

Fact Sheet

2024 Integrated Report: Aquatic Trash

Aquatic trash

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Trash Free Waters program refers to garbage polluting waterbodies as "aquatic trash." Most of the trash that ends up in waterways [comes from various land-based activities](#). Aquatic trash can negatively impact the beneficial uses designated to waterbodies. For each reporting cycle, EPA releases a memo to states, territories and authorized tribes to provide guidance on developing the Integrated Report. The [EPA 2024 memo](#) included a section on Clean Water Act Section 303(d) assessment/listing for trash related impairments. In this section, EPA defines trash as a pollutant to be regulated under the CWA even if an agency does not have a specific methodology to evaluate aquatic trash.

Assessment of aquatic trash data submitted to DEQ

During the 2024 Integrated Report Call for Data, Willamette Riverkeeper submitted a project plan, numeric aquatic trash data, photographic evidence and information from river trash cleanup events conducted in the past five years throughout the Willamette River Basin. DEQ reviewed this information and concluded it met all elements outlined in [DEQ's data submission guidelines](#) and was of sufficient quality for use in the 2024 Integrated Report. The Assessment Methodology for Oregon's 2024 Integrated Report does not have a specific methodology for evaluating the impacts of aquatic trash on designated beneficial uses but does include the concept of overwhelming evidence. This concept states that credible and compelling information indicating waters are not attaining applicable water quality standards can be used to determine impairment with multiple lines of evidence based on a specific rationale.

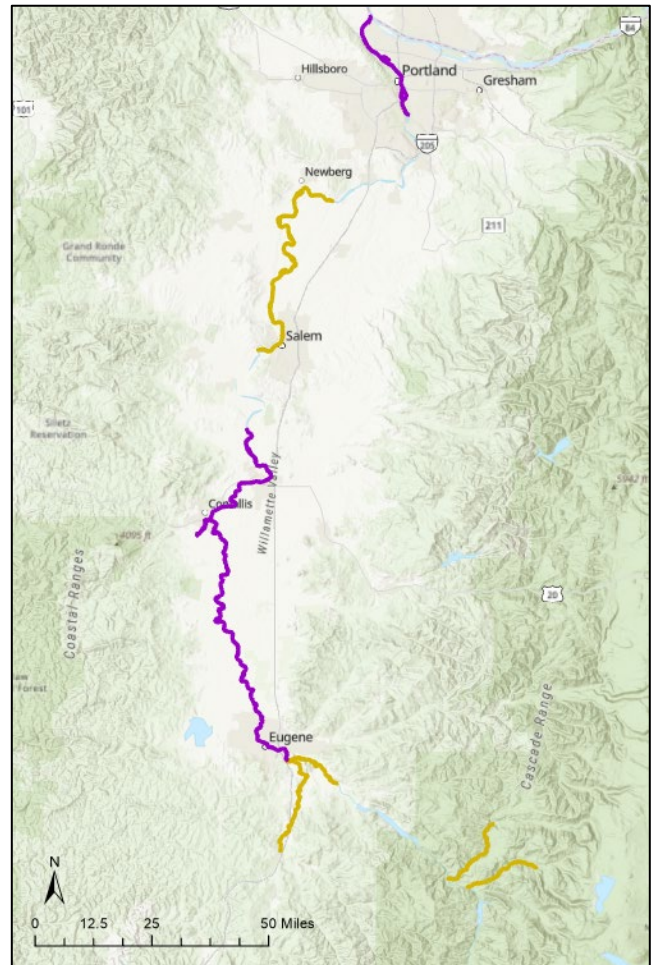


Figure 1. Map showing assessment unit status for aquatic trash. Impaired units are shown in purple and units with insufficient data are shown in yellow.

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To meet CWA requirements, DEQ applied the concept of overwhelming evidence to assess the data submitted. This data covers 11 waterbody assessment units. DEQ is proposing to add three of these assessment units to the 303(d) list of impaired waters for aquatic trash with the affected beneficial uses being aesthetic quality and water contact recreation (Figure 1). The remaining assessment units have insufficient data to make a determination. A detailed rationale of these conclusions is included in Appendix E of the [Assessment Methodology for Oregon's 2024 Integrated Report](#).

Implications for waterbodies with a 303(d) listing for aquatic trash

DEQ recognizes the complexity of this issue. Waterbodies are identified as impaired and added to the 303(d) list when one or more beneficial use is not *fully* supported. In most instances, placing a waterbody on the 303(d) list initiates the prioritization and future development of a water quality management plan, such as Total Maximum Daily Load, for attaining better water quality. While a TMDL can be an effective approach to identifying and controlling other pollutants within a watershed, considering the complexity of the sources and jurisdictions associated with aquatic trash, a TMDL may not be the most effective tool for reducing aquatic trash.

By including aquatic trash in the Integrated Report, DEQ is acknowledging that aquatic trash getting into waterways is an environmental concern. DEQ is interested in seeking creative solutions to determine the most effective tool for addressing aquatic trash by working collaboratively with partner agencies, organizations and communities, which all have important roles in addressing this issue.

Public process

DEQ offered several opportunities for public engagement this reporting cycle. DEQ would like to acknowledge how valuable the contribution of high-quality data and comments during public engagement are to the assessment and integrated report process

Water Quality Assessment contacts

Lesley Merrick
Water Quality Assessment Program Lead
971-323-7228
lesley.merrick@deq.oregon.gov

Travis Pritchard
WQ Assessment Data Analyst
503-887-4346
Travis.Pritchard@deq.oregon.gov

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