Getting to Know WATERS

What is WATERS?

How clean is your local lake or the stream that travels through your favorite park?

Is your favorite ocean beach safe for swimming?

Which waters in your state are considered impaired?

You can find answers to these and many other questions at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Watershed Assessment, Tracking, and Environmental ResultS (WATERS) website (**http://www.epa.gov/waters**). WATERS unifies federal and state data from many different sources to provide accessible water quality information for scientists and interested citizens alike. It uses a Geographic Information System (GIS) application known as EnviroMapper for Water to create customized maps that display this information.

What kinds of data are available through WATERS?

Using WATERS, you can view and map a wide range of information. For instance, you can learn about:

- The uses assigned by your state to local waters (for example, for fishing or swimming);

- Waters that are impaired and do not support their assigned uses;

- The reasons why waters are impaired (i.e. the causes and sources of pollution in impaired waters);

- Water monitoring information;

- Closure of swimming beaches; and

- The location of dischargers.

It is important to note that this information may not yet be available for all states. From the WATERS homepage, click on "Data" in the left hand column, then click on "Availability of Data" to find out which sets of data are available for your state.

EPA is always adding more database links and new features to WATERS, so be sure to re-visit the site in the future if you don't find the information you're looking for!

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Navigating WATERS

Your first step in navigating the WATERS website should be to check out the introductory explanations and descriptions of databases. Go to **www.epa.gov/waters** and click on "**About WATERS**" and "**Overview**."

Interested in finding out what WATERS can tell you about streams and lakes in your neighborhood? Fire up your computer, go to **www.epa.gov/waters**, and follow this sample pathway (there are many other paths you could take):

1. Click on "Tools" in the left hand column.

2. Click on "EnviroMapper for Water."

3. Click on the map to launch EnviroMapper. (For tips on using EnviroMapper, click on the "Help" button below the map).

4. Scroll down to the "Zoom to Area" menu below the map.

5. Click on the "Zip Codes" button and then type your zip in the box on the right (on the same line).

6. Scroll down and click on the "Zoom to Selected Area" box to pull up a map of your zip code. Then check the Map Features you want to see displayed or labeled (such as impaired waters, watershed boundaries, or facilities).

7. Hit "Update Map" to display your desired features on the map.

8. To find out more about any one of these features, click on the "Active" button for the appropriate feature layer (e.g., impaired waters), then on the "Identify Active Feature" button in the right hand column. Then simply click on the feature on the map itself. A brief report will appear in the message area below the map, including links to more detailed information.

HINT: To label the waterbodies on your map, first click on the "Surface Waters" triangle in the left hand column to see a menu of waterbody types (such as streams, lakes, and wetlands). Specify the ones you want to be labeled.

Questions or comments about WATERS? Send us an email by clicking on "**Contact Us**" at the top or the bottom of the main WATERS page at **www.epa.gov/waters**.