

What is the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Process?

The Clean Water Act requires states to identify impaired streams and then develop restoration plans which include total daily maximum load allocations for these streams. Recently, a law suit resulted in the Montana Department of Environmental Quality setting up a timeline for developing these plans. The impaired Upper Gallatin streams have to be addressed by 2008.

What is an “impaired stream”?

An impaired stream is a stream that doesn't support one or more “beneficial uses” (swimming, drinking water, fish habitat, etc.) because of pollutants or other things like habitat alteration.

What is “Total Maximum Daily Load”?

A TMDL is the amount (or load) of a pollutant that a stream can carry or hold without violating state water quality standards. You might also call a TMDL a “water quality target”.

Which streams in the Upper Gallatin Watershed are impaired?

Squaw Creek
Taylor Fork
Cache Creek
Middle Fork
South Fork
West Fork

What kind of pollutants are we looking at?

Sediment (erosion from logging, road building, development, etc.)

Nutrients (from fertilizer, sludge, manure, etc.), and

E. coli (bacteria found in fecal matter), etc.

So, why is this important to the Blue Water Task Force?

We are acting as the local coordinating and fiscal agent for TMDL planning and development for the Upper Gallatin Watershed. This effort includes:

- Establishing reference conditions (what should this stream look like?)
- Conducting source assessments (where are the impairments and/or pollutants coming from?)
- Establishing water quality targets (how do we know when we've reduced the problems?)
- Developing restoration and/or implementation strategies (how do we do this?)

Administration and coordination funds are being provided to the BWTF in the form of EPA grant money. The BWTF is raising matching funds and enlisting volunteers to contribute the local portion of participation. The BWTF subcontracts with qualified environmental contractors to complete necessary technical tasks. Building working relationships with the community of Big Sky, the USFS, environmental contractors, DEQ, and other players (university researchers, landowners, etc) is necessary for success.

Why are we involved?

Without local involvement, the DEQ and/or EPA is the lead agency and develops the plan and contract out with federally contracted companies without local input. There is no other organization in the Upper Gallatin Watershed that could provide oversight and input in an organized fashion. The Blue Water Task Force represents the Upper Gallatin Watershed community and is your liaison in this effort.