

Total Maximum Daily Load Prioritization for Clean Water Act – 2014 IR

Waters on the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) List (i.e. Impaired Waters List) are ranked by priority for Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) development. A TMDL is an analysis that determines how much of a pollutant a waterbody can assimilate before it exceeds water quality standards. Federal law requires that TMDLs be developed for impaired waters.

Waters are ranked “high,” “medium” or “low.” Rankings are evaluated during each listing cycle to determine if TMDL development can be completed based on staff and fiscal resources. If a TMDL is in development, we will rank the waterbody as a “high” priority. A ranking of “medium” indicates that information is currently being gathered that may be used for future TMDL development. All Category 5B waters (waters impaired by atmospheric deposition of mercury) will be assigned a “medium” priority. A ranking of “low” indicates that a TMDL will be completed in the future.

The following factors are considered when selecting waters for TMDL development:

- **Availability of information:** Large amounts of data are needed to develop a TMDL. Waters with readily available data will more likely be a candidate for TMDL development within two to five years and assigned a “medium” or “high” priority ranking.
- **Likelihood to respond:** WDNR may consider the likelihood of the water to respond to management actions when assigning a rank.
- **Severity of the impairment:** WDNR will also consider the severity of the impairment in assigning a priority. In some cases, extreme conditions may be present that need attention more quickly than those that are not so extreme. Waters with frequent fish kills or acute toxicity issues are examples of this concern.
- **Public health concerns:** Waters with issues that may affect human health can be considered “high” priority if development and implementation of a TMDL can result in improving water quality.

TMDL Development Schedules

Low priority waters are those for which TMDL development is proposed for to occur within 6-13 years from the date of listing. Medium priority waters are proposed for TMDL development to occur within 3-5 years from the date of listing. High priority waters are those for which a TMDL is currently in development, and resources are invested to see these projects through to completion. Typically, TMDL projects are completed within 2-3 years.

Table 1. Number and priority of impaired waters requiring TMDL development.

Priority	Number of Waters
High	168
Medium	250
Low	748
Total	1166

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TMDL Prioritization

A new, long-term vision and associated goals for the federal Clean Water Act Section 303(d) Program has been developed with input from individual states. Prioritization is one of the main goals of the long-term vision. The goal is for states to review, systematically prioritize, and report priority watersheds or waters for restoration and protection in their biennial integrated reports to facilitate strategic planning for achieving water quality goals. National implementation of this goal is aimed for the 2016 integrated reporting cycle.

Wisconsin's prioritization of impaired waters for TMDL development will evolve to adapt to the new vision for the Section 303(d) program with some changes proposed to be implemented during the 2016 integrated reporting cycle. Future prioritization of impaired waters will incorporate the identification of waters suited for TMDL alternatives, modeling tools to predict water quality and restoration potential, and protecting healthy waters.

TMDL Alternatives

Alternatives to a TMDL have been prepared for waters on the Wisconsin's 303(d) list. These alternatives are referred to as "[Environmental Accountability Projects](#)" or EAPs. These are any planned implementation actions on the impaired water that will result in that water meeting WQS. EAPs are commonly used when the source of an impairment and the appropriate management action are readily identifiable. EAP listings are designated when of the sources and pathways of pollutants do not require a TMDL analysis to identify management actions. Wisconsin may begin to more systematically identify impaired waters for which this approach is best suited.