

2024 WATER CONDITION LISTS

11-2023

Every two years, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources publishes a list of waters considered impaired, as required by the federal Clean Water Act (CWA). Impaired waters are those that do not meet water quality standards and may not support fishing, swimming and recreation, aquatic life, or public health and welfare.

- Over 80% of the waters assessed in Wisconsin are attaining their water quality standards.
- Twenty-two waterbodies are slated for delisting, with a total of 37 pollutant listings removed. The majority are for phosphorus.
- There were 20 waters added to the list of Waters in Restoration for phosphorus, *E. coli*, and suspended solids.
- The Impaired Waters List grew by 51 waterbodies (81 listings); the majority of new listings are for phosphorus or degraded aquatic plants.



Comment Period

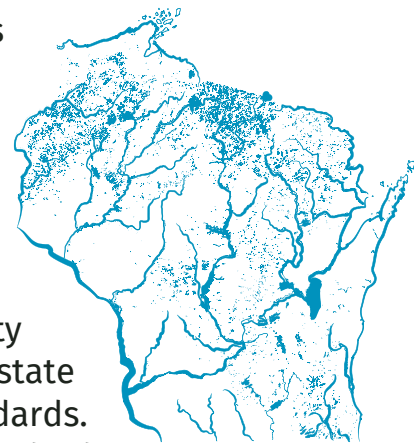
A public comment period on the 2024 draft Water Condition Lists is being held from November 6 to December 6, 2023.

Stay in the loop

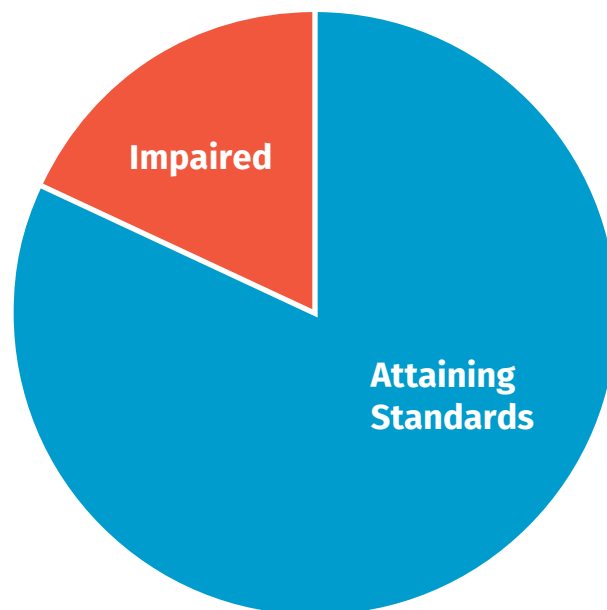
For more information regarding Wisconsin's Water Condition Lists visit: dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/SurfaceWater/ConditionLists.html

To receive future updates on Water Quality Lists, please [subscribe](#) to our mailing list.

Over 16,000 lakes and 85,000 miles of streams and rivers in Wisconsin are managed to ensure that their water quality condition meets state and federal standards. Water quality standards are the foundation of Wisconsin's water quality management program and serve to define goals for a waterbody by designating its uses, setting criteria to protect those uses, and establishing provisions to protect water quality from pollutants.



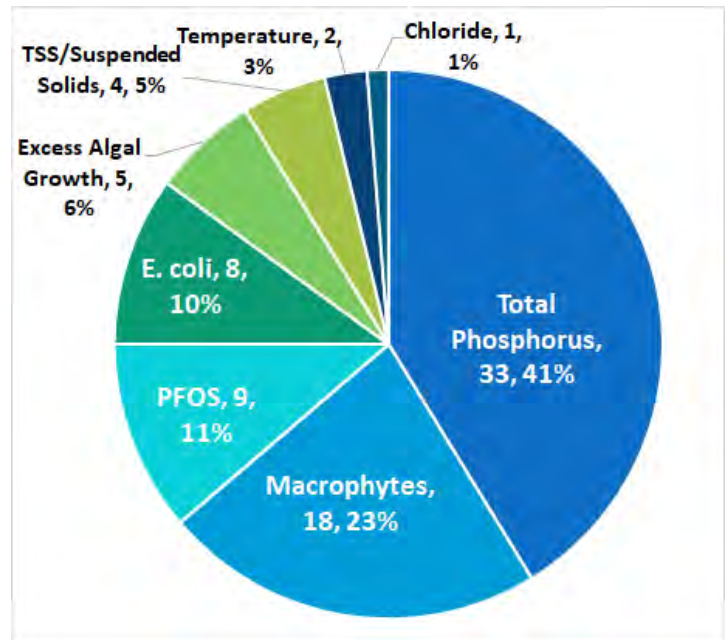
The majority of assessed waters are attaining water quality standards.



By assessing the condition of our surface waters we're taking care of our resources and protecting human health. Wisconsin is a state rich in water resources that are shared by over 5.5 million residents.

IMPAIRED WATERS LIST ADDITIONS

- Half of the new phosphorus listings have a restoration plan already in place (see below).
- Eighteen lakes are listed this year because their aquatic plants (macrophytes) are degraded. This is the first year of applying thresholds for healthy plant communities for assessing lake health.
- New PFOS listings are related either to PFOS in fish tissue, or PFOS concentrations in the water.



WATERS IN RESTORATION AND TMDL ADDITIONS

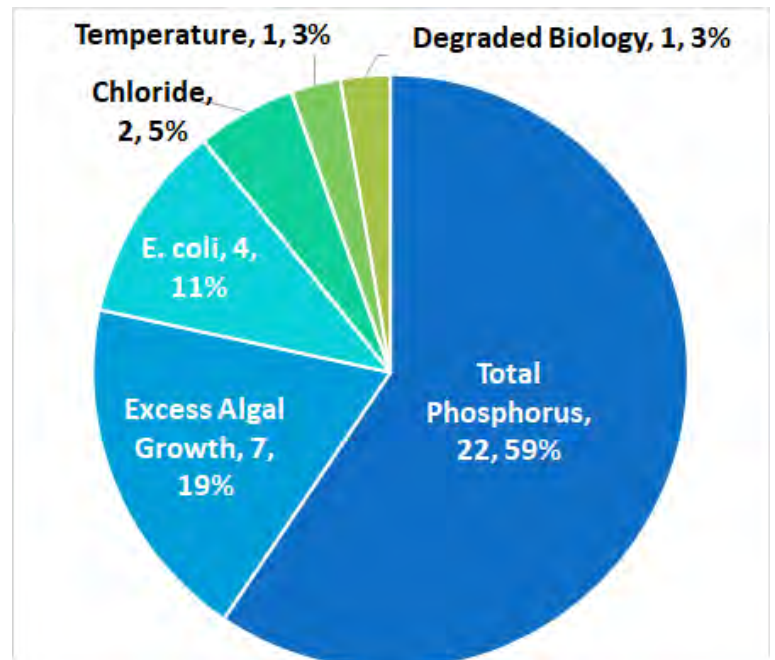
There are 17 new listings that will be placed directly on the list of Waters In Restoration. These listings are covered by existing plans called Total Maximum Daily Load Plans, or TMDLs. These listings will be added to the:

- Milwaukee River Basin TMDL (8)
- Upper Fox-Wolf Basin TMDL (5)
- Northeast Lakeshore TMDL (3)
- Wisconsin River Basin TMDL (1)

These listing additions do not change pollutant allocations within the TMDLs.

LIST DELETIONS

There are 37 former listings that are now proposed for deletion from the list. This means these waterbodies are now attaining these water quality standards. The majority of the delistings are for phosphorus and related excess algae growth. Efforts are ongoing around the state to address these types of nutrient impacts.



A water is considered to be attaining its standards when it supports:

- safe human recreation like swimming,
- healthy aquatic animal and plant communities, or
- safe fish consumption.

If any of these are not supported then the water is considered impaired.

Impaired water listings in Wisconsin have increased—but that's only half the story.

Since 2008, the number of impaired waters has increased from 738 to 1,258 in 2024. However, there are several reasons for that increase.

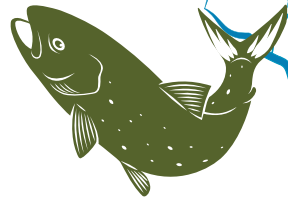
More waters assessed: Since 2008 the number of river and stream miles assessed has increased more than 80%. In addition to identifying impaired waters this has allowed for identification of waters attaining their water quality standards.

Investigating problem areas: DNR's surface water monitoring strategy includes monitoring focused on waters that DNR biologists or citizens suspect to be impaired in order to develop management plans for restoration.

FACT: Many of Wisconsin's water resources can be protected from pollution. The amount of water on our landscape alone is remarkable: nearly **17,000 lakes, 650 miles of Great Lakes shoreline, about 86,000 stream and river miles** — enough to circle the planet more than three times, and **5.3 million acres** of remaining wetlands. Most waterbodies that have been monitored and assessed for Clean Water Act purposes are attaining water quality standards. Unfortunately, we often hear about the negative impacts to waterbodies. Problems like blue-green algae blooms, declining fish populations and a continued trend of lost wetlands need not be the norm.



86,000 Miles of Streams



17,000 Lakes



5.3 Million Acres of Wetlands

650 Miles of Great Lakes Shoreline

Improving technology: Automated assessment tools allow larger datasets to be assessed. These tools assess any waters, across the entire state, that have certain types of data.

New or updated water quality criteria: Water quality criteria allow us to identify waters that have existing water quality issues and begin restoration work. Criteria help protect human health and water quality.

FAQS

Q. Does impaired mean polluted?

A. Yes, for specific pollutants.

Q. How are decisions made to list or delist?

A. Wisconsin's listing methodology (WisCALM):

Who – The state's assessment coordinator provides draft listings to regional staff for review. These are then reviewed by the public, EPA, and partners including Tribes. The list is given final approval by the EPA.

What – Evaluate all available and representative water quality data.

When – Occurs every two years.

Why – Clean Water Act requirement (sections 303(d), 305(b), 314)

Where – All waters under state jurisdiction.

Q. What do impaired waters, waters in restoration, and waters attaining standards mean?

A. Impaired – We're working on a cleanup plan, or we've sent a plan to EPA for Review

In Restoration – We have a cleanup plan and EPA has approved it

Attaining Standards– Water passes all thresholds we've looked at so far

Q. What uses are considered or prioritized?

A. Uses considered = Aquatic Life, Recreation, Public Health & Welfare (including Fish Consumption), and Wildlife uses. Aquatic Life, Recreation, and Fish Consumption are the uses most often assessed.

Q. What is the difference between a restored water and a water in restoration?

A. Restored – Category 2; attaining standards.

In Restoration – Category 4; has a plan but is not yet attaining its standards.

Q. What is the difference between deletion and delisting?

A. Deletion – A listing is removed for one pollutant but other pollutants are still present.

Delisting – All pollutants remediated.

Q. How is it determined if a waterbody is attaining standards?

A. Using the same thresholds as for Impaired Waters, and additional general assessment metrics like fish, bugs, algae, plant, and Trophic State Index, which require fewer samples for a decision.

Q. Are there exceptions to statewide thresholds?

A. Yes, because sometimes waterbodies don't fit into the model used for threshold creation. In some such cases, state biologists use professional judgment, considering background and historical information, hydrology, and biological metrics. In some cases a Site-Specific Criteria (SSC) is developed for the waterbody.

Q. What is a TMDL?

A. Total Maximum Daily Load – How much of a pollutant can this water hold without a negative impact on the system? How much do we need to reduce that pollutant load? It has been likened to a "diet plan" for a waterbody, where phosphorus = sugar.

Q. Why does the impaired waters list keep getting bigger?

A. New criteria – With a specific numeric value we are able to assess more waters for that pollutant.

Improving technology – With automation we can assess more waters.

Targeting problems - Many projects focus on investigating problem areas.

RAMIFICATIONS OF EACH IMPAIRMENT

Pollutant	Adult Health	Children's Health	Pet Health	Aquatic Life Health	Wildlife Health	Recreation/Economy
Algae	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Bacteria	☑	☑	☑		▲	☑
Chloride				☑	☑	
Aquatic Degraded Biology				☑	▲	
Habitat Alterations				☑	☑	☑
Metals	☑	☑	▲	☑	☑	▲
Oxygen Availability				☑	▲	
Phosphorus (Nutrients)				☑		
Sediment				☑	▲	
Temperature				☑		
Toxins	☑	☑	▲	☑	☑	▲
PFOS	☑	☑	▲	☑	☑	▲

☑ = main impact

▲ = possible impact (less likely than ☑)

