

Wisconsin DNR: Assessed lakes and rivers remain healthy, department seeks public comment on proposed list of impaired waters

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MADISON, Wis. – The majority of Wisconsin’s lakes and rivers recently assessed by the Department of Natural Resources received a good bill of health, continuing a trend of improved surface water quality across the state.

At the same time the DNR is working to identify new waterways to target for pollution reduction plans. The department’s recent assessment also included 240 new waters that meet the criteria for being classified as impaired, and is seeking public comment on the new listings.

“Long-term trend and satellite monitoring show that we are making progress with good overall water quality,” said Sharon Gayan, director of the DNR Water Quality Bureau. “Wisconsin waters stay healthy through combined efforts including strong partnerships with citizens, lake associations, local government, permit holders and others implementing practices that protect and restore waters of the state. However, through expanded monitoring, we’ve identified lakes and rivers where more work is needed to improve water quality for fish to thrive and for people to enjoy them recreationally.”

Over the past five years, Gayan said the DNR has completed assessments on more than 6,000 additional waterways. The vast majority, more than 80 percent of assessed waters, are in good condition. For the 2018 listing updates, 35

waterbodies are also proposed to be removed from the list, the highest number of delistings since 2010.

The impaired list identifies waters that need additional management attention. A majority of these new listings – 183 – are for lakes or river stretches that exceed new, more restrictive phosphorus standards that took effect in December 2010. Many of these new phosphorus listings are in areas with restoration plans already in development and were waters that had never been previously assessed for phosphorus.

“The listing does not necessarily mean that phosphorus levels in these waters got worse,” said Gayan. “Phosphorus levels may be improving in some, but not enough yet to meet these new standards.”

Gayan added that listing waters as “impaired” requires the state to develop restoration plans for them and also may make them eligible for state and federal cleanup funds, which can help speed improvements.

Public comments may be submitted by December 29, 2017, and can be emailed to DNR at DNRImpairedWaters@wisconsin.gov, or sent by U.S. mail to Ashley Beranek, DNR, Water Evaluation Section (WY/3), Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707. Comments postmarked or received by December 29, 2017, will be considered before submitting the final draft list to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for approval.

The Impaired Waters List is submitted to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency every even-numbered year under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act (40 C.F.R. §130.7(b)). The department follows standard procedures to assess waterbodies against water quality standards, these are known as Wisconsin Consolidated Assessment and Listings Methods (WisCALM).

The 2018 list and other materials can be found by searching the DNR website, dnr.wi.gov, for keywords “impaired waters” and clicking on the link for the “[2018 impaired waters list](#).”