



# 303(d) Waterbodies: Beneficial Use & Impairment Basics for Oklahoma

Prepared by INCOG | October 2025

## Purpose

This fact sheet gives basic guidance to Oklahoma municipalities/MS4s and any member of the public looking for information on 303(d) impaired waters and TMDLs in Oklahoma. This includes how they are categorized, reported, and permitted at both state and federal levels.

## What is the 303(d) List?

The Clean Water Act Section 303(d) “list” is a report or list of a state’s “impaired” waterbodies. States submit these reports to the EPA for review every two years, with Oklahoma’s most recent year for reporting being 2024. States develop individual Water Quality Standards (WQS) which help to determine impairments. All waterbodies on the list must have identified the pollutants causing the impairment, and a TMDL is usually scheduled and ultimately developed for waterbodies on the 303(d) list.<sup>1</sup>

## Integrated Reporting

Along with the 303(d) report, states are required to submit a 305(b) water quality report at the same time. The 305(b) report contains a list of all waterbodies in a state, while the 303(d) list identifies those that are impaired. To streamline the reporting process, EPA encourages states to submit these reports together in an “integrated report”<sup>2</sup>

## Determining Impairments

Each state’s WQS designate uses of specific waterbodies, which are known as Beneficial Uses (BU). Beneficial uses determine the standard to which a waterbody is held to based on the use of that waterbody. Examples are primary body contact recreation (for swimming, skiing, etc.), secondary body contact recreation (boating, etc.), aquatic life protection, and drinking water BU protection. States must evaluate all available water quality data while building their 303(d) list and compare pollutant amounts with each waterbody’s BU. This determines which waterbodies are placed on the 303(d) list.<sup>3</sup>

## TMDLs

What is a TMDL? Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) is the maximum amount of a specific pollutant that may enter a waterbody in order to meet WQS for the waterbody’s designated BU. Pollutant loads are separated into two categories: Waste Load Allocations (WLA) from permit-holding point sources, and Load Allocations (LA) from nonpoint sources. TMDLs are typically pollutant specific, and one waterbody can have multiple TMDLs if impaired for multiple pollutants. Alternatively, TMDLs can cover multiple waterbodies within the same watershed and multiple pollutants as long as they are approved. There is no limit on the scope of a TMDL.

TMDL development consists of five main objectives:

1. Pollutant identification
2. Modeling of the waterbody’s loading capacity.
3. Estimation of the current pollutant load.
4. Identification of load reduction needs.
5. Allocation among different sources to meet WQS.

These components must be present in a TMDL document which must be approved by EPA. One checklist for TMDL documents includes these minimum required components:

- Identification of Waterbody, Pollutant of Concern, Pollutant Sources and Priority Ranking.
- Applicable WQS and Numeric Water Quality Target.
- Loading Capacity.
- Load Allocations and Waste Load Allocations.
- Margin of Safety.
- Consideration of Seasonal Variation.
- Reasonable Assurance for PS/NPS.
- Monitoring Plan to Track TMDL Effectiveness.
- Implementation Plan.
- Public Participation.<sup>4</sup>

## Restoration and De-Listing

Restoration and recovery is no quick feat and may take multiple years. Once TMDLs are developed, they may be implemented and monitored for water quality improvement. If there is improvement, a waterbody could be on the road to de-listing!<sup>5</sup>

1. For more info, see [Identifying and Restoring Impaired Waters](#) - USEPA.

2. For more info, see [Listing Impaired Waters](#) - USEPA.

3. Id. footnote 1.

4. For more info, see [TMDL Overview](#) - USEPA.

5. For more info, see [Impaired Waters Restoration Process](#) - USEPA.