authority to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (**DEQ**) to operate the federal Clean Water Act (**CWA**) in Oregon. The EPA has oversight authority over how the DEQ carries out the CWA. The EPA also has separate enforcement authority under the CWA. The DEQ is responsible for protecting Oregon's rivers, lakes, streams, and ground water to keep these waters safe for a wide range of uses, such as drinking water, recreation, fish habitat, aquatic life, and irrigation. The DEQ's Water Quality Program accomplishes this by:

- Developing clean water standards for Oregon's waters
- Monitoring water quality with regular sampling of more than 50 rivers and streams in 18 designated river basins in Oregon
- Regulating sewage treatment systems and industrial dischargers through permits that set limits on pollutants discharged
- Developing and implementing clean water plans ("Total Maximum Daily Loads" or **TMDLs**) for rivers and streams that do not meet clean water standards
- Inspecting septic system installations and working with local agencies to ensure consistency around the state
- Helping public drinking water systems implement plans to protect drinking water
- Offering low cost loans to public agencies and grants to different entities to help fund improvements to water quality
- Providing grants and technical assistance to reduce pollution from surface water runoff (also called "nonpoint source" pollution)

Types of water pollution in Oregon



Clean Water Standards – Clean water standards are the foundation of the DEQ's water quality program. Standards establish water quality goals by designating beneficial uses for each water body and setting criteria to protect those uses. Beneficial uses include public water supply, fish and aquatic life, recreation, irrigation, and more.

303(d) List – Section 303(d) of the CWA requires states to develop a list of water bodies that do not meet the state's clean water standards. The DEQ uses existing scientific data from a variety of sources to assess water quality and determine which water bodies should be listed. Once a list is developed, the DEQ must prioritize the list and submit it to the EPA for approval. The DEQ's 2004/2006 Section 303(d) list was approved by EPA in March 2007. A total of 1,117 of approximately 37,600 water bodies in Oregon (three percent) are on the list for at least one pollutant.

Total Maximum Daily Loads – Once a waterbody is placed on the 303(d) list, the CWA requires states to develop a plan to meet clean water standards. This plan is called a TMDL, which describe the maximum amount of pollutants from municipal, industrial, commercial and surface runoff sources including natural background that can enter waterways without violating clean water standards.

Implementing a TMDL often includes revising industrial and municipal wastewater permits to incorporate revised permit limits. On agricultural lands, implementation plans are developed through the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Senate Bill 1010 process. On state and private forestlands, the Department of Forestry has the lead in providing water quality protection through the Forest Practices Act and long range management plans. In urban areas, local governments take the lead in developing TMDL implementation plans. The U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management are responsible for developing water quality restoration plans for lands under their jurisdiction.

Under most circumstances, TMDL implementation plans for improved water quality rely on

cooperation among landowners and land managers within a river basin. Local watershed councils, Soil and Water Conservation Districts or other organizations serve as community-based coordination points for these united efforts. TMDL implementation plans describe actions that will be taken to reduce pollution.

Industrial/Domestic Wastewater Permitting – The DEQ's wastewater management program regulates and minimizes adverse impacts of pollution on Oregon's waters from point sources of pollution. The term "point source" generally refers to wastewater discharged into water or onto lands through a pipe or a discernible channel. These point sources operate under the terms of a federal National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (**NPDES**) or state Water Pollution Control Facilities (**WPCF**) wastewater discharge permit issued by the DEQ. The DEQ currently manages over 5,000 water quality permits, including 4,700 federal NPDES permits and more than 500 WPCF permits. Point sources requiring an NPDES permit include wastewater treatment plants, various industries such as pulp and paper plants and food processors, as well as municipal stormwater systems for Oregon's larger urban areas.

Recent Legislation

Senate Bill 737 (2007) requires the DEQ to:

1. By June 2009, consult with all interested parties to develop a list of priority persistent bio-accumulative toxics ("persistent pollutants") that have a documented effect on human health, wildlife and aquatic life.
2. By June 2010, report to the Legislative Assembly on the list of priority persistent pollutants; point, nonpoint, and legacy sources of priority persistent pollutants "from existing data"; and source reduction and control methods that can reduce discharges.

Senate Bill 737 also requires Oregon's 52 large municipal wastewater treatment plants to develop plans by 2011 to reduce persistent pollutants through pollution prevention and toxics reduction.

Staff and Agency Contacts

Christine Svetkovich

[Department of Environmental Quality](#)

503-229-5046

Beth Patrino

[Legislative Committee Services](#)

503-986-1751

Christine Svetkovich, Department of Environmental Quality, assisted with the development of this document.