

# Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)



## What is a TMDL?

A Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) is the maximum amount of a pollutant that a body of water can receive while still meeting water quality standards. A waterway that exceeds water quality standards is often no longer suitable for its designated uses, such as wildlife habitat, fishing, or other recreational activities.

## Why develop a TMDL?

The ultimate goal of a TMDL is to improve water quality by reducing pollutants, such as phosphorus and sediment. To help achieve this, a TMDL answers the following questions:

1. What is the current amount of pollution entering the waterway and how much is each source contributing?
2. How much does pollution need to be reduced in order for each waterway to meet water quality standards?
3. How will the needed pollutant load reductions be achieved for each waterway?

A TMDL study and implementation plan provides a strategic framework and prioritizes resources for water quality improvement.



**Fish and aquatic life  
Recreation**



Photo credit: Jim Ziegler

Photo credit: Herbert Lange



**Phosphorus  
Toxic algae blooms  
Public health risks**

## TMDL Assessment

In order to develop the TMDL and answer the questions above, the watershed is studied to determine the amount of pollution currently entering the waterway from the sources shown in the adjacent figure.

