

News Release

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Contacts:

Mark MacIntyre, EPA Region 10 Communications, Seattle, (206) 553-7302

Mark Charles, DEQ Water Quality Division, Portland, (503) 229-5589

Brian White, Communications & Outreach, DEQ, Portland, (503) 229-6044

Information on the new Oregon water quality standards is available at:

DEQ Web site: <http://www.deq.state.or.us/wq/standards/wqstdshome.htm>

EPA Web site: www.epa.gov/r10earth/oregonwqs.htm

EPA Approves Oregon Water Quality Standards

The new standards represent a comprehensive revision of state guidelines for temperature and of policies aimed at preventing degradation of state waters

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) jointly announced today that EPA has approved DEQ's water quality standards for the state of Oregon. The revisions, which include a complete update of water temperature standards to protect salmon and trout, are the result of years of work among federal, state and tribal officials, scientists, industry, and public interest groups. The new standards go into effect immediately.

As a result of the new standards, all water quality permits in Oregon will, upon renewal, need to meet more protective targets for temperature. DEQ will also use the new temperature standards in its future listing of impaired water bodies in the state and for its issuance of pollution load limits (known as Total Maximum Daily Loads/TMDLs) for Oregon rivers and streams. The new standards will affect virtually all "point of discharge" pollution (point source) and nonpoint pollution sources in the state, including agriculture and forestry.

In addition to temperature, the new standards include methods that implement Oregon's "anti-degradation" policy. Under this policy, proposed new or increased pollution discharges must go through a water degradation review by DEQ before they're allowed to occur. The review balances the need for the discharge against the water quality degradation that might occur as a result of the discharge. The revised standards approved today clarify that policy. In addition, the new standards include revisions to criteria for inter-gravel dissolved oxygen levels for further protection of salmon and trout spawning.

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State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

**Communications
& Outreach**

811 SW 6th Ave.
Portland, OR 97204
Phone: (503) 229-5696
Toll free in OR
(800) 452-4011
Fax: (503) 229-5850



The new temperature standards lower the acceptable temperature in many rivers and streams, and raise the temperature limit for other streams, based on the latest reliable scientific data. Previously, DEQ used a temperature standard of 64 degrees Fahrenheit on most of the state's streams and rivers.

These new standards are the result of extensive public review and consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service, Pacific Northwest tribal governments, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and DEQ.

EPA's approval of the DEQ standards, which were adopted by the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission last Dec. 4, means that EPA does not need to issue final water quality standards for the state. In response to a March 2003 court decision, EPA was directed to either approve revised state standards or issue federal standards by March 2, 2004.

"These standards provide a state-of-the-art tool for local communities and watersheds. They're firmly grounded in current science, easier to understand, and will continue the protection and recovery of the state's endangered salmon and trout species," said Holly Schroeder, administrator of DEQ's Water Quality Division. "These new standards are an important step in addressing the endangered species issue and improving water quality overall in Oregon."

One new feature of the new water quality temperature standards is that DEQ will now be able to work with comprehensive watershed maps that identify temperature requirements for each water body in the state. This will enable water quality officials get a better handle on when and where the new temperature rules are in effect for specific sections of rivers and streams. In the past, this link between specific water bodies and temperature requirements was vague. The maps are accessible on DEQ's Web site. DEQ worked closely with EPA, NOAA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in compiling the maps, with much of the data coming from information provided by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

DEQ Director Stephanie Hallock: "Today's action is the culmination of long-term efforts between EPA, federal fisheries agencies, DEQ and others to address serious water quality and fish habitat issues in Oregon and make significant improvements. Our work in improving water quality in Oregon is a continuing challenge, and we're happy that EPA has approved these standards and hope to build on this as a model for future water quality improvement projects."

EPA Regional Administrator John Iani (Region 10 – Seattle): "I salute the scientists, agency staff, environmental groups, industry, tribes and all those who have worked on the temperature problem for the past several years. Their combined efforts have brought Oregon these new water quality/temperature standards that are truly 'the best in the business.' Now it's time to put the debate over standards to rest, and get on with the even more important task of making improvements in water temperatures to meet these new standards. That work will again demand the best of all of us."

Timeline of actions leading to today's approval of state water quality standards

- **1967:** State Sanitary Authority (now DEQ) first uses temperature standards as a means of monitoring water quality in the Willamette River.
- **Mid 1970s:** Oregon Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) adopts first statewide

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temperature standards for water quality.

- **January 1996:** EQC adopts revised DEQ temperature water quality standards for state waters.
- **July 1999:** EPA approves DEQ water quality standards for temperature.
- **April 2001:** Northwest Environmental Advocates files a lawsuit in federal district court, alleging that EPA improperly approved DEQ's temperature standards in 1999 and claiming that the standards do not meet requirements of the federal Endangered Species Act and federal Clean Water Act.
- **March 2003:** Court agrees with Northwest Environmental Advocates and orders EPA to adopt revised water quality standards by approving revised DEQ standards or its own revised standards by March 2, 2004.
- **April 2003:** EPA Region 10 Office issues guidance to Pacific Northwest state agencies and tribes for developing water temperature standards. This guidance was based on three years of work by EPA, DEQ and other state, federal and tribal parties to develop a better understanding of the science of water temperature and salmon in the Northwest.
- **May 2003:** DEQ holds informational meetings with the public statewide to get feedback on the need for revising the water quality standards.
- **June 2003:** DEQ begins its rule-writing process for revising existing water quality standards.
- **September 2003:** DEQ holds 10 public hearings throughout Oregon to gather public comment on its proposed water quality standard revisions. Official public comment period runs from Aug. 15 through Oct. 3, 2003.
- **October 2003:** EPA holds public hearings and opens public comment period on its own proposed revisions of state water quality standards in Oregon.
- **Dec. 4, 2003:** (After DEQ makes final changes to its proposed revisions), the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission unanimously approves DEQ's proposed water quality standards.
- **Dec. 10, 2003:** DEQ submits its proposed water quality standards to EPA for final review.
- **Feb. 23-24, 2004:** National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issue biological opinions stating that the new Oregon water quality standards meet federal Endangered Species Act requirements.
- **March 2, 2004:** EPA approves revised water quality standards that mainly address temperature and anti-degradation policy changes.

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