

WENATCHEE RIVER WATERSHED WATER QUALITY
Total Maximum Daily Load PROGRESS
Dissolved Oxygen, pH, Fecal Coliform, and Temperature

May 17, 2005

- Today, the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) is presenting technical assessment information for Dissolved Oxygen, pH, and Fecal Coliform Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for the Wenatchee River and key tributaries in the Wenatchee Watershed Planning Unit's Water Quality Technical Subcommittee.
- Through the sub-committee and Planning Unit, the Chelan County Conservation District and the Department's Environmental Assessment Program, Ecology has acquired an extensive set of water quality data. It is from this data source that assessment documents were prepared and are presented today.
- Preliminary results show that much of the Wenatchee watershed has excellent water quality. However, the report also identifies areas with dissolved oxygen, pH, and fecal coliform bacteria problems. The pollution of greatest concern, particularly in the lower Wenatchee River, appears to be pH. pH is a measure of how acidic or basic the water is - a healthy river is close to a neutral pH. When pH is too high, fish health declines, and when very high, they die. High pH can be caused by unusually high aquatic plant (algal) growth when there is too much phosphorus (a plant nutrient) in a stream or river.
- When the river contains too much phosphorus or other "nutrient" pollution, algae and other water plants thrive. The phosphorus acts like fertilizer, stimulating the growth of aquatic plants. As these plants grow, they cause the pH to go up. pH levels in the river are currently too high for a healthy fish population.
- At this time, Ecology is seeking review and comment from the Wenatchee Watershed Planning Unit's Water Quality Technical Subcommittee of the draft water quality technical assessment report (bacteria, dissolved oxygen, and pH). Ecology is working with the Subcommittee to develop outreach and communication tools to "get the word out" to everyone in the watershed about water quality and other issues being addressed by the Planning Unit. The subcommittee has already provided comments on temperature parameters as well as habitat, water quantity and instream flow issues address by the planning unit. Broad public review of the TMDL documents will occur in the coming months.
- Ecology is excited to be working with the Wenatchee Watershed Planning Unit concurrently addressing water quality and other natural resource problems. We

believe that the most effective and lasting strategies to address problems like water quality will be found through this collaborative and integrated effort.

- Ecology believes that strategies to address water quality problems may include additional analysis of existing wastewater flows and loadings, a broadened review of available technologies to improve water quality for both point source and non-point source, application of water reuse and conservation technologies, and active non-point source pollution reduction or elimination effort. We intend to work with the technical sub-committee and Planning Unit to implement any or all of these and other strategies in the Wenatchee River Watershed. Ecology stands ready to make commitments as part of the Wenatchee Watershed Plan, implementing these and other appropriate actions to address water quality and other natural resource issues.

- The Wenatchee River and its tributaries are important features of a beautiful watershed, unique in setting and diversity of life. Although rich with a healthy variety of living and non-living resources, it is a sensitive ecosystem warranting protection. Ecology believes that the level of involvement and commitment to the Watershed Planning effort by the Planning Unit and citizens of the Wenatchee River watershed illustrates the community's support for this protection. The Department of Ecology believes that it is through this stewardship commitment that collaborative partnerships can be forged to improve water quality and achieve other natural resource objectives in the Wenatchee River Watershed. We look forward to successful completion of the planning effort in April of 2006.