



COEUR D'ALENE RIVER BASIN TMDL

AUGUST 2000



STATE OF IDAHO
DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENTAL
QUALITY

Final TMDL Issued for Metals in Coeur d'Alene River Basin *Significant Improvements Made As a Result of Public Input*

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) have now issued the final TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) for dissolved cadmium, lead, and zinc in surface waters of the Coeur d'Alene basin. The TMDL establishes a "pollution budget" for sources that discharge metals to the Coeur d'Alene River and tributaries, Coeur d'Alene Lake, and Spokane River.

TMDL Revised to Address Public Comments

Several hundred individuals and groups provided comments, suggestions, and new information to the agencies during the comment period last spring and summer. EPA and DEQ have made several improvements to the TMDL as a direct result of public input. These changes include the following:

- 1. River flows and water hardness:** The relationship between river flow and river hardness (the amount of calcium and magnesium in the water) is now built into the TMDL loading capacities for the South Fork Coeur d'Alene River and tributaries. The available data indicates that river hardness increases as river flow decreases at these sites. Since hardness reduces the toxicity of metals to aquatic life, the water quality criteria are less restrictive during low flow conditions. This results in higher TMDL allocations during low flow conditions.
- 2. Background levels of metals:** The levels we use to reflect natural background conditions have been increased based on significant new data received since the release of the draft TMDL. However, as in the draft TMDL, the new levels are lower than the Gold Book criteria levels.
- 3. Current Performance of Facilities:** The approach for determining performance-

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Where to Review the Final TMDL Package and Administrative Record

Copies of the final TMDL documents (which include a technical support document, response to comments document and information fact sheet) are available at DEQ's Coeur d'Alene field office, the North Idaho College Library, and the Wallace Public Library. They are also available on EPA's website at: www.epa.gov/r10earth/water.htm

The Administrative Record for the TMDL includes all of the information (correspondence, comment letters, draft documents, technical reports, etc.) that forms the basis for the final TMDL. An index of the documents contained in the Administrative Record is currently available at the website noted above. In the near future, copies of all the Administrative Record documents will be available for public review (by appointment) at the DEQ office in Coeur d'Alene and the EPA office in Seattle.

Interested parties may call the contact numbers below to request copies of the final TMDL documents or make an appointment to review the Administrative Record.

EPA's Seattle office	Toll-free at 1-800-424-4372 (extension 1256)
DEQ's Coeur d'Alene office	(208) 769-1422.

based wasteload allocations has been revised. Rather than setting current performance levels up-front in the TMDL, facilities will be allowed to conduct their own studies and determine current performance levels on a permit-by-permit basis during the NPDES permitting process. This allows additional time for sampling and analysis to establish accurate estimates of current performance for each facility.

4. New or Expanding Facilities: The final TMDL provides a process for new and expanding facilities in the South Fork Coeur d'Alene River watershed, allowing for future development in these areas. Also, the final TMDL accounts for municipal stormwater sources for the Spokane River.

5. Discharges more closely tied to river conditions. The final TMDL is still calculated for four river flow conditions, but it now allows NPDES permit writers to include additional flow conditions in the permit for a particular facility.

In addition to the above changes, the TMDL has been refined based on extensive new data obtained in the Coeur d'Alene basin by the United States Geological Survey in 1999.

The remainder of this fact sheet provides general information about the final TMDL in a question and answer format:

Question: Is the TMDL Still Based on the 'Gold Book' Water Quality Criteria?

Answer: Yes. The 'Gold Book' criteria are adopted statewide by the State of Idaho as the water quality standards for protection of aquatic life. Site-specific criteria for lead and zinc in a small segment of the South Fork Coeur d'Alene River above Wallace are nearing completion. These criteria will not affect the TMDL because they only apply in the headwaters portion of the basin, while statewide criteria still apply downstream and drive the TMDL allocations.

Question: Can the Operating Mines Achieve the TMDL Goals?

Answer: We are very optimistic that mining facilities can achieve the TMDL allocations. EPA and DEQ's ongoing evaluations of the Bunker Hill Central Treatment Plant (CTP) indicate that the final TMDL allocations are achievable using water management controls and conventional treatment technologies.

Question: Can the Superfund Program Achieve the TMDL Goals?

Answer: We don't know. The basin-wide Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) that is underway now will evaluate cleanup alternatives for waste piles and tailings in the floodplain. The success of Superfund cleanup actions in this basin will depend on the level of funding for cleanup and the effectiveness of the selected cleanup actions. Due to the scale of the contamination problem, the cleanup is expected to take many years. EPA, DEQ, and other governmental agencies will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of cleanup projects in light of the TMDL goals.

Question: Will the TMDL Cause Unreasonable Increases in Sewer Rates in the Silver Valley?

Answer: The Idaho water quality standards allow for relaxation of requirements when they would result in widespread economic harm. This relief mechanism is called a "variance". Based on a review of the comments and information received from the wastewater treatment plants in Page, Smelterville, and Mullan, EPA and DEQ believe that these facilities are candidates for variances due to the potential costs to the community. Variances require an analysis of alternatives and a public comment period. EPA and DEQ plan to work with the Silver Valley sewer utilities to develop variances

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that include reasonable further progress toward achieving the TMDL allocations. The NPDES permit renewal process for these facilities will be coordinated with the variance process.

The agencies note that the TMDL has highlighted known problems in the aging infrastructure of the Silver Valley sewage collection system. Inflow and infiltration of runoff and groundwater into the sewers causes increased metals levels in treated sewage and can also cause raw sewage overflows to streets and nearby streams during high flow events. EPA and DEQ believe that a long-term program to upgrade and replace portions of collection system is needed to eliminate these problems.

Question: Will the TMDL Restrict Growth Along the Spokane River?

Answer: EPA and DEQ do not expect the TMDL to result in any growth restrictions. The TMDL requires municipalities along the Spokane River to maintain current concentrations of metals in their discharges to the river. The TMDL does not restrict discharge flow rates, which are expected to increase as the community grows.

Question: Is There an Immediate Effect on Industries and Communities?

Answer: The TMDL is a plan. This plan is implemented in separate regulatory actions by EPA and DEQ. For example, operating facilities are not required to meet the TMDL allocations until their permits are updated and re-issued for a new five-year term. Unless the facility is granted a variance (see above), the updated permit for a particular facility must contain metals limits that are consistent with the final TMDL. The permit may include a schedule that gives the facility time to design and construct improvements to meet the new permit limits.

Question: What Happens Next?

Answer: EPA and DEQ plan to continue working on projects that will help to improve water quality in the Coeur d'Alene basin. Toward the end of this year, EPA's Superfund program will release a draft, basin-wide RI/FS for public comment. Meanwhile, EPA and DEQ will be developing updated NPDES permits for mining and municipal facilities in the Silver Valley. These permits will incorporate the TMDL wasteload allocations and address non-TMDL pollutants as well (e.g., ammonia in the municipal discharges and copper in mining discharges). The public will have the opportunity to provide comments on each proposed permit.



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