



Fact Sheet

Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)



Driving Actions to Clean Local Waters and the Chesapeake Bay

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is leading a major initiative to establish and oversee achievement of a strict “pollution diet” to restore the Chesapeake Bay and its network of local rivers, streams and creeks.

EPA is working with its state partners to set binding limits on nutrient and sediment pollution through a Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMDL, a tool of the federal Clean Water Act that will be backed by accountability measures to ensure cleanup commitments are met.

The Bay TMDL will be the largest and most complex ever developed, involving pollution sources throughout a 64,000-square-mile watershed that includes six states and the District of Columbia.

Addressing the Challenges

A TMDL is the calculation of the maximum amount of pollution a body of water can receive and still meet state water quality standards designed to ensure waterways are safe, swimmable and fishable.

The Clean Water Act requires that a TMDL be written for all segments of a waterway that fail to meet water quality standards. Most of the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal waters do not meet the standards and are listed as impaired.



Monitoring data continues to show that the Bay has poor water quality, degraded habitats and low populations of many species of fish and shellfish. The Bay and its rivers are overweight with nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment from agricultural operations, urban and suburban runoff, wastewater, airborne contaminants and other sources.

The excess nutrients and sediment lead to murky water and algae blooms, which block sunlight from reaching and sustaining underwater bay grasses and create low levels of oxygen for aquatic life, such as fish, crabs and oysters.

The Bay TMDL – actually a combination of 92 smaller TMDLs for individual Chesapeake Bay tidal segments – will include pollution limits that are sufficient to meet state standards for dissolved oxygen, water clarity and chlorophyll-a, an indicator of algae levels.

Actions under the TMDL will complement significant and ongoing work by EPA and its partners to restore the Bay and will have benefits far beyond the Chesapeake itself, helping to clean local rivers that support fishing and swimming and often serve as a source of local drinking water.

Sharing the Load

The pollution diet will be divided among all jurisdictions in the watershed. The jurisdictions include Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, West Virginia and the District of Columbia. The states and the District will further divide the pollution loadings among local sources, improving their ability to target and achieve reductions.

Accountability

The six states and the District will prepare Watershed Implementation Plans detailing how they will accomplish their portions of the pollution diet. The plans – to be refined in phases – will identify pollution reduction targets by geographic area and source sector and will include a description and schedule of actions to be taken to achieve the reductions.

States and the District will specify reductions they intend to get from “point sources” like sewage treatment plants, urban stormwater systems and large animal feeding operations regulated under the federal Clean Water Act, and other sources such as discharges and polluted runoff from agricultural lands, towns and septic systems.

The plans will be supported by a series of two-year milestones for achieving specific near-term pollution reduction needed to keep pace with long-term restoration commitments. The states, the District and EPA will monitor the effectiveness of those actions in order to assess progress and water quality improvement.

EPA would take federal steps if there are insufficient commitments in a jurisdiction’s implementation plan or a failure to meet the established two-year milestones.

Timetable

EPA will meet a state-federal partnership commitment to establish the TMDL by the end of 2010.

EPA, the states and the District have agreed to have all practices in place by 2025 to restore the Bay and its tidal waters.

For Further Information, Contact:

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Bay TMDL Web Site: <http://www.epa.gov/chesapeakebaytmdl>

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