

Water Quality Standards

FACT SHEET

OWRB
the water agency

The Oklahoma Water Quality Standards (WQS) serve as the cornerstone of the state's water quality management programs. The OWRB is designated by state statute as the agency responsible for promulgating WQS and developing or assisting the other environmental agencies with implementation framework. The WQS are published in Oklahoma Administrative Code Title 785, Chapter 45 (OAC 785:45) and consist of three main components:

- Designation of Beneficial Uses,
- Water quality criteria to protect the designated uses, and
- Antidegradation policies.

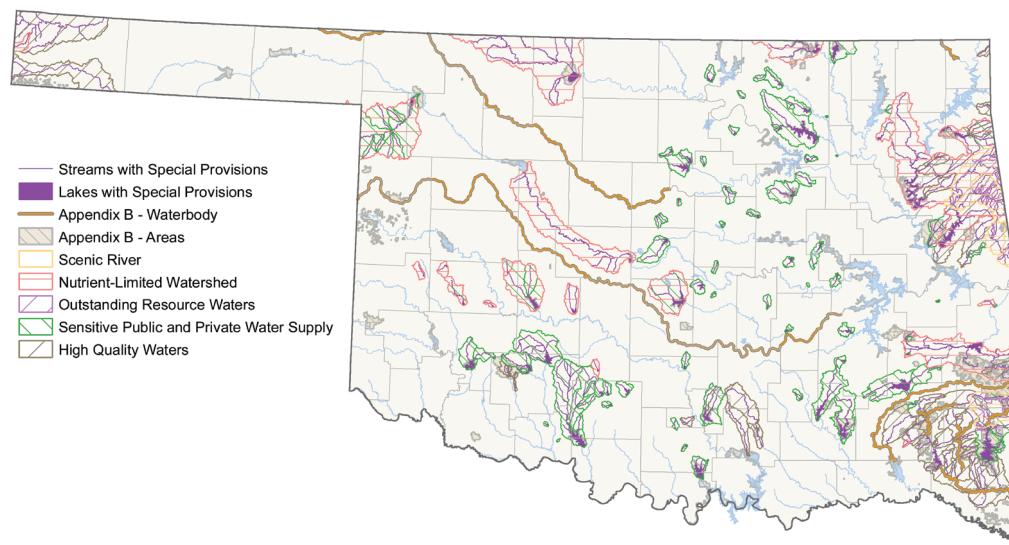
Although all Oklahoma surface water receives broad protection through the WQS, explicit protection is afforded to approximately 27,000 stream and river miles, 650,000 lake surface acres, and all groundwaters of the state that have a mean concentration of Total Dissolved Solids of 10,000 milligrams per liter or less.

The designation of appropriate beneficial uses to each of the state's waterbodies is a requirement of the federal Clean Water Act. Based on physical, chemical, and biological characteristics, as well as geographical setting, scenic qualities, and economic considerations, appropriate uses for each waterbody are identified by considering use and value for the following:

- public water supply;
- protection of fish, shellfish, and wildlife; and
- recreational, agricultural, industrial, and navigational purposes.

For each waterbody, the assigned beneficial uses have water quality criteria, implementation methods, and antidegradation policies which must include the maintenance and protection of existing uses and water quality conditions necessary to support such uses.

Waterbodies and Watersheds with Special Provisions Including Appendix B Tables 1 & 2



Surface Water Protection

The Oklahoma Water Quality Standards (OWQS) provide protection for surface waters in many ways.

Appendix B Areas are designated in the OWQS as containing waters of recreational and/or ecological significance. Discharges to waterbodies may be limited in these areas.

Source Water Protection Areas are derived from the state's Source Water Protection Program, which analyzes existing and potential threats to the quality of public drinking water in Oklahoma.

The **High Quality Waters** designation in the OWQS refers to waters that exhibit water quality exceeding levels necessary to support the propagation of fishes, shellfishes, wildlife, and recreation in and on the water. This designation prohibits any new point source discharges or additional load or increased concentration of specified pollutants.

The **Sensitive Water Supplies (SWS)** designation applies to public and private water supplies possessing conditions making them more susceptible to pollution events, thus requiring additional protection. This designation restricts point source discharges in the watershed and institutes a 10 µg/L (micrograms per liter) chlorophyll-a criterion to protect against taste and odor problems and reduce water treatment costs.

Outstanding Resource Waters are those constituting outstanding resources or of exceptional recreational and/or ecological significance. This designation prohibits any new point source discharges or additional load or increased concentration of specified pollutants.

Waters designated as **Scenic Rivers** in Appendix A of the OWQS are protected through restrictions on point source discharges in the watershed. A 0.037 mg/L total phosphorus criterion is applied to all Scenic Rivers in Oklahoma.

Nutrient-Limited Watersheds are those containing a waterbody with a designated beneficial use that is adversely affected by excess nutrients.

Beneficial use designations are found in Appendix A of OAC 785:45. Here you will find a list of waterbodies in Oklahoma and their beneficial uses. If a waterbody is not listed in Appendix A, that means it has been assigned default beneficial uses, including Agriculture, Aesthetics, Fish and Wildlife Propagation (Warm Water Aquatic Community Subcategory), and Primary Body Contact Recreation.

Through assignment of as many beneficial uses as are attainable, the WQS ensure that existing water quality is not unduly impacted. Science-based narrative and numerical criteria imposed in the WQS ensure attainment of beneficial uses while limiting waste and pollution of state waters. For waterbodies that have quality greater than that required to protect beneficial uses (such as Scenic Rivers, some municipal water supply lakes, and water possessing critical habitat for endangered species), the anti-degradation policies provide more stringent protection and are designed to keep water quality from declining in these areas.

Water Quality Standards Implementation

The OWRB also promulgates WQS implementation rules, which provide consistent application of numeric and narrative criteria. As in development of the WQS themselves, an extensive public participation process is utilized to ensure that the state's water quality management process strikes an appropriate balance between environmental protection and sound public policy.

All state agencies are currently required to implement Oklahoma's Water Quality Standards within the scope of their jurisdiction through the development of an Implementation Plan specific for their agency. This allows the WQS to be utilized by other state agencies in the performance of their statutory responsibilities to manage water quality or to facilitate best management practice initiatives. The WQS implementation rules are found in OAC Title 785, Chapter 46.

Public Role in Standards Revision Process

The Clean Water Act requires states to review their water quality standards at least once every three years. Public meetings and hearings held during this review period provide an opportunity for citizens to become involved. A series of monthly meetings are usually held from August through November each year, where specific topics proposed for revision can be discussed informally. Everyone is invited to attend these meetings and provide input.

During or after the informal meetings series, a Notice of Rulemaking Intent is published in the Oklahoma Register. After it is published, the official comment period lasts at least 45 days and ends with a formal public hearing. During this time, you may submit oral or written comments to the OWRB regarding the revisions.

For information on the national program and WQS history visit <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/standards/>

After the comment period, the proposed revisions are considered and acted upon by the OWRB members. Revisions that are adopted by the OWRB are submitted to the Governor and Legislature for review and approval.

If and when approved, the new WQS become effective as State standards, and are then submitted to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for review and approval as Federal standards.

If you are interested in participating in the Water Quality Standards revision process, here are some opportunities that will help you stay informed and become involved.

- Request to be placed on the standards revision mailing list by completing and returning the form below.
- Visit the standards revision web page at www.owrb.ok.gov/quality often to keep updated about the informal meeting dates, times, and topics and to get copies of the justification documents presented in the meetings.
- Attend and participate in standards revision meetings and keep informed about current revision topics.
- Submit oral or written comments during the official comment period stating whether you approve or disapprove of proposed revisions.

We depend on public input for a successful revision process. Your presence at standards revision meetings and your comments are always welcome!

For more information about the Oklahoma Water Quality Standards program please visit us online.

www.owrb.ok.gov/quality



Standards Revision Mailing List

Individuals and organizations on the Water Quality Standards mailing list receive notices of the dates, times, and topics of informal meetings, as well as a copy of the official Notice of Rulemaking Intent when it is published.

Email pubinfo@owrb.ok.gov to join the Water Quality Standards mailing list.