



DRAFT Prioritization Goal

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

1/20/16

1.1. Prioritization Goal

The intent of the Prioritization Goal is to express the TMDL Program priorities in the context of the State's broader, overall water quality goals. The TMDL Program translates state water quality standards into pollution reduction targets in impaired waterbodies for planning and regulatory purposes including point source permitting and nonpoint source management programs as well as other programs outside the CWA. Prioritization provides a method for strategically focusing the location and timing of TMDL development (and/or alternative restoration efforts) in a manner that will hopefully increase the pace and number of waterbodies that are restored to a healthy condition each year.

New Hampshire is in the process of developing a TMDL priority framework that is a transparent collaborative process in which the public can easily access the information, and clearly understand and contribute to how the State prioritizes waters for TMDL development and other purposes such as protection of healthy waters. The prioritization framework will provide the foundation to guide planning and implementation of TMDLs as well as other CWA programs (e.g., the section 319 Nonpoint Source Program) that are impacted by section 303(d) of the CWA. This will be accomplished by using a multi-agency team to collaboratively discuss and evaluate waterbodies of concern, develop planning strategies and make priority decisions (see the Integration Goal in section 3.5 for further details).

The prioritization framework will use a matrix of weighted metrics to prioritize impaired and threatened waters based on collaborative decision making. As discussed below, the Resource Potential Screening Tool (RPST) will be used to conduct this initial evaluation, followed by detailed data review and collaboration with other programs and local stakeholders, to prepare a prioritized list of waters that should have TMDLs and/or alternative restoration plans developed. The matrix will include input from the DES Surface Water Quality Assessment program (see section 3.1) in order to identify particular pollutants and/or geographic areas that may warrant attention and input from the NHDES Watershed Assistance Section which administers the CWA section 319 Nonpoint Source program (i.e., the 319 NPS Program), and other restoration efforts. Other agencies such as the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (NHFGD), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), United States Geological Survey (USGS), and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) could be incorporated into this decision matrix to potentially identify additional technical and financial resources that could be directed to restoring or protecting specific waterbodies. Local stakeholder groups will also be invited to contribute to the prioritization process (this is discussed in more depth under the Integration Goal in section 3.5).



DRAFT Prioritization Goal
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1/20/16

The Recovery Potential Screening Tool (RPST)

The Recovery Potential Screening Tool (RPST) is a systematic, comparative method for identifying differences among watersheds that may influence their relative likelihood to be successfully restored or protected. It was developed by the EPA Office of Water as a flexible, user-driven screening tool to help States and others compare impaired waters more quickly and efficiently and set priorities for investing limited restoration resources. The RPST approach involves:

- identifying a group of watersheds to be compared and a specific purpose for comparison,
- selecting appropriate indicators in three categories (Ecological, Stressor, and Social),
- calculating index values for the watersheds, and
- applying the results as part of strategic planning and prioritization.

RPST is an excel-based spreadsheet tool that was designed on a HUC 12 basis (although the tool can be modified for smaller or larger HUCs). The spreadsheet is embedded with a data table that includes 21 Base, 47 Ecological, 98 Stressor, and 41 Social indicator metrics, totaling 207 indicator metrics that can be chosen. These indicators can be run on all the State's HUC 12s or a subset, and the user can select the indicators (typically 3 to 10 per group) most relevant to their screening purpose. Other attributes derived from field monitoring that are geo-referenced to waterbodies or watersheds (such as selected impairment-specific 303(d) and TMDL data), are also included. RPST also allows the user to add more indicators to the data table, which allows for flexibility in its use.

The tool includes a worksheet that lists all of the indicators and brief descriptions to aid in the understanding and transparency of its use. RPST performs all calculations automatically and generates the results for every watershed including index scores and watershed rank. It also automatically generates a graphic bubble plot display and a HUC12 Statewide map. The RPST was successfully used by the DES 319 NPS program in 2014 to identify priority projects for their 5 Year Management Plan¹.

¹ The NHDES Draft Nonpoint Source Management Plan and Appendix (which contains information on the use of the RPST) can be found at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wmb/was/nps-plan.htm>.



DRAFT Prioritization Goal
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Primary indicators that are currently in the RPST tool to help prioritize the list of potential TMDL and/or alternative restoration plans projects are provided below:

- Public health risk;
- Existence of interested stakeholder group(s);
- Location of impairment in relation to the synoptic and confirmation monitoring rotational basin assessment strategy;
- Prioritization of alternative strategies for impairments that have approved (or are developing) Watershed Implementation Plans (WIP's) and/or Watershed Based Plans (WBP's);
- Relative severity of impairment/impact;
- Amount, age and quality of data available to develop TMDLs;
- Availability of funding for either TMDL development or alternative strategies;

To research and provide index values for each of the above indicators in RPST, for all waters of interest, is typically very time-consuming. Therefore, in most cases DES envisions a two-step process to select priority waters for TMDL and or restoration plan development. That is, indicators for which data is most readily available will be assigned an RPST index value. These indicators typically include indicators 1 through 4 above (although it could include other indicators, if information is readily available). This data will then be input and run in the RPST model to narrow the field of potential candidates. Once the field is narrowed, DES will then proceed with a more thorough review of the available data for the priority waters predicted by RPST to see if conditions have changed and/or if there is sufficient data to conduct a TMDL or alternative restoration plan. DES will also confirm if funding is available and that assumptions used for the other indicators are appropriate. This information will then be used to generate a final, prioritized list of waters that are recommended by DES for development of TMDLs and or alternative restoration plans.

Action Items

- 1) Develop the TMDL Program Prioritization Framework in 2015.
- 2) Modify the RPST and begin using it for TMDL prioritization in 2015.



New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES)

DRAFT Prioritization Goal

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1/20/16

- 3) In accordance with the new CWA 303(d) Measure (WQ 27²), identify priority areas for TMDL development or alternative restoration actions in 2015.
- 4) Beginning in 2016, review proposed priorities with staff from other DES programs and update priorities (and the RPST) as needed on an annual basis.
- 5) Beginning in 2016, use the results of TMDL Program Prioritization Framework to create annual workplans and to inform the EPA Performance Partnership Grant (PPG) Priorities and Commitments list.
- 6) Continue working with the DES 319 NPS program to more closely align priorities.

Possible Future Action Items (pending the availability of resources):

- Identify priority areas where protection approaches for unimpaired waters can be developed to maintain water quality standards (see section 3.3).
- Develop an on-line system for public input where the public can nominate waterbodies to be prioritized for development of TMDLs or alternative strategies (and, if appropriate, add this metric to the RPST).
- Reach out to external organizations such as Regional Planning Commissions, Watershed Associations and other stakeholder groups to solicit feedback on the process and encourage engagement.
- Work to better align priorities with other programs, agencies, organizations and stakeholders.

² For information regarding measure WQ-27, see http://water.epa.gov/resource_performance/planning/FY-2015-NWPG-Measure-Definitions-Water-Quality.cfm