

## Oregon Water Quality Standards Review and Revision Priorities



State of Oregon  
Department of  
Environmental  
Quality

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The Department of Environmental Quality invites the public to provide input on a list of priority water quality standards projects for the agency to initiate over the next three years. The standards may be revised through rulemaking, and in other cases, implementation procedures may be developed or updated. These projects would begin as projects currently in progress are completed.

### What do water quality standards do?

Water quality standards designate for what uses the water body will be protected and establish criteria to protect water quality for those uses. Examples of water body uses are fish and aquatic life, drinking water and recreation.



*Spawning salmon on the Lostine River.*

### Why are potential revisions to water quality standards being reviewed?

The Clean Water Act requires states to periodically review and revise water quality standards and hold public hearings about those changes. DEQ reviews and revises water quality standards for several reasons. Some revisions are made to incorporate new science, or to improve water quality protection. Other revisions ensure that Oregon's water quality standards comply with federal Clean Water Act regulations, or consider the Endangered Species Act. Still other revisions allow DEQ to make decisions based on site-specific conditions. Standards revisions or application procedures also can help DEQ staff be more consistent and efficient when writing permits.

### What are the types of reviews and revisions DEQ may undertake?

The types of reviews and revisions to water quality standards fall into categories like:

- Updates to rule language and maps to show current information about fish presence and spawning
- Revisions to water quality criteria based on current scientific information and EPA recommendations
- Revisions to address locations where water quality criteria are not attainable
- Procedures development to improve consistency and apply narrative water quality standards
- Evaluation of current protections and designated uses
- Corrections and clarifications

### What are the draft highest priority water quality standards revision projects?

The water quality standards that DEQ currently considers highest priority to work on during the next three to five years are included in the table on the second page of this fact sheet.

### What has DEQ considered in prioritizing potential projects?

DEQ has considered the effect the revision would have on the efficiency and effectiveness of DEQ's water quality programs — like permitting and pollution reduction — in prioritization of potential projects. DEQ also considered the environmental benefit that would come from making the revision. And DEQ considered external requirements like court findings and federal agency decisions.

### Where can I find more information and comment on DEQ's water quality standard review and revision priorities?

You may view information about this review process, including the list of water quality standard projects considered, and provide input online at:

<http://www.oregon.gov/deq/wq/Pages/WQ-Standards.aspx>

### For more information please contact:

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## Alternative formats

Documents can be provided upon request in an alternative format for individuals with disabilities or in a language other than English for people with limited English skills. To request a document in another format or language, call DEQ in Portland at 503-229-5696, or toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696; or email [deqinfo@deq.state.or.us](mailto:deqinfo@deq.state.or.us)

**Table: DEQ’s draft highest priority standards review and revision projects.** Find more detail at DEQ’s Water Quality Standards website: <http://www.oregon.gov/deq/wq/Pages/WQ-Standards.aspx>

Issue	Potential Revisions
Aquatic Life Designations – General Review and Update	Review and update fish use designations based on best available current information, primarily from Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife. Update and refine interior basin resident trout designations.
Cold Water Refuge Plan for Lower Willamette River (Project Underway)	Develop a Cold Water Refuge Plan for the lower 50 miles of the Willamette River to evaluate whether this narrative criterion is being attained. The plan will also identify existing refuges that should be protected and refuges that should be restored if additional refuges are needed to meet the criterion.
Dissolved Oxygen Clarifications (Project Underway)	Clarify the use classification definitions associated with the dissolved oxygen standard. The clarification will be consistent with DEQ’s application of the criteria in the dissolved oxygen standards since 1998.
Fish Use Updates – Resident Trout Spawning and Bull Trout	Specify where and when resident trout spawning is a designated use with maps or a process-based designation.  Designate an additional 33.5 miles of bull trout spawning and rearing habitat as requested by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and remove reaches that are not current or potential bull trout habitat.
Natural Conditions Criteria: General and Temperature	DEQ needs a means to efficiently address situations where natural conditions protect uses or where criteria are not attainable due to natural conditions.  This approach must be scientifically credible, implementable, and protect uses. Options could include a new natural conditions provision, site specific criteria, variances, or other approaches.
Temperature: Variance	Variance(s) for Willamette River, possibly other streams of the Willamette basin, or possibly a statewide temperature variance for streams that cannot attain the numeric temperature criteria.  A waterbody or multiple discharger or individual variance would need to protect existing beneficial uses and facilitate overall improvement of conditions leading to improved temperature-related water quality, while allowing DEQ to issue permits that contain achievable requirements.
Toxics - human health: Methylmercury	Methylmercury variances would allow permits to be issued that require mercury reduction but also have permit requirements that are achievable and result in overall mercury reductions.
Toxics - narrative criterion	Review and research methods and approaches to implementing Oregon’s narrative toxics criterion. Revise DEQ’s implementation procedures to describe the available and appropriate tools for regulating the discharge of toxic pollutants that have no numeric criteria.