Clean Water

Under the Clean Water Act, water bodies in the US are classified whether they meet standards established in the act, for either drinking water supply, recreation, aquatic life, agriculture or wetlands. Water bodies that fail to meet the standards for their use classification require remedial efforts to bring them into compliance.

Why is this important?

Protecting water quality and balancing the competing demands on this limited resource for current and future generations is important for the health of the environment, welfare of our citizens and the economic well-being of our state. Water quality standards are established to protect the five use classifications: drinking water supply, recreation, aquatic life, agriculture and wetlands.

The most recent assessment completed in 2010 showed a slight majority of stream/river miles, but a minority of lake/reservoir acres, currently meet water quality standards. Efforts to maintain current water quality where standards are met must continue, but more resources are needed to restore water bodies where standards are not met. The population of Colorado is projected to increase by 39 percent over the next three decades and will increase the demands and pressure on all water resources.

Where are we?

Baseline Measurement (2010):

	River and Streams Total Miles	Lakes and Reservoirs Total Acres
Meet Standards	51.6%	30.1%
Do Not Meet Standards	12.0%	30.9%
Insufficient Data	36.4%	39.0%

Source: 2010 Clean Water 305(b) report to EPA

Where do we want to be?

Colorado 2016 Target: 60 percent of river/stream miles meet standards.
40 percent of lakes/reservoirs meet standards.

What is being done?

Improvement will be pursued by focusing on two primary functions –protect existing water quality and restore water bodies that do not meet water quality standards. Existing water quality will be protected primarily through targeting of point source (facilities that discharge wastewater through a pipe or other conduit to state waters) permitting, engineering, compliance and enforcement activities in areas where water quality improvement best can be achieved. Water bodies that do not meet standards will be restored primarily through focus on pollutant sources that cause the problems. The majority of these pollutants originate from nonpoint sources (sources of pollutants that are unregulated under the Clean Water Act because they do not enter state waters through a pipe of other conduit), which are not subject to regulatory requirements. Poor water quality will be restored primarily through targeting of federal and state funding of voluntary local actions to implement appropriate pollution reduction projects.

High-risk groups

- Customers of drinking water whose source does not meet a protective standard
- Citizens and visitors that recreate in streams and reservoirs where a standard such as for microbiological contamination is not met
- Aquatic life that are impacted by poor water quality
- Agricultural water users whose crops and/or livestock are affected by poor quality water
- Users of water where water quality will be degraded by increased discharges of pollutants due to population growth

Underlying causes

Regulated human-caused sources of pollution include:

- wastewater treatment plants
- stormwater runoff
- large animal feedking operations

Unregulated sources include:

- abandoned mines
- irrigated land