



Fact Sheet

Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)



Driving Actions to Clean Local Waters and the Chesapeake Bay

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is leading a major initiative to establish and oversee achievement of a strict “pollution diet” to restore the Chesapeake Bay and its network of local rivers, streams and creeks.

EPA is working with its state partners to set restrictions on nutrient and sediment pollution through a Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMDL, a regulatory tool of the federal Clean Water Act that will be backed by a series of accountability measures to ensure cleanup commitments are met.

The Bay TMDL will be the largest and most complex ever developed, involving six states and the District of Columbia and the impacts of pollution sources throughout a 64,000-square-mile watershed.

Addressing the Challenges

Monitoring data continues to show that the Chesapeake Bay has poor water quality, degraded habitats and low populations of many species of fish and shellfish.

The Chesapeake Bay and its rivers are overweight with nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment from agricultural operations, urban and suburban runoff, wastewater, airborne contaminants and other sources.



The excess nutrients and sediment lead to murky water and algae blooms, which block sunlight from reaching underwater bay grasses and create low levels of oxygen for aquatic life, such as fish, crabs and oysters.

The Bay TMDL – actually a combination of 92 smaller TMDLs for individual Chesapeake Bay tidal segments – will include limits on nutrients and sediment sufficient to achieve state clean water standards for dissolved oxygen, water clarity and algae.

Actions under the TMDL will complement significant and ongoing work by EPA and its partners to restore the Bay and will have benefits far beyond the Chesapeake itself, helping to clean local rivers that support fishing and swimming and often serve as a source of local drinking water.

Sharing the Load

The pollution diet will be divided among all jurisdictions in the watershed by their major river basins. The jurisdictions include Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, West Virginia and the District of Columbia. The states and the District will further divide the “loadings” among local sources, improving their ability to target and achieve reductions.

Accountability

The six states and the District will prepare Watershed Implementation Plans indicating how they will accomplish their shares of the pollution diet. The plans will identify pollution reduction targets by geographic location and source sector and will include a description and schedule of actions to be taken to achieve the reductions.

States will specify reductions they intend to get from “point sources” like sewage treatment plants, urban stormwater systems and large animal feeding operations and “non-point sources” such as polluted rainfall runoff from agricultural lands and hard surfaces. The Bay Program’s advanced computer models will offer the ability for states to target actions to specific local areas and sources.

The plans will be supported by a series of two-year milestones for achieving specific near-term pollution reduction actions and targets needed to keep pace with commitments.

The states and EPA will monitor the effectiveness of the pollution reduction actions to assess progress and water quality response. EPA would employ consequences if there are insufficient commitments in a jurisdiction’s implementation plan or a failure to meet the established two-year milestones.

EPA is working closely with the states and the District of Columbia, and with modeling and water quality experts at the Chesapeake Bay Program in developing the TMDL.

Timetable

While court-ordered consent decrees with Virginia and the District of Columbia require the TMDL to be finalized by May 1, 2011, EPA has agreed to work toward an accelerated completion date of December 2010.

A draft TMDL and accompanying draft implementation plans are scheduled to be prepared by August 2010. The TMDL and the plans will then be offered for public comment. An initial round of public meetings will be held in November and December 2009, part of a robust plan for gathering public input.

(Last Updated: 10/15/09)