



## Fact Sheet

# Watershed Assessment, Tracking, and Environmental Results (WATERS)

### *Summary*

*The Environmental Protection Agency, in partnership with states, territories and tribes, is working to improve communication with the regulated community and the public about the quality of the Nation's surface waters through the use of the Watershed Assessment, Tracking and Environmental Results (WATERS) information system. WATERS unifies geography-specific water quality information previously available only on various individual state web sites and several different EPA web sites.*

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**Visit WATERS at:**  
**[www.epa.gov/waters](http://www.epa.gov/waters)**

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### What is WATERS?

WATERS allows environmental professionals and interested citizens to access information about surface water quality within a specified geographic area. WATERS contains information about the quality of the Nation's surface water, the purpose or designated use of a waterbody (e.g., drinking water supply, recreation, fish protection), and a list of waters identified by the state as being impaired. The website uses EPA's standard mapping application, Enviromapper, to display water

quality information about local waters.

WATERS uses the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD) maintained by the US Geological Survey, as the common language to connect and display surface water information. Users can find local water quality information for a particular body of water by clicking on an interactive map.

WATERS displays key water quality information and allows users – from interested citizens to state and federal water quality managers – to quickly identify the status of individual waters of interest. It also allows users to easily generate reports summarizing key information on waters of a state. Before WATERS was developed, information on water quality standards, impaired waters, and Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) status was not available on a national scale in an electronic format.

### Linking Water Quality Information

WATERS links water quality information from several state and EPA databases. It allows the user to pull information about water quality goals for a particular waterbody from EPA's Water Quality Standards Database and information about impaired waters and Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) assigned to those waters from EPA's TMDL Database. The Water Quality Standards Database provides information on water quality standards set by the states, territories, and tribes. Under

the Clean Water Act, each state is required to set water quality standards and to identify a designated use for each body of water in that state. The designated use, such as drinking water supply or recreation, provides the regulatory goal for a waterbody and defines the level of protection assigned to it. The Water Quality Standards Database currently contains mapped designated use information for 11 states and numeric information for 16 states. Ultimately, it will include criteria and other important water quality standards data.

The TMDL Database provides a list of waters that the states have identified as impaired. Under section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act, states are required to submit a list of impaired waters - waters not meeting water quality goals - to EPA every two years. States are required to develop TMDLs for all waters on this list. A TMDL is the maximum amount of a pollutant that a waterbody can receive and still meet its water quality standards. WATERS lists which waters have been identified as impaired and if EPA has approved the TMDL for those waterbodies.

### **How Will WATERS Be Used?**

WATERS will be used by both water quality professionals and interested citizens to find out, through the Water Quality Standards Database, which rivers, lakes, or streams are designated by the state for fishing and swimming and which ones are designated as a source of drinking water. The TMDL Database will tell them which of those waters are impaired. WATERS will also assist state employees in making TMDL determinations for those

impaired waterbodies.

The regulated community can use WATERS to determine which water quality criteria apply to the discharge from their facility based on the designated use of the receiving waterbody. Water quality managers will be able to quickly determine how many surface waters have a particular designated use and where those waters are located.

### **Future Releases of WATERS**

EPA will update WATERS as new information becomes available. Future releases of WATERS will include links to data on ambient water quality; drinking water quality; projects to control polluted runoff; fish consumption advisories; discharge facility outfall locations; and other types of information.

#### **For additional information, please contact:**

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