

2008 DRAFT 303(d) List Analysis for the Tri-Cities Area of Northeast Tennessee

The 303(d) list is prepared every two years by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation and every similar office in each state in the nation. The report is required by the EPA and it lists all of Tennessee’s waters that are too polluted or full of sediment for public uses. Each stream has designated uses for humans like fishing, swimming, boating and others for biodiversity and trout populations. Designated uses are assigned to waters, and the water is listed as impaired if it is unsafe or impossible to use the water as intended. Designated uses are generally a reflection of historical or “existing” uses. The people of the state own the water in trust and have a right to clean water and streams and lakes. This is codified in Tennessee law.

Some streams are considered to be “Outstanding Water Resources of the State” and TDEC can’t permit pollution discharges into those waters. Other streams get different levels of protection, and the resulting inputs from permitted or non-point sources degrade the water quality. When the water quality is too poor for people to use it as intended, it is placed on the 303(d) list for greater protection. On the list, the waters that are assessed are listed in a category that says how clean they are based on the designated use criteria.

Table 1. 303(d) List Attainment Categories

Category 1	Waterbody or waterbody segment meets all designated uses.
Category 2	Waterbody or waterbody segment meets some designated uses, but data are not available in order to determine whether all uses are being met.
Category 3	Insufficient data exists to determine whether any uses are being met.
Category 4A	One or more uses are not being met. However, TMDLs have been completed and approved for all listed pollutants.
Category 4B	One or more uses are not being met. However, a TMDL is not needed because compliance with water quality standards will be achieved in the short-term by a more traditional approach, such as permitting or enforcement.
Category 4C	One or more uses are not being met. However, the impairment is not being caused by a pollutant.
Category 5	One or more uses are not being met. A TMDL is needed for the listed pollutants.

Though the list comes out every two (2) years, the watersheds in the state are split into five (5) different groups. TDEC measures pollution in the streams of one or two groups for each report, and returns to that group 5 years later to reassess. For the 2008 303(d) List TDEC reassessed watershed groups 4 and 5. The South Fork Holston and Watauga River Watersheds of Northeastern Tennessee are not included in either group.

Impairment

202.63 miles impaired and polluted waters in the South Fork Holston Watershed (which contains Kingsport and Bristol)

175.26 miles impaired and polluted waters in the Watauga River Watershed (which contains Johnson City)

At least 60 streams in Northeastern Tennessee are on the proposed 2008 303(d) list. A significant amount of the designations are Category 5, which means too polluted or disturbed for at least one public to use as intended. None of the streams listed in 2006 were removed due to improvement.

A TMDL is the total maximum daily load, or the amount of a particular pollutant, that can be added to the stream before the water quality degrades. A TMDL is developed if the only way to improve the water quality it is fit for the designated uses is to set limit for a pollutant, and then limit each source to a percentage of the pollution. In some cases this is a decrease of 5% of the pollution from a source and sometimes a 95% reduction is necessary.

Some pollution can make people sick and kill animals and plants. The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation posts advisories for bacteria and fish that can't be eaten due to the pollution in the water. These are listed in the 303(d) list as well as on the web site (April 2007).

Bacteriological Advisories in Tennessee

Streams in Northeastern Tennessee with bacterial advisories:

- Beaver Creek in Bristol: 20 miles listed due to nonpoint source pollution
- Cash Hollow Creek in Washington County: Septic Tank Failures
- Sinking Creek in Washington County: Agricultural and Urban Runoff

Fish tissue advisories

- Entirety of Boone Reservoir (4,400 acres) for PCBs and Chlordane. Precautionary advisory for Catfish and Carp.
- South Holston Reservoir due to mercury. Precautionary advisory for largemouth bass.
- Entirety of Watauga Reservoir (6,427 acres) due to mercury. Precautionary advisory for largemouth bass and channel catfish.

Tri-Cities Area

As the chart below indicates, the greatest pollution in the Tri-Cities area is caused by pasture grazing, Municipal Storm Sewer System (MS4) area pollution, and channelization. There may be multiple sources of pollution in the stream. In these combined cause groups, the data given doesn't allow separation to identify which use is the predominant cause of the pollution and which have a smaller contribution. The TN Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) attributes sediment as the state's number one source of pollution to our rivers, streams, and lakes. Sediment carried in water increases flooding, impacts water supplies and navigation, degrades aquatic habitat and transports chemicals. Channelization, hydromodification, pasture grazing and grading for development all promote transport of sediment into streams.

Table 2. Contributing Causes of Pollution by River Miles Affected

	Listed as only cause	Listed as partial cause
Channelization	21.71	41.8
Pasture Grazing	71.21	140.44
MS4	70.26	154.42

Definitions:

MS4

Tennessee's Municipal Storm Sewer System (MS4) Phase II Permit is given by the state, to small municipalities, to control pollution going into our waters. In particular, it is designed to control pollution that flows into our streams from development, such as sediment or mud.

Channelization

The subset "channelization" is the actual alteration of the stream substrate.

Examples of listings for South Fork Holston and Watauga River Watersheds

- Cedar Creek
11.8 stream miles of Cedar Creek are listed in the 2008 Draft 303(d) List for loss of biological integrity due to siltation, Escherichia coli levels, nitrates, and other anthropogenic habitat alterations resulting from contributions as an MS4 and land development. Cedar Creek is a Category 5 stream.
- Booher Creek
7.2 miles are listed for Escherichia coli levels due solely to pasture grazing. Booher Creek is a Category 5 stream.
- Reedy Creek
10.7 miles are listed for nitrates, physical substrate alterations, and loss of biological integrity due to siltation. These listings are a result of pasture grazing, discharges from the MS4, and channelization. Booher Creek is a Category 5 stream.

Actions Items

1. Eliminating nutrients and sediment
 - a. Good construction management practice are available on TDEC's web site
 - b. As the TMDLs are formed for each stream reach, TDEC must provide permits to allocate the available assimilative capacity of the waters. Then each discharger can discharge only a set amount into the stream.
 - c. Builders are allowed to get a permit under a general permit from the state. These permits require Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plans, but no monitoring requirements. The legislature should require monitoring and water testing for sites that are near 303(d) listed streams, those over a certain size, or other protective criteria.
 - d. MS4 Permit requirements must be diligently enforcement and implemented. These requirements are designed to limit the amount of sediment or mud entering our streams.
2. Preventing Sewage overflows
 - a. Collection systems have to record and report the nutrient levels in the effluent, but are not limited in their permits. The permits focus on sediments, toxins and pathogens. Sewage treatment plants (STPs) that are contributing to a condition of pollution are at risk for fines that could increase the cost of sewage services to the community without improving streams.
 - b. State Revolving Fund money is available for sewage treatment plants that need to do repairs or increase capacity for existing flows. The money is given by the EPA to create low interest loans to repair failing infrastructure and keep our streams healthy.
3. Enforcement Actions
 - a. Stronger permit monitoring and fast, efficient and fair (to all affected parties) enforcement of permit violations. TDEC has recently launched an accelerated enforcement program that preapproves up to \$15,000 in fines for permitted activities that are causing pollution. Unfortunately, TDEC monitors primarily in

response to complaints, so community members have to call or write to their county and state officials to instigate inspections.

- b. The legislature passed a Stop Work Order bill so that TDEC can immediately shut down mining operations that are non-compliant and causing water pollution.
- c. TCWN developed legislation which was introduced in the 2008 Legislature. These bills will help reduce pollution loading in our streams.
 - i. **Green Design Bill** (HB3965/SB3956): Provides incentives for developers to incorporate water quality practices in their designs and buildings.
 - ii. **Stop Work Orders Bill** (HB3521/SB3651): Provides TDEC the authority to issue a stop work order when permit requirements are not being met for all water quality impact potentials.