

Total Maximum Daily Load Program

Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act (CWA) requires states to establish a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for all pollutants identified as preventing attainment of water quality standards. TMDLs set the maximum amount of a pollutant, the pollutant load, that can be delivered to a waterbody without exceeding water quality standards. The TMDL also allocates the allowable pollutant load among the various sources in the watershed (e.g. point and nonpoint sources such as agriculture, wastewater treatment plants, mine drainage). Waters that are not attaining water quality standards are often referred to as “impaired” waters.

Pennsylvania first established a list of impaired waters in 1996 and established TMDLs for all waters on the list over a period of 10-12-years. After completion of TMDLs for the 1996 List, PA developed TMDLs for a period of time to meet a goal of 350 stream segments per year. However, TMDL development prioritization strategies, alone, based solely on the year the stream was listed as impaired or designed to meet a segment-based commitment goal have not proven to be successful in accomplishing the CWA objective of removing the water quality impairments from these waters. Thus, the states and EPA developed a new vision for the implementation of Section 303(d) to achieve water quality restoration.

Over the last several years, states and EPA have worked together to facilitate better prioritization of waterbodies for TMDL development. Prioritization is based on sediment as the priority pollutant, solicited input from the Regional Offices, the existence of active stakeholders, and restoration potential. Along with that more focused prioritization came a realization that a standard TMDL was not always the best tool for successfully addressing water quality issues. The states and EPA have crafted a framework through which TMDL programs across the country would look toward the water body’s potential for success by initially using alternative practices prior to TMDL development with water quality improvement as the measuring stick of effectively carrying out the CWA mandate. In addition to redefining the prioritization of waters for TMDL development, the states and EPA acknowledged the effectiveness of tools beyond traditional TMDLs, in achieving water quality benefits.

Pursuant to the new vision of Section 303(d) of the CWA, DEP created a list of priority waterbodies that combines waters where a TMDL will be developed to address water quality impairments with waters where a restoration alternative may address water quality issues more quickly or effectively. Pennsylvania’s list of completed TMDLs is available at the [TMDL website](#).