

State of Alaska
Department of Environmental Conservation



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Integrated Report Highlights Condition of Alaska's Water

Eighteen healthy waters identified. DEC proposing to add the Kenai and Little Susitna Rivers to Alaska's list of waters that are not meeting all water quality criteria. Public invited to comment.

(ANCHORAGE, AK) — The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has released for public comment the draft 2014/2016 Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Report. The federal Clean Water Act requires each state to monitor and report every two years on the quality and status of its waters. This biennial report, called the "Integrated Report," helps states identify and prioritize waters for watershed protection, data gathering, and pollution restoration. The report for Alaska was prepared by DEC using available water quality data and includes a list of "impaired" waters, the waters in Alaska that do not consistently meet all state water quality criteria.

"In placing a waterbody on the list of impaired waters, this opens up a dialog with the public on how best to address the water quality concerns," stated DEC's Water Division Director Andrew Sayers-Fay. "For example, Granite Creek in Sitka was added to the impaired waters list in 1996 because of turbidity and sediment concerns. Through collaborative actions with the City and Borough of Sitka, including financial assistance through DEC's Alaska Clean Water Actions grants, the water quality of Granite Creek was restored, and it is now being removed from the impaired waters list."

In the draft 2014/2016 Integrated Report, eighteen waterbodies that were examined are listed as meeting all water quality standards. The Kenai River on the Kenai Peninsula and Little Susitna River in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough are both proposed to be listed as impaired due to excess turbidity. Turbidity is a measurement of water clarity, and increased turbidity is caused by sediment particles and other organic matter becoming suspended in the water column. The levels of turbidity in these rivers often exceed state water quality standards applicable to recreation and drinking water uses. Under the Clean Water Act and state law, all water bodies are to be protected for all designated uses unless the state follows a separate public process to remove a designated use.

"Although the Kenai and Little Susitna Rivers are impaired due to turbidity, the overall health of both rivers is good," said Sayers-Fay. "We plan to take the time that is needed to gather additional data that would be helpful in better understanding the potential causes of the high turbidity and the degree to which we have a continuing problem. We

look forward to collaborating with other agencies, local officials, and stakeholders to find workable solutions. It's a lot easier to fix pollution problems when they are small and isolated and everyone is pulling the same direction."

DEC is also proposing to list the Little Susitna River as threatened by petroleum pollution. Petroleum at the levels measured in the Little Susitna River can be detrimental to aquatic life. Fishing from boats with older, more polluting 2-stroke motors is prohibited in the Little Susitna under a ban passed by the Alaska Board of Fisheries. The 2-stroke motor ban went into effect in January 2017 and is expected to reduce petroleum pollution to levels that meet state water quality standards for petroleum. Once additional water quality sampling confirms the petroleum standard is being met, DEC can remove the Little Susitna River from the impaired list for petroleum contamination.

The public has until 5pm AKST January 29, 2018, to comment on DEC's findings in the draft 2014/2016 Integrated Report. A public meeting is also scheduled for January 4, 2018, in Anchorage. For more information on how to submit comments and for a list of frequently asked questions, see: <http://dec.alaska.gov/water/wqsar/waterbody/integratedreport.htm>.

Below is a summary of the draft 2014/2016 Integrated Report actions:

There are five categories to which a waterbody can be assigned:

- Categories 1 and 2 are waters for which there is enough information to determine that they have attained all or some of the standards for their designated uses.
- Category 3 are waters for which there is not enough information to determine their status.
- Category 4 are waters that are impaired, but have waterbody recovery plans.
- Category 5 are waters that are impaired and do not yet have a waterbody recovery plan. Category 5 waters are also known as Clean Water Act Section 303(d) impaired waters.

Eighteen waters are now proposed to have met standards in Category 2 for some criteria:

- Five Unnamed Creeks, near Sweetwater Lake and USFS 3030 Road, where the waters are in attainment of the water quality criteria for a variety of metals.
- Chatanika River, north of Fairbanks, where the water is in attainment of the water quality criteria for arsenic and dissolved oxygen.
- Chena River in Fairbanks where the water is in attainment of the water quality criteria for sediment.
- Chena Slough in Fairbanks is in attainment of the water quality criteria for sediment.
- Cottonwood Creek in Wasilla is in attainment of the water quality criteria for dissolved gas, pH, sediment (settleable solids), and turbidity.
- Granite Creek in Sitka where the water is in attainment of the water quality criteria for sediment and turbidity.
- Kenai River in Kenai where the water is in attainment of the water quality criteria for arsenic, cadmium, chromium, lead, and pH.
- Lake Hood and Spenard Lake in Anchorage is in attainment of the water quality criteria for dissolved oxygen.
- Little Meadow Creek in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough is in attainment of the water quality criteria for dissolved gas; petroleum hydrocarbons, oils, and grease; pH; sediment; toxic and other deleterious organic and inorganic substances; and turbidity.

- Meadow Creek in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough is in attainment of the water quality criteria for dissolved gas; petroleum hydrocarbons, oils, and grease; pH; sediment; toxic and other deleterious organic and inorganic substances; and turbidity.
- Mosquito Lake on the Haines Highway is in attainment of the water quality criteria for dissolved gas, fecal coliform bacteria, and pH.
- Noyes Slough in Fairbanks is in attainment of the water quality criteria for sediment standard, but remains impaired from residues and petroleum hydrocarbons.
- Udagak Bay on Unalaska Island is in attainment of the water quality criteria for residues.
- Wasilla Creek in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough is in attainment of the water quality criteria for dissolved gas; petroleum hydrocarbons, oils, and grease; pH; sediment (settleable solids); and turbidity.

Five waters are now in Category 4a under a plan:

- Cottonwood Creek in Wasilla was previously in Category 5/Section 303(d) impaired list; the water now has a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) that was developed and approved for fecal coliform bacteria.
- Goldstream Creek in Fairbanks was previously in Category 5/Section 303(d) impaired list; the water now has a TMDL that was developed and approved for turbidity and total suspended solids.
- Hawk Inlet in Southeast Alaska was previously in Category 5/Section 303(d) impaired list; the water now has a TMDL that was developed and approved for cadmium, copper, lead, mercury, and zinc.
- Matanuska River near Palmer was previously in Category 5/Section 303(d) impaired list; the water now has a TMDL that was developed and approved for residues/debris.
- Slate Creek in Denali National Park was previously in Category 5/Section 303(d) impaired list; the water now has a TMDL that was developed and approved for antimony, arsenic, and iron.

One water is now proposed to be place in Category 4b with alternative pollution controls:

- Little Susitna River threatened for 8.5 miles due to petroleum hydrocarbons and now has a waterbody recovery plan.

Three new waters are proposed for placement in Category 5/Section 303(d) impaired list:

- Lake Lucille in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough where two areas of freshwater lake bed sediments have elevated levels of lead and zinc. Lake Lucille is under an existing plan to correct dissolved gas.
- Kenai River for 7.5 miles for turbidity.
- Little Susitna River for 8.5 miles for turbidity. Little Susitna is also proposed to be listed as threatened from petroleum hydrocarbons from motorized boats. Since a plan is in place to address the petroleum hydrocarbons, the river is also placed in Category 4b.

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