

Water Quality Planning in Idaho: Continuing Planning Process

The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is the state agency responsible for implementing environmental protection laws and programs for the state of Idaho.

DEQ is required by section 303(e) of the Clean Water Act to develop a Continuing Planning Process (CPP) that describes the ongoing processes and planning requirements of the state's Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP). The WQMP is not a single plan or document but rather a compilation of the guidance and programs DEQ uses to implement Clean Water Act requirements. The WQMP is discussed in more detail [below](#). While the WQMP concerns how the programs are implemented, the CPP encompasses the broader picture: it includes the WQMP but also looks beyond at how decisions are made, how programs relate, and how the public is involved.

CPP Strategy

The CPP provides a mechanism through which the state's water resources are managed. In essence, the CPP is a description of how Idaho manages water quality. As the name "Continuing Planning Process" implies, the CPP is an evolving process that grows and changes as circumstances change.

The primary aspects of the process are shown in the graphic below: laws and rules, water quality programs, water quality monitoring and assessment, implementation of water quality maintenance and restoration projects, and ongoing planning. Public involvement is at the center of the process but is especially prevalent at three individual points on the circle: creating Idaho laws and rules; monitoring, assessing, and reporting on the quality of Idaho's waters; and implementing measures to restore and maintain water quality. Inherent in this loop is continual feedback, improvement, and change.

Webpage



Laws, Rules, and Guidance—The state of Idaho's commitment to water quality protection is articulated in Title 39 of the Environmental Protection and Health Act of 1972 and codified in Idaho's Administrative Rules. For more information, visit DEQ's [Laws, Rules, Policies, and Guidance](#) webpage.

Water Quality Programs—DEQ is responsible for ensuring that the state's surface water, ground water, wastewater, and drinking water resources meet state water quality standards and federal requirements. For more information about DEQ's water quality programs, visit the [Water Quality Division](#) page.

Monitoring and Assessment—DEQ continually monitors and assesses the quality of the state's rivers, streams, lakes, reservoirs, ground water, and sources of drinking water. This information is used to comply with federal reporting requirements and to make decisions regarding water quality management. For more information, see DEQ's pages on [drinking water monitoring and reporting](#), [ground water monitoring](#), [source water assessments](#), and [surface water monitoring and assessment](#).

Implementation—DEQ uses a variety of tools to preserve and enhance (where necessary) the quality of Idaho's waters. Loosely, these tools fall into three categories: permitting, preservation/restoration, and compliance and enforcement. See the individual [water quality programs](#) for more specific information regarding implementation activities in the various programs.

Planning—Since circumstances constantly change, planning is a constant process. While some plans or planning processes are required by state (e.g., DEQ's five-year [strategic plan](#)) or federal (e.g., Water Quality Management Plan and Continuing Planning Process) law, DEQ's ongoing planning is more a matter of good policy than simply fulfilling legal obligations.

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Public Involvement—The public can become involved in DEQ's water quality management process in many ways, from simply keeping informed, to serving on a committee, to participating in rulemaking, monitoring, assessment, and implementation and restoration activities. See DEQ's [public involvement](#) webpage for more information.

CPP Requirements

Federal regulations ([40 CFR 130.5](#)) state that the following nine processes must be addressed by the CPP. These requirements and how DEQ has addressed them are described briefly below. Included are links to related DEQ webpages where more information is available.

1. Limit the amount of pollutants discharged to surface water from point sources such as industrial sites and publicly owned treatment works (“effluent limits”). These limitations and schedules are covered under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), which is operated by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Idaho. DEQ is seeking delegated authorization of the NPDES program in Idaho in 2018, known as the Idaho Pollutant Discharge Elimination (IPDES) Program.
2. Develop and incorporate elements from any area-wide waste treatment plans and basin plans when undertaking statewide planning. DEQ implements basin-wide and statewide planning with its [Integrated Report](#) and related data-gathering processes. This report provides the water quality status of all Idaho waters, helps DEQ set priorities, and is the basis for writing total maximum daily loads (TMDLs), which are subbasin specific. [Basin advisory groups](#) and [watershed advisory groups](#) help guide the planning and implementation process.
3. Develop water quality improvement plans (TMDLs) for water bodies that do not meet Idaho water quality standards. Learn more at DEQ's [TMDLs](#) webpage.
4. Update and maintain the water quality management plan (WQMP) comprised of various programs and guidance documents. The WQMP is discussed in more detail below.
5. Ensure intergovernmental cooperation in the implementation of the state water quality management program through state laws, regulations, and memoranda of understanding/agreement. DEQ is granted authority to implement Idaho's water quality management program through state [laws and regulations](#) and through primacy from EPA. DEQ enters into many interagency agreements (mainly [memoranda of understanding/agreement](#)) to ensure intergovernmental cooperation in Idaho's water quality management program.
6. Establish and ensure implementation of new or revised water quality standards for surface water to protect the public and restore the quality of Idaho's surface waters. The [standards](#) are the benchmarks that waters are compared to when determining the need for TMDLs or [antidegradation](#) measures. DEQ's [§401 certification program](#) ensures federally permitted or licensed activities meet water quality standards, while continual [monitoring and assessment](#) provide feedback on the achievement of water quality standards.
7. Ensure adequate control of residual waste from water treatment processing. To control residual waste from water treatment processing, DEQ approves or disapproves plans for [wastewater](#) treatment and disposal facilities, issues wastewater land application permits, and provides [§401 certification](#) of federal NPDES permits (issued by EPA). DEQ is seeking approval to administer the IPDES Program in Idaho in 2018.
8. Develop an inventory and ranking in priority order of needs for construction of waste treatment works. This annual priority list helps identify projects that qualify for construction loan funds. Learn more about [wastewater loans](#).
9. Determine the priority of permit issuance. This process is covered under the NPDES program, which is operated by EPA in Idaho. DEQ is seeking approval to administer the IPDES Program in Idaho in 2018.

Water Quality Management Plan

Webpage

One tool DEQ uses to implement its water quality programs is the Water Quality Management Plan, which is a compilation of the guidance and programs DEQ uses to implement the Clean Water Act. Each component of the WQMP is updated individually. The updating processes vary in their triggers, participants, and time frames, and the majority include public comment periods.

Plan Requirements

Federal regulations (40 CFR 130.6) require that the plan address the following nine elements:

1. Total maximum daily loads—learn more about [TMDLs](#).
2. Effluent limitations—effluent limits are covered under the NPDES program administered by EPA. DEQ is seeking approval to administer the [IPDES Program](#) in Idaho in 2018.
3. Municipal and industrial waste treatment—see DEQ’s [Wastewater Program](#) for more information.
4. Nonpoint source management and control—learn more about DEQ’s [Nonpoint Source Pollution Program](#).
5. Management agencies—see information about applicable laws, policies, guidance, and memoranda of agreement/understanding [here](#).
6. Implementation measures—DEQ implements various measures to carry out the WQMP within the individual [water quality programs](#). See also the agency’s [strategic plan](#).
7. Dredge or fill program—DEQ certifies dredge and fill permits (issued by the US Army Corps of Engineers) through its [§401 certification program](#).
8. Basin plans—learn more about subbasin assessments and surface water planning [here](#).
9. Ground water—visit DEQ’s [Ground Water Program](#) for more information.

These elements are addressed in numerous documents and programs that span DEQ’s Water Quality Division. The links above provide helpful starting points for exploring more information or viewing documents related to the various elements. Additional components of DEQ’s WQMP include [administrative rules](#), [surface water monitoring and assessment programs](#), [water quality standards](#), and [wastewater treatment and IPDES permitting](#) programs.