



Water Quality Program

Spokane River water quality improvements under way

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Twelve years of complex, difficult work culminated in the Spokane River dissolved oxygen TMDL (total maximum daily load) report in late 2011, and National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits were issued to the five wastewater treatment facilities discharging to the Spokane River in Washington.

The Spokane River is on the state's list of impaired waters [303(d) list] for dissolved oxygen. After a lengthy, contentious process that began in 1998, the TMDL was approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in May 2010. The permits provide the implementation plans for the TMDL to reduce ammonia, phosphorus, and other oxygen-depleting substances to some of the lowest concentrations in the country.

The newest permittee, Spokane County's Regional Water Reclamation Facility, began discharging on Dec. 1, 2011. The facility is designed to remove oxygen-depleting substances to the lowest limits possible for available wastewater treatment technology.

Despite these tremendous accomplishments, this is only the beginning of the journey towards meeting water quality requirements for the Spokane River. In addition to the improvements brought by the new county facility, the city of Spokane has finished testing six advanced wastewater treatment technologies in various combinations. The testing will help determine the combination of technologies that remove the most oxygen demanding wastes.



The TMDL implementation process takes place over the next 10 years. However, as a new discharger, the new county facility must meet the TMDL limits at the start of its operation. For the other four facilities, compliance schedules define interim milestones and compliance with the TMDL limits by 2021. Success will be determined by monitoring discharge water quality parameters and assessing water quality improvement in 10 years.

Addressing PCBs

The Spokane River is also on the 303(d) list for the legacy pollutant, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The Spokane Tribe of Indians' water quality standard for PCBs is 3.37 picograms per liter, which is below what wastewater treatment technologies can achieve today.

To address the concerns of the tribe and others in the Spokane community, the Washington permits for the facilities discharging to the Spokane River also require that dischargers participate in a regional toxics task force that will plan and implement PCB reduction efforts.

The Memorandum of Agreement for forming the Spokane River Toxics Task Force was submitted to Ecology on Nov. 30, 2011 and is expected to be signed by those representing environmental interests, the permittees discharging to the Spokane River, regulatory agencies, and the Spokane Tribe by March 1, 2012. The first year of funding for the task

force administrator/facilitator has been identified and the task force met for the first time on Jan.11, 2012.

Task force goals during 2011-2016 permit cycle

Within 12 months of Ecology's approval of the MOA on Nov. 30, 2011 the task force will:

- Confirm initial task force funding.
- Identify and contract with appropriate staff.
- Develop a 2012 through 2016 task force work plan to:
 - Establish an approach for analyzing existing data on PCB and other toxics on Washington's 2008 303(d) list to (1) understand what is known, (2) identify data gaps, and (3) determine where additional characterization of amounts, sources and locations is needed.
 - Develop and implement a monitoring plan for the Spokane River that, (1) establishes the baseline conditions for PCBs and the other identified toxics, (2) monitors and assesses the effectiveness of toxic reduction measures, and (3) can be adapted to take into account newly generated data and sampling techniques.
 - Identify or establish a publicly accessible clearinghouse for storing data, reports, task force meeting minutes or summaries, and other information gathered or developed by the task force and its members.
 - Review proposed Toxic Management Plans, Source Management Plans, and Best Management Practices.
 - Develop an approach for preparing recommendations to control and reduce point and nonpoint sources of PCBs and other toxics on the 303 (d) list.
 - Decide what is needed to conduct public education about pollution prevention, task force activities, and public and environmental health information.

To learn more about the Spokane River Toxics Task Force and to follow the community's progress toward meeting Spokane River toxic reduction goals, please go to www.srrttf.org.

Contributing to this success were:

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City of Spokane Wastewater Management Division
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