



Watershed Advisory Group (WAG)

Watershed advisory groups (WAGs) are groups of citizens that provide the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) with local public input and guidance regarding specific watersheds during Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) development and related processes. TMDLs are water quality improvement plans that establish a pollutant budget for a given waterbody. The WAG provides an opportunity for interested citizens and industry to be involved with the process from start to finish. This includes advising DEQ on developing and implementing TMDL water quality improvement plans.

WAG Membership

Idaho Statute §39-3615 requires that WAG membership reflect a balanced representation of citizen/industry interests in the watershed. The size of WAGs varies with community/industry interest and the complexity of the issues in the watershed. As appropriate, WAG members include representatives from the agriculture, mining, forest products, livestock, water-based recreation industries, point source dischargers, local government, Native American tribes, environmental groups, and affected land management or regulatory agencies. A person does not need to be a water quality expert to serve on a WAG. Individuals who live or work within a watershed have invaluable knowledge of the area and the watershed.

There are opportunities for formal and informal WAG participation. Formal participation is by appointed members—appointed by the DEQ Director after receiving input from the appropriate basin advisory group. Informal participation is by non-appointed WAG members. WAG meetings are always open public meetings that anyone is welcome to attend. All attendees' input is valued.

WAG Responsibilities

WAGs advise DEQ on a range of water quality issues and help identify local concerns regarding water quality. They provide qualitative and quantitative data and address the relevance of anecdotal information.

Key responsibilities of WAGs include:

- Advise the TMDL authors at DEQ on matters of concern to the community
- Share information on water quality issues
- Help identify possible water quality problems in the watershed
- Advise on pollution reduction allocations among contributors
- Recommend specific actions needed to effectively control sources of pollution
- Help develop and implement water quality improvement projects

A WAG usually meets once every two months. However, when important decisions are being made on issues such as load allocations, a WAG may meet more frequently. The WAG's involvement continues through the implementation phase of the TMDL.

To the degree possible, DEQ tries to incorporate WAG recommendations into the TMDL. A TMDL supported by the community is far more likely to succeed during implementation than one without support. However, in some cases, WAG recommendations conflict with regulatory or statutory requirements. If there is a disagreement, the WAG will have opportunities to document its position.

5-Year Review

Five-year reviews address the water bodies in a subbasin that are in Category 4a of Idaho's most recent Integrated Report. Five-year reviews outline the appropriateness of beneficial uses, water quality criteria, TMDL targets, pollutant allocations, and other assumptions of the TMDL. The review describes the current water quality status, pollutant sources, and recent pollution control efforts in the subbasin. The 5-year review process may also recommend delistings or TMDL revisions to incorporate updated information. The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is responsible for reviewing and re-evaluating each Total Maximum Daily Load according to Idaho Code §39-3611(7).

Little Salmon River WAG

The Little Salmon River WAG was initially formed in May of 2004 and regularly met over the development of multiple TMDLs, Five-Year reviews, and Implementation Plans within the Little Salmon River Subbasin. However, since the last Implementation plan was completed in 2016, no official WAG meetings have been held. In accordance with Idaho Code [39-3615](#), DEQ is re-forming the Little Salmon WAG to advise the agency on water quality topics. The IDEQ intends to provide the opportunity for past and new members alike to serve on the WAG that will advise DEQ during the development of a five-year review of water bodies in the subbasin. Regular meetings will be held in the New Meadows area, and all meetings will be open to the public. There will be many opportunities to share information and have open communication.

To get involved, ask questions, or share ideas, please contact Rachel Lindsey at (208) 373-0551 or email rachel.lindsey@deq.idaho.gov.