



## 2018 INTEGRATED REPORT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

January 2020

### Q1. Why is DEC switching to electronic reporting?

A1. In an effort to ensure future Integrated Reports are more timely, DEC is switching to an electronic reporting database and has revised the report development process. For information on the new process, see <http://dec.alaska.gov/water/water-quality/integrated-report/>.

Data for the Integrated Report are now reported to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through a database which is not yet available to the public. EPA and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) have plans for the future to make this information publicly accessible. Since there is no longer a written report, DEC is providing all Attainment and Impairment Listing Determinations and numerous fact sheets. All information is available on the website.

### Q2. What happens if a waterbody is listed as impaired?

A2. If waters are polluted, DEC evaluates possible sources of pollution and then develops a waterbody recover plan or a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). The recovery plan or TMDL identify approaches for improving water quality, recovery actions, and routine monitoring evaluates current water quality. DEC is not proposing any new impaired waters for the 2018 Integrated Report.

### Q3. How are impaired waters removed from the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) list of impaired waters (a.k.a., Category 5 in the Integrated Report)?

A3. Under the federal Clean Water Act, there are three ways to remove a water from the 303(d) list of impaired waters: (1) develop a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and implementation plan; (2) develop a waterbody recovery plan including a commitment to implement enforceable actions and monitoring; or (3) demonstrate through monitoring that the waterbody is no longer impaired. If monitoring is conducted, it must be similar to the monitoring done that led to the impairment listing. There must also be assurances that the water quality will continue to meet standards in the future.

Submit written comments  
by 5:00 PM February 27,  
2020, to:

Amber Bethe  
555 Cordova St.  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
amber.bethe@alaska.gov  
Phone: 907-269-7955  
Fax: 907-334-2415

DEC website:

<https://dec.alaska.gov/water/water-quality/integrated-report/>

**Q4.** Is DEC just trying to find a way to issue restrictions and regulations by calling waters impaired? For example, do you just want to restrict for motorized boat use?

A4. No. DEC is not trying to issue restrictions or regulations. DEC is required by state statutes to protect human health and the environment. In many situations, regulations are not needed or are not the best approach if the problem can be addressed through other means. DEC supports a variety of methods to improve water quality. In some cases, restrictions on motorized boating is among the solutions.

**Q5.** Where can I get more information on Alaska’s waterbody listing process and what do the different categories mean? Does a water always stay in the same category?

A5. DEC has specific guidance for analysis of water quality data for the Integrated Report, including listing methods for specific pollutants like turbidity, petroleum hydrocarbons, pathogens and residues. Other pollutants are evaluated using the Alaska Consolidated Assessment and Listing Methodology (CALM) for 2018 Integrated Report on Water Quality. Links to these listing methods can be found at <http://dec.alaska.gov/water/water-quality/integrated-report/>. As new water quality information becomes available, DEC will re-evaluate where waters are exceeding or attaining water quality standards and change the category, as appropriate, in future Integrated Reports.

**Q6.** How do I make public comments on the draft Integrated Report?

A6. Public comments are being accepted until 5pm February 27, 2020. Comments must be made in writing and either emailed, faxed, or mailed to the Department of Environmental Conservation, Attention: Amber Bethe, 555 Cordova Street, Anchorage, AK 99501; [amber.bethe@alaska.gov](mailto:amber.bethe@alaska.gov), Fax: 907-334-2415.

**Q7.** Where can I find information on the water quality studies DEC has done?

A7. DEC’s searchable database can be viewed at <http://dec.alaska.gov/water/water-quality/reports/>

**Q8.** What information that I submit could lead to DEC changing the proposed water quality impairment or de-listing decisions?

A8. Additional water quality data could result in DEC changing the proposed water quality impairment or de-listing decision(s).

**Q9.** What can I do to help improve water quality?

A10. Take action to help reduce water pollution. Changing our behavior is a big part of reducing pollution, such as being careful when using fuel containers and quickly cleaning up drips and spills using absorbent materials (not dish soap), and reducing your boat wake to avoid stirring up excess

sediments. For additional information on best management practices to reduce pollution, see: <http://dec.alaska.gov/water/wastewater/stormwater/best-management-practices/>.

**Q9.** What are the next steps?

A9. DEC will review and respond to all written public comments received by 5 pm February 26, 2020. DEC will then prepare a revised Final Integrated Report and a Response to Comments and submit these documents to EPA for approval. EPA then approves or disapproves the list of impaired waters (Category 5) and submits their findings to Congress.

Existing impaired waterbodies (Category 5) may need restoration activities. Many of these restoration activities include opportunities for public involvement, inclusion in the Alaska Clean Water Actions grant program, and follow-up water quality monitoring after restoration activities have been implemented. As new water quality information becomes available, DEC will re-evaluate where waters are exceeding or attaining water quality standards and change the category as appropriate, as early as 2020. If you want to be involved in restoration activities, you can subscribe to the Nonpoint Source Program email listserv at <http://list.state.ak.us/mailman/listinfo/dec.wqsar.nps/>.

**Q10.** The Kenai River has elevated levels of zinc and bacteria, are the fish still safe to eat?

A10. Yes. Salmon are anadromous and spend a limited period of time in the river before spawning, and thus less likely to be impacted by brief periods of elevated zinc concentrations. For resident fish, although zinc concentrations sometimes exceed Water Quality Standards, these exceedances are variable both in the river mile location and season as to when the samples were collected. Human health impacts are not expected.

Sampling along Kenai River coastal beaches indicate that there are frequent exceedances of fecal coliform and enterococci bacteria criteria. Microbial source tracking indicates that the predominant source of bacteria is the bird rookery near these beaches. Because fish are not warm-blooded they do not carry fecal coliform or enterococci bacterial internally. When elevated fecal bacteria levels are present, precautionary measures are advised. DEC recommends rinsing fish with clean water after they have been harvested from the area. As always, people should cook seafood to a minimum internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit to destroy pathogens. See the Kenai River fact sheet for more information.

**Q11.** What are the next steps for the Kenai River?

A11. DEC supports the development of a watershed plan to address specific water quality issues such as metals and bacteria. Continued water quality monitoring is planned in the mainstem and coastal beaches. Future actions may include a pollution source assessment, loading analysis, and/or watershed planning.