

Antidegradation	Nonpoint Source Pollution
Aquatic Life	Outstanding State Resource Water
Assessment	Point Source Pollution
Clean Water Act	Primary Contact Recreation
Cold Water Aquatic Habitat	Secondary Contact Recreation
Designated Uses	Section 303(d)
Domestic Water Supply	Section 305(b)
<i>E. coli</i>	Special Use Waters
Fish Consumption	Total Maximum Daily Loads
Impaired	Warm Water Aquatic Habitat
Integrated Report	Water Quality Standards

WATER RULES

KENTUCKY'S WATER HEALTH GUIDE



What is the Clean Water Act?

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for overseeing the requirements of the **Clean Water Act**, but they share this responsibility with the states. In Kentucky, the Division of Water works with the EPA to meet this responsibility. The Clean Water Act is made up of many sections that address different issues related to protecting our water. In general, it requires that the waters of the nation be drinkable, swimmable and fishable.



In the late 1960's and early 70's, citizens and government officials in the United States realized there was a crisis with our streams and lakes. The water was so polluted that the Cuyahoga River in Ohio was one of several that actually caught on fire – more than once! In order to address the problems, Congress made laws in 1972 to protect surface water that have come to be known as the Clean Water Act (CWA).



[Back to Top](#)

Point & Nonpoint Source Pollution

The major water health problems were caused by waste released through pipes into waterways from industrial processes and sewage treatment plants (**point source pollution**). After several years of regulation of point sources, water health began to improve. However, there were still water pollution problems across the nation.

In the late 1980's, the US Environmental Protection Agency began to focus on the effects of runoff pollution (**nonpoint source pollution**) that was being carried into streams and lakes by water from storms running over the land. This pollution was preventing the streams and lakes, sometimes called waterbodies from being drinkable, swimmable and fishable. Runoff pollution is discussed and dealt with in Section 319 of the Clean Water Act. The funding that is provided by the US Environmental Protection Agency to reduce runoff pollution is often called 319 funding.



Point Source Pollution - pollution from regulated pipes and ditches



Runoff Pollution (Non-Point Source Pollution)– pollution from a combination of sources



[Back to Top](#)

Requirements of the Clean Water Act

Legal Limits of Pollution (**Water Quality Standards**)

To support the drinkable, swimmable and fishable goals, the Clean Water Act requires states to set **water quality standards** or legal limits of pollution in streams and lakes. These limits are used to protect and manage the streams and lakes, and to reduce or get rid of point and nonpoint source pollution. In Kentucky, the legal limits of pollution are set for a variety of measurements such as bacteria (*E. coli*), dissolved oxygen, metals, temperature and pH. These limits are part of the state regulations.

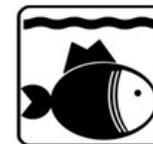
Ways We Use Streams and Lakes (**Designated Uses**)

As a part of the legal limits of pollution in streams and lakes, states must **designate uses** or identify the uses for each body of water in their state. In Kentucky, the Division of Water has identified the possible uses of streams and lakes.

They are listed here with the symbols (icons) that represent them:



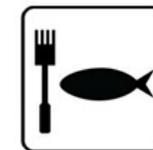
Primary Contact Recreation (PCR)



Aquatic Life (AL)



Secondary Contact Recreation (SCR)



Fish Consumption (FC)



Domestic Water Supply (DWS)



[Back to Top](#)

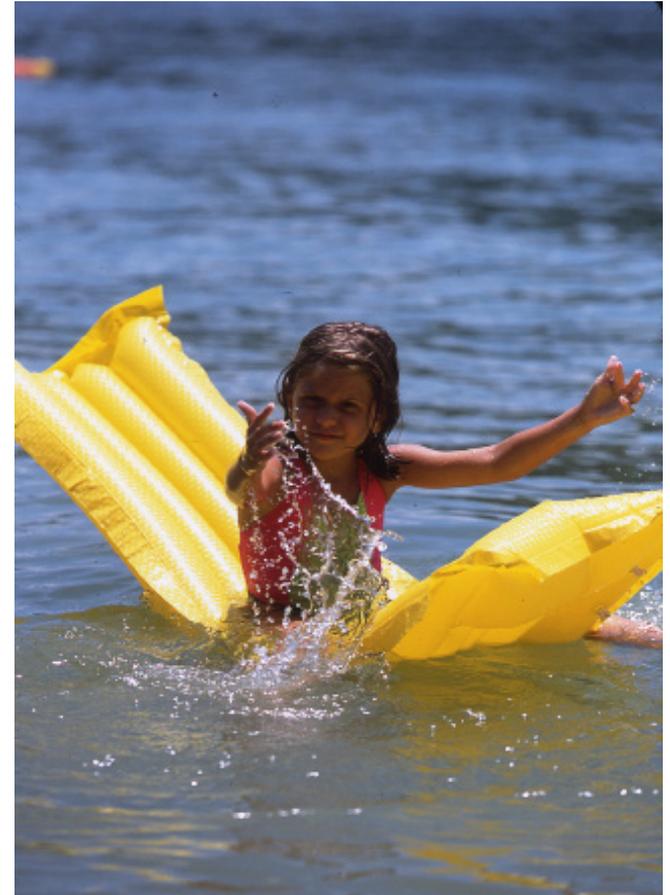
Ways We Use Streams and Lakes (Designated Uses)



Primary Contact Recreation (PCR)

Primary Contact Recreation (PCR) includes swimming or other activities where your head goes under water and you are likely to swallow water, or if the eyes, inside of the nose or inside of the mouth are likely to come in contact with the water.

- If there are bacteria or other germs in the water, they can get inside your body through these areas and cause sickness.
- Bacteria and other germs can also get inside your body through cuts and sores.
- The higher the amount of bacteria in the water, the higher your chances of getting sick.
- Harmful substances from rapid growths of blue-green algae in streams and lakes can cause skin rashes, breathing problems and other sickness.



[Back to Top](#)

Ways We Use Streams and Lakes (Designated Uses)



Secondary Contact Recreation (SCR)

Secondary Contact Recreation (SCR) involves fishing, boating, wading or other activities where parts of your skin come in contact with the water, but your head doesn't go under the water.

- If there are bacteria or other germs in the water and you get them on your skin, then touching your eyes, nose or mouth can move the bacteria and germs into your body and cause sickness.
- Bacteria and other germs can also get into your body through cuts and sores.
- The higher the amount of bacteria in the water, the higher your chances of getting sick.
- Harmful substances from rapid growths of blue-green algae in streams and lakes can cause skin rashes, breathing problems and other sickness.



Ways We Use Streams and Lakes (Designated Uses)



Domestic Water Supply (DWS)

Domestic Water Supply (DWS) involves human drinking water.



- The water quality is tested at the place where the drinking water treatment plant takes the water from the stream or lake.
- The water must not have more pollution than can be cleaned to a level safe for humans to drink.
- Harmful substances from rapid growths of blue-green algae in streams and lakes can cause skin rashes, breathing problems and other sickness.



[Back to Top](#)

Ways We Use Streams and Lakes (Designated Uses)



Aquatic Life (AL)

Aquatic Life (AL) involves the healthy variety of animals that live in water.

- The variety of animals depends on the health of the water and the variety of healthy places to live (habitat) in the stream or lake.
- **Warm water aquatic habitat (WAH)** is a type of habitat that supports a balanced community of aquatic organisms able to live within a certain temperature range.



Ways We Use Streams and Lakes (Designated Uses)



Fish Consumption (FC)

Fish Consumption (FC) determines the safety of eating fish.

- Based on the amount of chemicals found in the flesh of the fish.
- This is a goal of meeting the legal limits of pollution in streams and lakes to protect human health.
- The chemicals of most common concern are mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), but tests are also performed for other metals and for pesticides.
- Harmful substances from rapid growths of blue-green algae in streams and lakes can cause skin rashes, breathing problems and other sickness.



[Back to Top](#)

Ways We Use Streams and Lakes (Designated Uses)



Outstanding State Resource Water (OSRW)

Outstanding State Resource Water (OSRW) describes streams or lakes that have unique features that are worthy of legal protection.

- The Division of Water identifies a stream or lake as an Outstanding State Resource Water (OSRW) if a group of animals living in the stream or lake are of a kind that has been found to be dying off or disappearing (federally endangered or threatened) in other areas but are still living in that particular stream or lake because of the high water quality.
- Any streams that have already been identified as Kentucky Wild Rivers, Exceptional Waters or Federal Wild and Scenic Rivers are also automatically considered for review to become an Outstanding State Resource Water (OSRW).

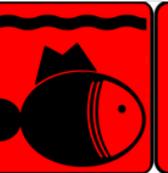
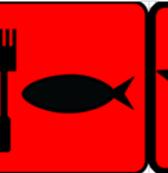
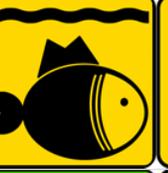
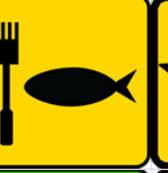
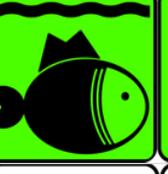
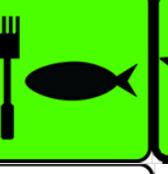
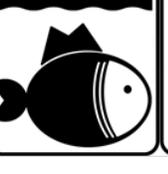
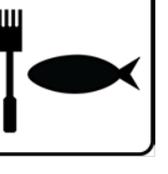


The Kentucky regulations that set the legal limits of pollution (water quality standards) and identify possible uses (designated uses) for streams and lakes are found in Title 401 of the Kentucky Administrative Regulations Chapter 10 Sections 031 and 026 (401 KAR 10:031 and 401 KAR 10:026). These regulations can be found on the [Kentucky Legislative Research Commission website](#).



How We Evaluate the Health of Streams and Lakes (**Assessment**)

To find out if the streams and lakes in Kentucky are below the legal limits of pollution and meeting the designated uses assigned to them, the Division of Water (DOW) collects several types of samples from the water and tests them. The Division then combines all of the information collected and uses it to provide an evaluation of the health of the stream or lake. With these health evaluations, the stream or lake receives one of the following ratings:

		Uses					
		Swimming (Primary Contact Recreation-PCR)	Fishing, Wading, Boating (Secondary Contact Recreation-SCR)	Drinking Water (Domestic Water Supply-DWS)	Animals That Live in Water (Aquatic Life-AQ)	Safety of Eating Fish (Fish Consumption-FC)	Outstanding State Resource Water (OSRW)
Ratings	Nonsupport of Use (red)						
	Partial Support of Use (Yellow)						
	Full Support of Use (green)						
	Non Evaluated/Not Assessed (White)						



[Back to Top](#)

Is the Water Safe?

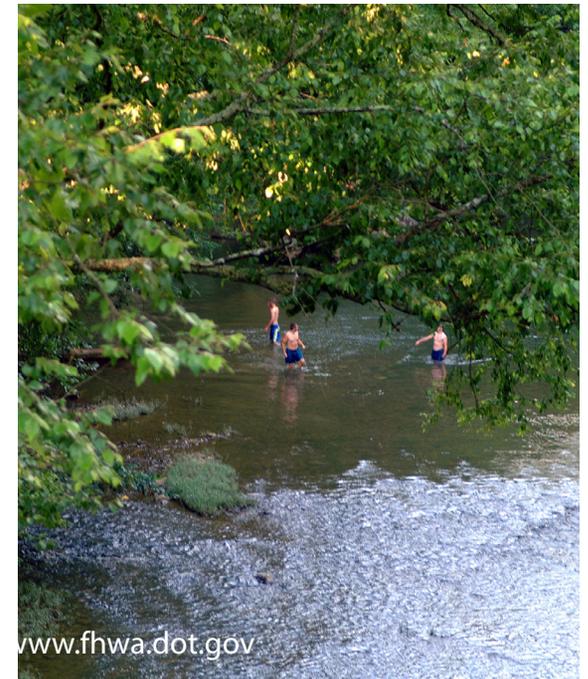
Can I Swim There? (Swimming Advisories)

The Kentucky Division of Water and the Kentucky Division of Public Health Protection and Safety are responsible for sampling and evaluating streams and lakes to determine if they are safe for human contact. Those that are found to have high levels of bacteria can cause illness from recreational contact with the water. The ones that consistently have high levels of bacteria are identified as unsafe for swimming and/or other activities like boating and wading. Signs are placed around these streams and lakes to let the public know they are unsafe.

The bacteria come from human or other animal waste and are a sign of the presence of untreated, or poorly treated, sewage, poor farming practices, failure to pick up pet waste, etc. High amounts of bacteria and the other germs found in sewage and other waste create a higher chance of getting sick from contact with the water.

Any stream or lake is more likely to have high amounts of bacteria after heavy storms. The rain or melting snow from these storms can overwhelm sewage pipes causing untreated sewage to flow into streams and lakes. The runoff from those storms will also carry any waste on the land surface into the local streams and lakes. Streams and lakes are evaluated for two different types of recreational activity:

- Primary Contact Recreation (PCR) - swimming or other activities where your head goes under water and you are likely to swallow water, or your eyes, inside of the nose or inside of the mouth are likely to come in contact with the water
- Secondary Contact Recreation (SCR) - fishing, boating, wading or other activities where parts of your skin come in contact with the water, but your head doesn't go under the water



The current swimming advisories for Kentucky are available on the Division of Water's website on the [Swimming Advisories webpage](#).



Is the Water Safe?

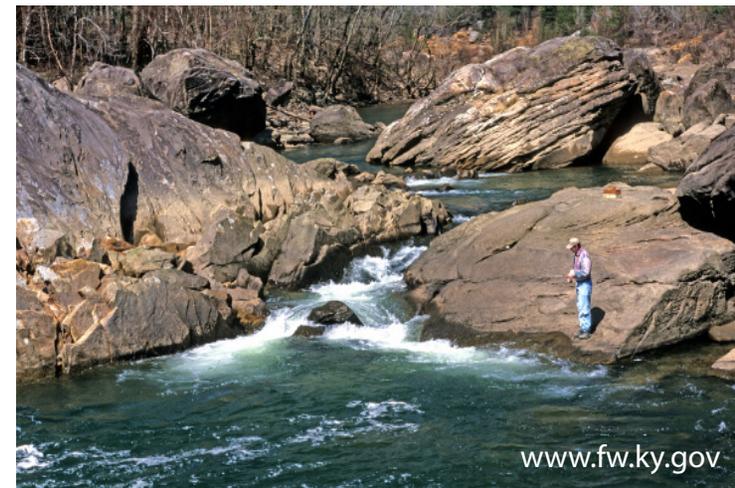
Can I Eat the Fish? (Fish Consumption Advisories)

The Kentucky Division of Water, Kentucky Division of Public Health Protection and Safety and Kentucky Department for Fish and Wildlife Resources are responsible for working together to determine the safety of eating fish that are caught in the streams and lakes in the state. They jointly issue a fish consumption advisory to the public for a stream or lake when fish flesh is found to contain chemicals above the amounts that have been determined to be safe for humans to eat. The chemicals of most common concern are mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), but tests are also performed for other metals and for pesticides.

An advisory cautions people about potential health problems that may result from eating fish caught from a particular area. An advisory does not mean fish can't be eaten. It is intended to provide information to guide people in making choices that reduce health risks. The advisory provides information on how often fish may be safely eaten.

Risks from eating fish from an advisory area can be reduced by the following:

- Fillet the fish, remove the skin and trim all fat
- Do not eat fish eggs
- Broil, grill or bake the fillets instead of frying or microwaving
- Do not eat, or reuse, juices or fats that cook out of the fish



Is the Water Safe?

Can I Eat the Fish? (Fish Consumption Advisories)

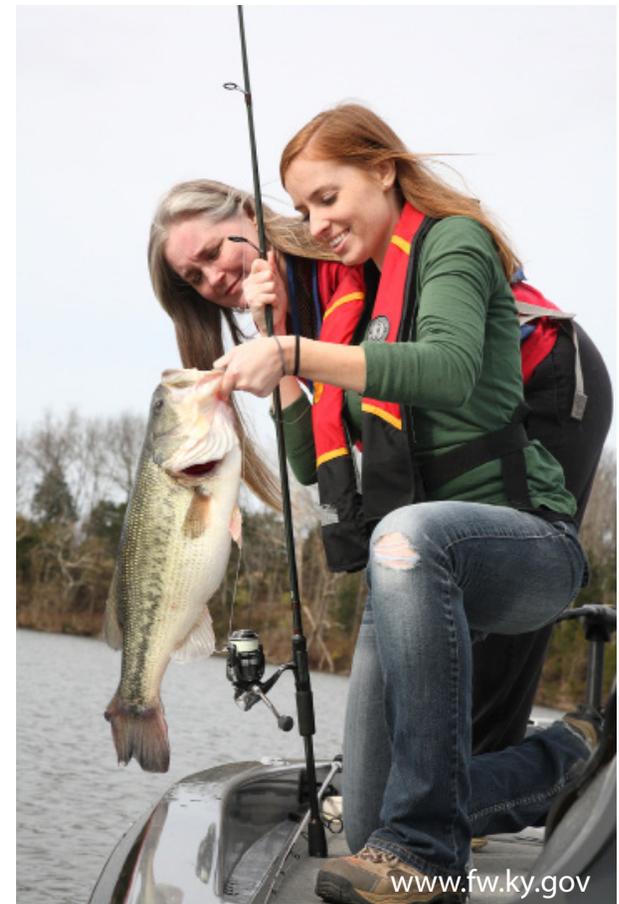
Current Advisories for Safety of Eating Fish (Fish Consumption)

Statewide Advisories -

- Fish Consumption Advisory for Mercury
- A safety of eating fish (fish consumption) advisory for mercury is in effect for fish caught in any of the waters in the state
- Women of childbearing age and children 6 years of age or younger should eat no more than one meal per week of freshwater fish
- Other adults are not included in the advisory
- This is not an emergency situation since organic mercury can occur naturally in the environment and does not affect swimmers, skiers or boaters. It affects the fish by building up levels of mercury in their flesh when they eat small plants that have absorbed the mercury or eat the small animals that have eaten the small plants.

Individual Stream and Lake Advisories -

For information on specific streams and lakes in, or bordering, Kentucky, go to the [Division of Water's Fish Consumption webpage.](http://www.fw.ky.gov)



Back to Top

Is the Water Safe?

What is that Scum on the Water? (Harmful Algal Bloom Advisories)

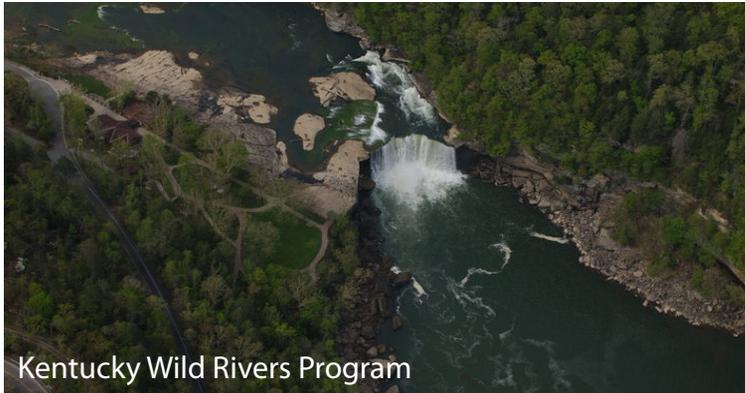


Fertilizers are carried by runoff into lakes and streams from lawns, sewage, farms, etc. This causes several different types of algae to grow rapidly in the water. The common green algae are not harmful to humans or animals that come in contact with the water. When they grow rapidly, they can look like underwater moss, stringy mats or floating scum. Blue-green algae, on the other hand, can be harmful. They can cause skin rashes, breathing problems and other sickness in humans and animals. When they grow rapidly, they can make the water look like shiny bright-green paint, but the color can also be red or brown. The rapid growth of blue-green algae that release poisons in the water is called a Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB).

In addition to the fertilizers in the water, there are other conditions that can cause a HAB. These include slow moving water, low water levels, warmer temperatures and lots of sunlight. These HABs are more likely to happen between May and October. For information on HAB warnings in Kentucky, go to the [Division of Water's Harmful Algal Blooms webpage](#).



Required Reports for Stream and Lake Health



Part of the Clean Water Act (**Section 305(b)**) requires states to submit a report to Congress every two years on the health of the waters that have been assessed by the state. It provides a list of all of the streams and lakes in the state that have been tested and assessed and describes whether or not they are supporting their designated uses.

Another part of the Clean Water Act (**Section 303(d)**) requires that states also submit to Congress every two years a report of the streams and lakes that are found to be in poor health (**impaired**). This is a list of the streams and lakes from the Section 305(b) report that are not supporting or are partially supporting identified uses.

These two reports, the 305(b) and the 303(d), are sent by the Division of Water to Congress through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as one report called the **Integrated Report**. The Integrated Report has Volume I and Volume II. Volume I is the 305(b) report and Volume II is the 303(d) report. The reports are available on the Kentucky Division of Water's [Integrated Report website](#).

It is important to know that the Integrated Report only provides information for the waters in the state that have been tested and evaluated. Not all of the waters in the state have been tested. For an easy summary of this report, [view our interactive webpage here](#).

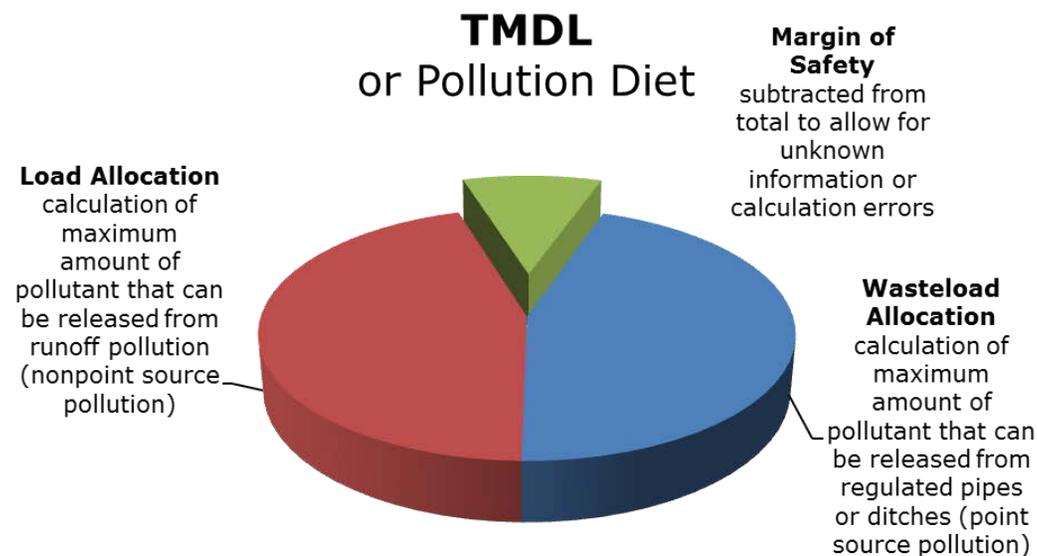


Pollution Studies and Solutions

The streams and lakes on the 303(d) list will each require a study that identifies the types and amounts of pollutants in the water and gives guidelines for how much they should be reduced. These studies are called **Total Maximum Daily Loads** (TMDLs) and they determine the amount of a certain type of pollutant a stream or lake can receive and still meet its designated uses.

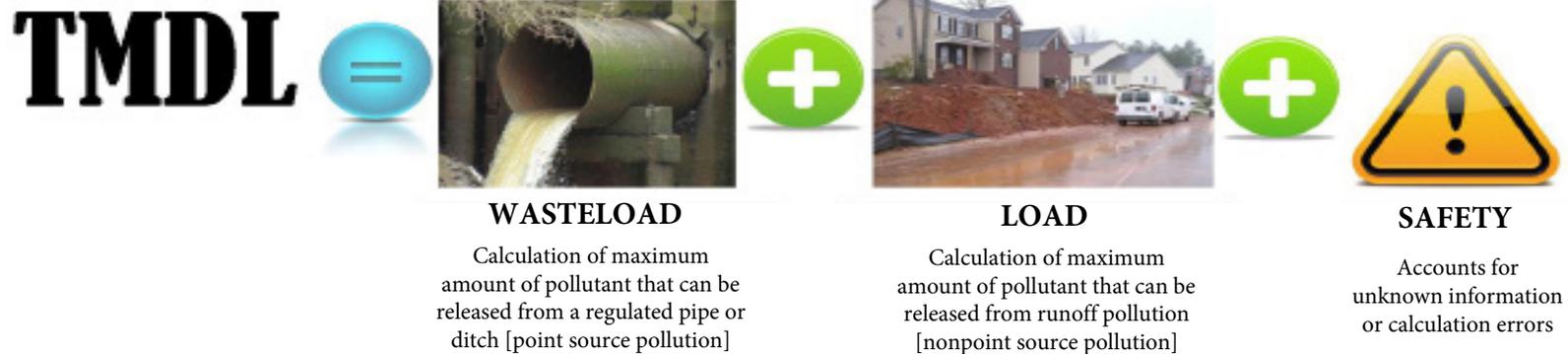
A TMDL is often called a pollution diet. Just as eating smaller portions of food controls the amount of weight in your body, balancing or reducing the portions of chemicals and waste that get into a stream or lake from different sources controls the overall amount of pollution in it. The Division of Water performs strategic sampling to find out the amount of chemicals and waste that are going into the stream or lake, and then develops the pollution diet that describes how much of each chemical or waste must be reduced to bring the stream or lake back below the legal limits that allow it to be healthy.

The results of the studies are included in a TMDL report that describes the current condition of the stream or lake and the amount of pollutant that must be removed in order for it to support its identified use(s). The TMDL report is intended to help government officials, agencies, watershed groups and citizens make decisions and take action to improve water health. The TMDL reports for Kentucky can be found on the [Division of Water's TMDL website](#).



Pollution Studies and Solutions

Pollution Diet or Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)



Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) divide up the amount of pollutant that is allowed to be released in the watershed among the users of the land. These different land users can include businesses, factories, sewage treatment plants, towns, farms and homeowners. Some land users are required to have a permit to release polluted water in the watershed. All other user activities can cause pollutants that runoff into the stream during storms; these are runoff pollution sources. The calculation of the maximum amount of pollutant that can be released from point sources to a stream or lake so it will still meet its uses is called the Wasteload Allocation. The calculation of the maximum amount of pollutant from runoff that can be released to a stream or lake so it will still meet its uses is called the Load Allocation.

Before the maximum amount of point source pollutant (Wasteload Allocation) and runoff pollutant (Load Allocation) are added together and finalized, a small amount is subtracted from each to allow for any unknown information and potential errors. This amount is called the Margin of Safety. To summarize, the TMDL is made up of the Margin of Safety, the Wasteload Allocation and the Load Allocation.



Protecting Streams from Additional Damage (**Antidegradation**)

In order to meet the legal limits of pollution that protect and support the designated uses of streams and lakes, the Clean Water Act requires protection of basic levels of health from unnecessary pollution for all streams or lakes. In addition, streams or lakes with higher levels of health are required to receive extra protection from activities that have the potential to damage that health.

These protections are intended to 1) prevent any additional pollution damage and 2) keep stream and lake health at the same level and supporting the same designated uses from the time these Clean Water Act requirements went into effect on November 28, 1975. The goal of no additional pollution damage is referred to as **antidegradation**. To support this goal, streams and lakes are evaluated and identified for special uses based on unique characteristics they have.



Protecting What is Special



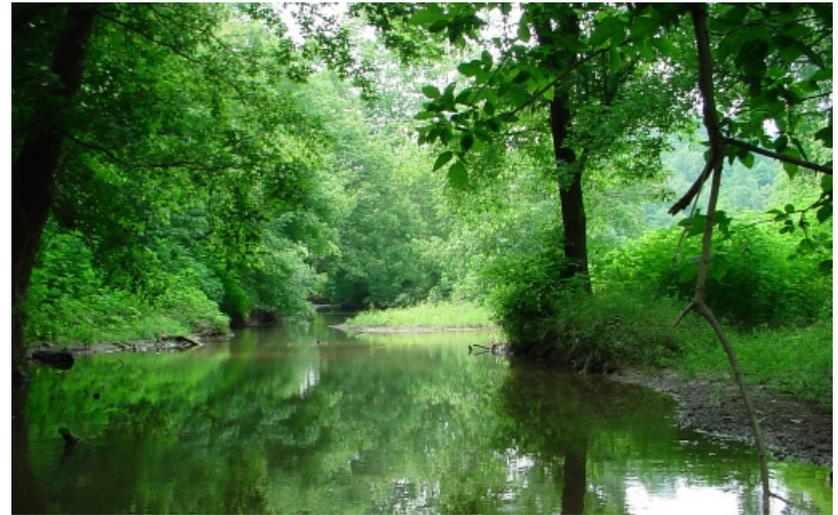
With over 90,000 miles of streams and lakes in Kentucky that run through mountains, hills, Bluegrass, coal fields and many other land features, it isn't surprising that many of these have one or more unique characteristics that deserve extra protection. The Division of Water has regulations that define several categories that are based on these characteristics. Because many of these streams and lakes have more than one unique characteristic, they may fit into more than one of the categories of **Special Use Waters** that are described in this section. Maps showing the streams and lakes can be found on the Division of Water's [Special Use Waters webpage.](#)



Back to Top

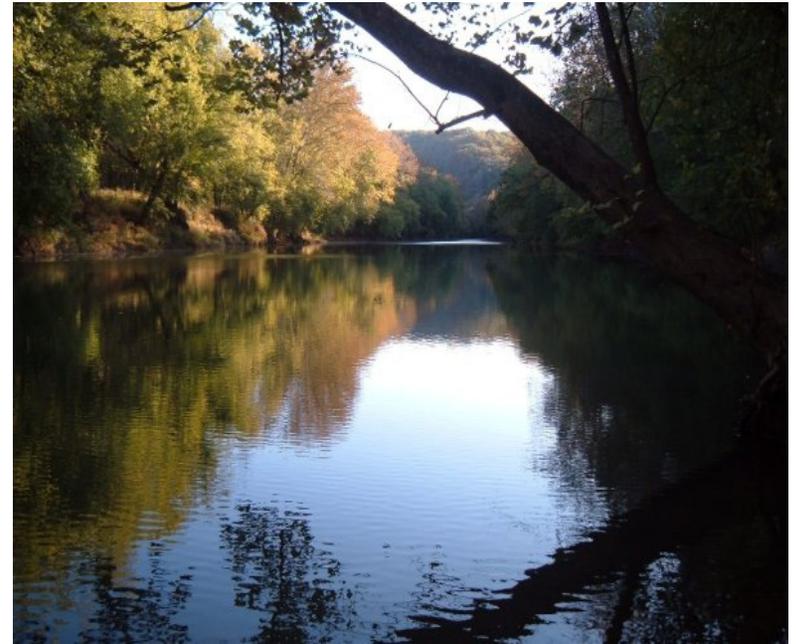
Special Use Waters

- Reference Reach Waters – streams and lakes throughout the state that are the most unchanged from their natural conditions
 - Used as best examples of how least altered streams are supposed to look and function in different areas of the state
 - Used when working to fix streams that have been damaged, because they can be used as a comparison for how the streams are meant to be
 - It is important to know that very few, if any, of our streams are in an untouched condition -The Reference Reach streams represent the least changed streams in each region
- **Cold Water Aquatic Habitats (CAH)** – streams that will support, on a year-round basis, animals that require cooler water temperatures for survival, and/or provide the cooler temperatures and surroundings needed for trout to reproduce
- Exceptional Waters (EW) – streams or lakes that have the high quality of water that is necessary for fish, shellfish and wildlife to reproduce and supports recreation in and on the water
 - this category includes Reference Reach waters, Kentucky Wild Rivers, some Outstanding State Resource Waters and some waters that have a rating of “excellent” for fish or bugs (macroinvertebrates)
- Kentucky Wild Rivers – parts of nine rivers in the state that have extraordinary beauty and clean water.
 - includes all visible land for at least 2000 feet on either side of the river
 - any change in the way the land is used within the Wild River boundary requires a permit, and cutting all trees or strip mining are not allowed



Special Use Waters

- Outstanding State Resource Waters (OSRW) – streams or lakes that have unique features that are worthy of legal protection
 - The Division of Water identifies a stream as an OSRW if a group of animals living in the stream or lake are of a kind that has been found to be dying off and they are disappearing, or beginning to disappear, from the places they normally live (federally threatened or endangered)
 - Any streams that have already been identified as Kentucky Wild Rivers, Exceptional Waters or Federal Wild and Scenic Rivers are also automatically considered for review to become an Outstanding State Resource Water



- Outstanding National Resource Waters (ONRW) – streams or lakes that meet the requirements for an Outstanding State Resource Water and also have natural or recreational importance on a national level
- Federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act
 - Federal Wild Rivers – rivers, or sections of rivers, that don't have dams, don't have developed watersheds or shorelines, don't have polluted waters, and can only be reached by trail.
 - Federal Scenic Rivers – rivers, or sections of rivers, that meet all of the requirements of a Federal Wild River, except they can be reached by roads in some places.
 - Recreational Rivers – rivers, or sections of rivers, that can be reached by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shorelines, and that may have been dammed or re-routed in the past.





For more information about Kentucky's waters, checkout
**KENTUCKY'S WATER HEALTH
GUIDE**