

Arizona's Prioritization Criteria  
February 16, 2016

In late 2013 the EPA, in consultation with states, finalized a new Long-Term Vision for Assessment, Restoration and Protection under the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) Program. One of the goals of the vision is Prioritization which reads "for the 2016 integrated reporting cycle and beyond, States review, systematically prioritize, and report priority watersheds or waters for restoration and protection in their biennial integrated reports to facilitate State strategic planning for achieving water quality goals.

In 2013 ADEQ began reviewing internal programs and policies to determine how our processes could be made more efficient leading to greater environmental benefit. One outcome was to combine the TMDL and 319 programs in order to implement the right improvement projects as quickly as possible. There are several other programs across ADEQ's Water Quality Division that share responsibilities for implementing portions of our nonpoint source program. Integration encourages interactions, even with programs that control point source discharges to surface water. Within the Surface Water Section the TMDL and 319 programs are housed within the Watershed Protection Unit allowing for common goals to be set, shared and actively worked toward for each program. Coordination between internal programs looks at water body and watershed prioritization based on many factors, including:

- Local interest in implementing projects
- Human health concerns
- Ecosystem health including ecological risk
- The beneficial uses of water
- Value of the watershed or groundwater basin to the public
- Vulnerability of the surface to additional environmental degradation
- Implement-ability
- Likelihood of achieving demonstrable environmental results
- Extent of alliance with other federal agencies (e.g. National Water Quality Initiative) and states to coordinate resources and actions
- Readiness to proceed
- Emergency response needs (for example, in response to wildfires)

ADEQ has committed to an approach of identifying Targeted Watersheds, determining what needs to be done to address the problems in those areas, and implementing strategies to restore accordingly. Watersheds that display a strong combination of these factors may be prioritized as Targeted Watersheds where staff and financial resources will be allocated to implement and document water quality improvements. Arizona's current Targeted Watersheds and pollutants of concern are:

- San Francisco River/Blue River watershed (Blue River from headwaters to San Francisco River, San
- Francisco River from Blue River to Limestone Gulch and from Limestone Gulch to the Gila River; *E. coli*)
- Granite Creek watershed (headwaters to Watson Lake; nutrients and *E. coli*)
- Oak Creek watershed (headwaters to Spring Creek and the Spring Creek drainage; *E. coli*)

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- San Pedro River watershed (Babocomari River to Dragoon Wash; *E. coli*)
- Little Colorado River Headwaters watershed (West Fork LCR to Lyman Lake; sediment/turbidity)
- Santa Cruz River watershed (Mexico border to Sapor Wash; *E. coli*)
- Boulder Creek watershed (Wilder Creek to Butte Creek; arsenic, copper, and zinc)
- Tonto Creek (headwaters to unnamed tributary) and Christopher Creek (headwaters to Tonto Creek) watershed (*E. coli*, phosphorus, low dissolved oxygen, and nitrogen)

The strong focus on sediment and *E. coli* impairments reflects the level of interest of the general public and agency partners in addressing these issues. Sediment concerns are closely tied to agricultural producers' concerns regarding soil loss and improved grazing. *E. coli* impairments garner interest due to their potential impact on human health, particularly in areas where recreating in the water is common.

In addition to these Targeted Watersheds, ADEQ has also identified a Master Target List (MTL) of impaired waters which are tracked as part of agency and state level performance measures:

- ADEQ Water Quality Performance Measure: Document improved water quality in 50% of monitored waters (*defined as the waters on the MTL*) over five years.
- Governor's Scorecard Water Quality Performance Measure: Reduce the number of impaired waters on the Master Target List from 64 to 34 by restoring waters to meet Surface Water Quality Standards.

The MTL contains 109 individual pollutant/water body combinations (including those identified as Targeted Watersheds above) that ADEQ anticipates being able to document water quality improvements in by 2020. These waters are prioritized for effectiveness monitoring and restoration activities. The full list of MTL waters is published in Arizona's 5-Year Nonpoint Source Management Plan.

ADEQ is currently developing prioritization criteria for protecting unimpaired waters which may result in updated the overall prioritization criteria.