

### **303(d) Restoration Prioritization Strategy**

In December 2013, EPA announced a new framework for implementing the CWA Section 303(d) Program — *A Long-Term Vision for Assessment, Restoration, and Protection under the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) Program*. The new Vision encompasses all facets of Section 303(d) from the assessment and listing process through the development of a TMDL or alternative water quality analysis. It is important to note that while the Vision provides a new framework for implementing the CWA 303(d) program, it does not alter state and EPA responsibilities or authorities under the CWA 303(d) regulations.

The new 303(d) implementation framework focuses on several broad areas. The three receiving the most focus being:

- 1) **Prioritization** – Setting strategic priorities not only for TMDL/alternative restoration development, but also for assessments and monitoring if existing data are not up to date
- 2) **Public engagement** – increased emphasis on sharing not only information, but the process with stakeholders, and
- 3) **TMDL or Restoration Alternative Development** – A restoration alternative may include many of the same steps as a normal TMDL, but the alternative could provide more flexibility in the implementation phase. This public/stakeholder-friendly process will hopefully lead to more successful implementation in both the point and nonpoint source sectors.

DEP has chosen to take a step-wise approach to the prioritization process. The first step in the process of narrowing the universe of impaired waters in which to work was to prioritize watersheds with sediment-related impairments (e.g., siltation). Siltation impairments affect the most stream miles in Pennsylvania, occur in all regions, and allow DEP to address many pollutant sources (e.g., urban runoff, agriculture, and mining). Addressing siltation impairments is critical because through this restoration there is potential to restore other causes of impairment such as nutrients and pathogens. These impairments threaten critical uses such as Aquatic Life, Recreation, and Water Supply. Consequently, siltation impairments on the 303(d) list are a high priority for TMDL or alternative restoration development.

There are over 10,000 miles of siltation-impaired streams in Pennsylvania, thus, another filter was necessary in the prioritization process. A ranking process performed by each of the six DEP Regional Offices (RO) was applied as that next filter. Watersheds containing concentrated siltation impairments were evaluated by each of the ROs to generate a list of their top candidates.

Regional prioritization considered any factors believed to be important for their region; however, active stakeholders (both permittees and nonpoint sources) are key to

implementation and represent a core component in the 303(d) Revisioning process. Therefore, it was determined that an active stakeholder community is needed to implement the restoration plan. Coordination from the onset between Central Office and RO Nonpoint Source (NPS) grant (Federal 319 and state Growing Greener) program staff is critical to ensure that the proper planning horizon is provided for future access to funds. Development of RO prioritization strategies considered input from the NPDES, NPS, and TMDL programs and regional biologists. The final list of priorities includes waters that met one or more of the following considerations:

- Watersheds for which there is an existing approved 319 Watersheds Implementation Plan could also serve as priorities as the implementation plans can be adjusted to conform with restoration alternative requirements.
- Watersheds previously identified as Regional Targeted Watersheds
- Other candidates for a restoration alternative may be areas where urban runoff (MS4) related impairments are prevalent, but there is nothing in place to drive pollutant reductions.
- Additional priority watersheds may include those that were not in the universe of siltation related impairments sent to the RO but have been prioritized previously for another purpose.

### **Priority Ranking**

Through the additional filter process, DEP created a list of watersheds with the highest priority for TMDL or restoration alternative development. The list of watersheds is found in the "RESTORATION PRIORITIES" subsection of the Integrated Report. Current status of completion is also found within this list. Watersheds that have alternative restoration plans are ranked low for TMDL development; however, alternative restoration plans do have a high priority for restoration implementation.