

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation



# **Draft 2024 Integrated Report**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

Division of Water  
Water Quality Program

June 2024

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## Integrated Report Fundamentals

### *What is the integrated report?*

Every two years DEC reviews readily available water quality data to determine if waterbodies are meeting water quality standards. This is known as the Integrated Report, and it categorizes waterbody sections (assessment units) in Alaska to determine if they are meeting water quality standards. This is also known as the Section 305(b) report and Section 303(d) list of impaired waters. The Integrated Report helps the State prioritize waterbodies for data gathering, watershed protection, and restoration of impaired waterbodies.

### *What happens during the Integrated Report process?*

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) prepares the Integrated Report every two years. Throughout the two years, DEC evaluates readily available water quality data to determine if waterbody assessment units are meeting Alaska’s Water Quality Standards. A summary of waterbody categories and pollutants is provided in the Integrated Report Fact Sheet



*Table 1. Categories for assigning waterbody assessment units.*

<b>Categories 1 and 2</b>	Waterbodies for which there is enough information to determine that water quality standards are attained for all or some of their designated uses.
<b>Category 3</b>	Waterbodies for which there is not enough information to determine their status.
<b>Category 4</b>	Waterbodies that are impaired and have one of several different types of waterbody recovery plans.
<b>Category 5</b>	Waterbodies that are impaired and do not yet have waterbody recovery plans. Also known as 303(d) list impaired waters.

### *What is a waterbody assessment unit?*

An assessment unit is the section of a waterbody from which data is analyzed to determine if water quality standards are being met. Most assessment units are broken down at Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC)

10 boundaries. A large waterbody such as a Yukon River has many assessment units, while smaller waterbodies are contained within one unit. Some assessment units have different boundaries, for example if there is an impacted area smaller than the Hydrologic Unit Code 10, or if they don't fit well such as marine areas.

### *How does DEC analyze the data?*

DEC has developed publicly reviewed guidance for analysis of water quality data for the Integrated Report, including listing methodologies for specific pollutants like turbidity, petroleum hydrocarbons, pathogens and residues. These documents provide information on minimum data requirements and data evaluation methods for analyzing water quality data for the Integrated Report. The listing methodologies can be found on the DEC Integrated Report webpage:

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

## **Impaired Waterbodies**

### *What is the impaired waters list (Clean Water Action Section 303(d) list of impaired waters or Category 5 in the Integrated Report)?*

If the data evaluation conducted for a specific pollutant indicates that the waterbody assessment unit is persistently exceeding Alaska Water Quality Standards, and the exceedances are due to human actions, the waterbody assessment unit will be proposed for Category 5 in the Integrated Report. EPA must approve waterbodies that are moving onto or off the impaired waters list.

### *What happens when a waterbody assessment unit is considered impaired and placed in Category 5?*

When a waterbody assessment unit is placed in Category 5, it triggers the development of a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) or other recovery plan. The development of a recovery plan is a public process. It includes an assessment of pollutant sources and development of a schedule of actions to improve water quality. The placement of a waterbody in Category 5 may also limit or restrict current or future permitted activities, depending on the nature of the pollutant and the activities in the watershed.

Various types of restoration activities may be outlined to improve water quality of impaired waterbodies. 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. 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/>.

### *How are impaired waterbody assessment units removed from Category 5?*

As new water quality information becomes available, DEC will re-evaluate whether waterbody assessment units are exceeding or attaining water quality standards and change the category as appropriate. Under the Clean Water Act, there are three ways to remove a waterbody from the 303(d) list of impaired waters:

- Develop a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and implementation plan; this would move a waterbody to Category 4a.
- Develop a waterbody recovery plan including a commitment to implement enforceable actions and monitoring; this would move a waterbody to category 4b. If a waterbody recovery plan is established on a waterbody before being placed in Category 5, it may be placed directly in Category 4b.
- Demonstrate through monitoring that the waterbody is no longer impaired.

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

DEC's goal is to allow for Alaskans' use of our waterbodies while helping those waterbodies remain healthy for current and future uses. We do not issue unnecessary restrictions or regulations. The federally required Integrated Report evaluation is a data driven process, and when data indicates impairment, listing the waterbody allows Alaska to prioritize its restoration and protection. In many situations, regulations are not needed nor are they the best approach to fixing pollution if the problem can be addressed through other means. DEC supports a variety of methods to protect and improve water quality.

## More Information

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

DEC's searchable list of reports can be viewed at <https://dec.alaska.gov/water/water-quality/nonpoint-source-control/water-quality-resources/reports>

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

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, quickly cleaning up drips and spills using absorbent materials (not dish soap) and reducing your boat wake to avoid stirring up excess sediments. Additional information about best management practices can be viewed at <https://dec.alaska.gov/water/wastewater/stormwater/resources/>

*Where can I find the final 2024 Integrated Report?*

Once EPA has approved the Report, the EPA Letter of Approval and Integrated Report Factsheet and a map of assessed waterbody assessment units will be available on the Integrated Report website (<https://dec.alaska.gov/water/water-quality/integrated-report>).

Water quality assessment information from the States is sent to the EPA and is managed and maintained in a system called ATTAINS (Assessment and Total Maximum Daily Load Tracking and Implementation System), a website created by EPA designed to provide the public with information about the condition of their local waterbodies. Results from Alaska's Integrated Report can be found on

How's My Waterway (<https://mywaterway.epa.gov/state/AK/water-quality-overview>). How's My Waterway integrates data from the Integrated Report with local water quality data, information on aquatic recreation and harvest, and restoration and protection efforts. A complete list of report documents will be available by selecting Alaska, under Alaska Documents.