



## Antidegradation

Federal regulations require states to develop antidegradation policies to protect existing and designated beneficial uses of surface waters. Idaho's antidegradation policy establishes three tiers of water quality protection.

### Tier I

Tier I maintains and protects existing uses and water quality conditions necessary to support such uses. Where an [existing use](#) is established, it must be protected even if it is not listed in the water quality standards as a designated use. Tier I requirements are applicable to all surface waters.

### Tier II

Tier II maintains and protects "high-quality" waters—water bodies where existing conditions are better than necessary to support Clean Water Act "fishable/swimmable" uses. Water quality may be lowered in Tier II waters, but only with public review of the necessity for degradation and social and economic importance of the activity. In no case may water quality be lowered to a level that would interfere with existing or designated uses.

### Tier III

Tier III maintains and protects water quality in outstanding resource waters (ORWs). Except for certain temporary changes, water quality cannot be lowered in such waters. ORWs generally include the highest quality waters of the United States. However, the ORW classification also offers special protection for waters of exceptional ecological significance, such as those that are ecologically important, unique, or sensitive. Decisions regarding which water bodies qualify to be ORWs are made by states and authorized tribes. In Idaho, designation as an ORW requires legislative action. Though several waters in Idaho have been considered for ORW recognition at various times, none have yet been legislatively approved.