

Water Quality Standards Triennial Review— Issue Paper #5

Cold Water Aquatic Life Criteria for Turbidity

Current Rules

Surface Water Use Designations (IDAPA 58.01.02.100)

Waterbodies are designated in Idaho to protect water quality for existing or designated uses. The designated use of a waterbody does not imply any rights to access or ability to conduct any activity related to the use designation, nor does it imply that an activity is safe. For example, a designation of primary or secondary contact recreation may occur in areas where it is unsafe to enter the water due to water flows, depth or other hazardous conditions. Another example is that aquatic life uses may be designated in areas that are closed to fishing or access is not allowed by property owners. Wherever attainable, the designated beneficial uses for which the surface waters of the state are to be protected include:

01. Aquatic Life.

- a. Cold water (COLD): water quality appropriate for the protection and maintenance of a viable aquatic life community for cold water species.*

Turbidity Criteria for Aquatic Life Use Designations (IDAPA 58.01.02.250)

02. Cold Water. Waters designated for cold water aquatic life are not to vary from the following characteristics due to human activities:

- e. Turbidity, below any applicable mixing zone set by the Department, shall not exceed background turbidity by more than fifty (50) NTU instantaneously or more than twenty-five (25) NTU for more than ten (10) consecutive days.*

Discussion

Currently, turbidity criteria apply to only those waters designated for cold water aquatic life and/or surface waters specifically identified as small public water supplies in IDAPA 58.01.02.252.01.b.i.

DEQ is considering adding temporary allowances for short-term exceedance of the numeric criteria for turbidity caused by construction activities designed to improve water quality or aquatic and riparian habitats in waters designated for cold water aquatic life or identified as small

public water supplies in IDAPA 58.01.02.252.01.b.i. Although turbidity may increase during the short-term activity, stabilizing eroding river and stream banks may enhance habitat in a stream and reduce long-term turbidity.

Wyoming water quality standards allow for “short-term increases of turbidity” of a “limited time and duration” if “all existing and designated uses will be fully maintained and protected throughout the duration of the activity” (Wyoming Turbidity Implementation Policy).

An authorization for increased turbidity may specify the limits of the authorization, possibly including monitoring and reporting schedules to demonstrate limit compliance.