

TMDL: Middle Trempealeau River, Wisconsin
Effective Date:

DECISION DOCUMENT FOR THE APPROVAL OF MIDDLE TREMPEALEAU RIVER TMDLS

Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act (CWA) and EPA's implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Part 130 describe the statutory and regulatory requirements for approvable TMDLs. Additional information is generally necessary for EPA to determine if a submitted TMDL fulfills the legal requirements for approval under Section 303(d) and EPA regulations, and should be included in the submittal package. Use of the verb "must" below denotes information that is required to be submitted because it relates to elements of the TMDL required by the CWA and by regulation. Use of the term "should" below denotes information that is generally necessary for EPA to determine if a submitted TMDL is approvable. These TMDL review guidelines are not themselves regulations. They are an attempt to summarize and provide guidance regarding currently effective statutory and regulatory requirements relating to TMDLs. Any differences between these guidelines and EPA's TMDL regulations should be resolved in favor of the regulations themselves.

1. Identification of Waterbody, Pollutant of Concern, Pollutant Sources, and Priority Ranking

The TMDL submittal should identify the waterbody as it appears on the State's/Tribe's 303(d) list. The waterbody should be identified/georeferenced using the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD), and the TMDL should clearly identify the pollutant for which the TMDL is being established. In addition, the TMDL should identify the priority ranking of the waterbody and specify the link between the pollutant of concern and the water quality standard (see section 2 below).

The TMDL submittal should include an identification of the point and nonpoint sources of the pollutant of concern, including location of the source(s) and the quantity of the loading, e.g., lbs/per day. The TMDL should provide the identification numbers of the NPDES permits within the waterbody. Where it is possible to separate natural background from nonpoint sources, the TMDL should include a description of the natural background. This information is necessary for EPA's review of the load and wasteload allocations, which are required by regulation.

The TMDL submittal should also contain a description of any important assumptions made in developing the TMDL, such as:

- (1) the spatial extent of the watershed in which the impaired waterbody is located;
- (2) the assumed distribution of land use in the watershed (e.g., urban, forested, agriculture);
- (3) population characteristics, wildlife resources, and other relevant information affecting the characterization of the pollutant of concern and its allocation to sources;

- (4) present and future growth trends, if taken into consideration in preparing the TMDL (e.g., the TMDL could include the design capacity of a wastewater treatment facility); and
- (5) an explanation and analytical basis for expressing the TMDL through *surrogate measures*, if applicable. *Surrogate measures* are parameters such as percent fines and turbidity for sediment impairments; chlorophyll *a* and phosphorus loadings for excess algae; length of riparian buffer; or number of acres of best management practices.

Comments:

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) developed six sediment TMDLs for six segments in the Middle Trempealeau River watershed (Table 1). The TMDLs address the sediment impacts and impairments which were identified on the Wisconsin 1998 303(d) list. The segments were ranked as medium or low priority on the Wisconsin 1998 303(d) list.

The waterbody segments are located in Trempealeau and Buffalo Counties, Wisconsin. The segments are 3 to 6 miles long, and drain areas varying from 3000 acres to 10,000 acres. The Middle Trempealeau River watershed overall drains about 220 square miles. In the watershed, 49% of the land use is cropland, and about 33% of the land use is woodlot.

There are no point sources on the impaired waters that discharge sediments. Non-point sources are identified in the Nonpoint Source Control Plan for the Middle Trempealeau Priority Watershed Project (Watershed Plan), Chapter 2. The Watershed Plan is an attachment to the TMDL. Nonpoint sources identified in the Watershed Plan as contributing to the impairments include agricultural field run-off and streambank erosion. Table 2 identifies the existing annual sediment load (in tons/year) for the impaired segments from various sources/land uses.

EPA finds that the TMDL document submitted by WDNR satisfies all requirements of this first element.

2. Description of the Applicable Water Quality Standards and Numeric Water Quality Target

The TMDL submittal must include a description of the applicable State/Tribal water quality standard, including the designated use(s) of the waterbody, the applicable numeric or narrative water quality criterion, and the antidegradation policy. (40 C.F.R. §130.7(c)(1)). EPA needs this information to review the loading capacity determination, and load and wasteload allocations, which are required by regulation.

The TMDL submittal must identify a numeric water quality target(s) – a quantitative value used to measure whether or not the applicable water quality standard is attained. Generally, the pollutant of concern and the numeric water quality target are, respectively, the chemical causing the impairment and the numeric criteria for that chemical (e.g., chromium) contained in the water quality standard. The TMDL expresses the relationship between any necessary reduction of the pollutant of concern and the attainment of the numeric water quality target. Occasionally, the pollutant of concern is different from the pollutant that is the subject of

the numeric water quality target (e.g., when the pollutant of concern is phosphorus and the numeric water quality target is expressed as Dissolved Oxygen (DO) criteria). In such cases, the TMDL submittal should explain the linkage between the pollutant of concern and the chosen numeric water quality target.

Comments:

The State identified the narrative standard set forth at Section NR 102.04 (1) intro and (a) of the Wisconsin Administrative Code (WAC) as the applicable standard. This standard states in part, “Substances that will cause objectionable deposits on the shore or in the bed of a body of water, shall not be present in such amounts as to interfere with public rights in waters of the state.”

The designated uses applicable to each segment are set forth at Section NR 102.04(3) intro, (a) and (b) of the WAC. The table below lists the segments, the current use, and the potential use.

Segment	Current Use	Potential Use
Welch Coulee Creek	Warmwater Forage Fishery	Coldwater Class III
Irvin Creek	Warmwater Forage Fishery	Coldwater Class II
Newcomb Valley Creek	Warmwater Forage Fishery	Coldwater Class III
Swinns Valley Creek	Warmwater Forage Fishery	Coldwater Class II
Tappen Coulee Creek	Warmwater Forage Fishery	Coldwater Class III
North Creek	Warmwater Forage Fishery	Coldwater Class III

The state established a water quality target for the segments as meeting a potential use of Cold Water Class II or Class III community, as described in NR 1.02(7)(b) of the WAC. Although sediment has been determined to be the pollutant of concern, WDNR will be monitoring the fish community to determine the effectiveness of TMDL implementation, as the fish community is the designated use being impaired.

EPA finds that the TMDL document submitted by WDNR satisfies all requirements of this second element.

3. Loading Capacity - Linking Water Quality and Pollutant Sources

A TMDL must identify the loading capacity of a waterbody for the applicable pollutant. EPA regulations define loading capacity as the greatest amount of a pollutant that a water can receive without violating water quality standards (40 C.F.R. §130.2(f)).

The pollutant loadings may be expressed as either mass-per-time, toxicity or other appropriate measure (40 C.F.R. §130.2(i)). If the TMDL is expressed in terms other than a daily load, e.g., an annual load, the submittal should explain why it is appropriate to express the TMDL in the unit of measurement chosen. The TMDL submittal should describe the method

used to establish the cause-and-effect relationship between the numeric target and the identified pollutant sources. In many instances, this method will be a water quality model.

The TMDL submittal should contain documentation supporting the TMDL analysis, including the basis for any assumptions; a discussion of strengths and weaknesses in the analytical process; and results from any water quality modeling. EPA needs this information to review the loading capacity determination, and load and wasteload allocations, which are required by regulation.

TMDLs must take into account *critical conditions* for stream flow, loading, and water quality parameters as part of the analysis of loading capacity. (40 C.F.R. §130.7(c)(1)). TMDLs should define applicable *critical conditions* and describe their approach to estimating both point and nonpoint source loadings under such *critical conditions*. In particular, the TMDL should discuss the approach used to compute and allocate nonpoint source loadings, e.g., meteorological conditions and land use distribution.

Comments:

WDNR will consider that the six segments in Table 1 are meeting the narrative water quality standard when the appropriate cold water community is established. To achieve a cold water community, WDNR has determined a total load capacity of sediment for the six segments as listed in Table 3 on Page 12.

These total load capacities represent an approximate 45% reduction of sediment entering the six creeks for existing conditions (based on 1990 information). WDNR has determined that these reductions in sediment will achieve the water quality target of establishing the appropriate cold water community in the segments. Establishment of a cold water community has been determined by WDNR to be an adequate surrogate for the narrative water quality standard. The TMDLs include a monitoring plan which is appropriate for demonstrating whether or not progress has been made towards establishment of the cold water community. Since sediments impact the fish community in several ways (reproduction, food supply, raising water temperature), and sediments are not a toxic, no specific critical condition exists.

WDNR used the WINHUSLE model for determining soil erosion and loading of sediments in the watershed. The WINHUSLE model calculates the amount of soil erosion based on a number of parameters, and routes the sediment to the waterbody in question. The amount of sediment reduction needed can then be estimated for the stream. The volume of sediment entering the waterbodies from streambank erosion was estimated using the NRCS volumetric spreadsheet model, which was applied to field data collected on the individual eroding streambanks to estimate sediment loads.

EPA finds that the TMDL document submitted by WDNR satisfies all requirements of this third element.

4. Load Allocations (LAs)

EPA regulations require that a TMDL include LAs, which identify the portion of the loading capacity attributed to existing and future nonpoint sources and to natural background. Load allocations may range from reasonably accurate estimates to gross allotments (40 C.F.R. §130.2(g)). Where possible, load allocations should be described separately for natural background and nonpoint sources.

Comments:

The load allocations for the creeks are the same as the total loading capacity in Table 3, as there are no point sources, and the WLA is 0. Tables 5-10 of the TMDL split the LA into two main subcategories of land uses; croplands and other uplands, and stream banks. Reductions range from 30%-50%.

EPA finds that the TMDL document submitted by WDNR satisfies all requirements of this fourth element.

5. Wasteload Allocations (WLAs)

EPA regulations require that a TMDL include WLAs, which identify the portion of the loading capacity allocated to individual existing and future point source(s) (40 C.F.R. §130.2(h), 40 C.F.R. §130.2(i)). In some cases, WLAs may cover more than one discharger, e.g., if the source is contained within a general permit.

The individual WLAs may take the form of uniform percentage reductions or individual mass based limitations for dischargers where it can be shown that this solution meets WQs and does not result in localized impairments. These individual WLAs may be adjusted during the NPDES permitting process. If the WLAs are adjusted, the individual effluent limits for each permit issued to a discharger on the impaired water must be consistent with the assumptions and requirements of the adjusted WLAs in the TMDL. If the WLAs are not adjusted, effluent limits contained in the permit must be consistent with the individual WLAs specified in the TMDL. If a draft permit provides for a higher load for a discharger than the corresponding individual WLA in the TMDL, the State/Tribe must demonstrate that the total WLA in the TMDL will be achieved through reductions in the remaining individual WLAs and that localized impairments will not result. All permittees should be notified of any deviations from the initial individual WLAs contained in the TMDL. EPA does not require the establishment of a new TMDL to reflect these revised allocations as long as the total WLA, as expressed in the TMDL, remains the same or decreases, and there is no reallocation between the total WLA and the total LA.

Comments:

There are no point sources on any of the six creeks; therefore, the waste load allocation is zero.

EPA finds that the TMDL document submitted by WDNR satisfies all requirements of this fifth element.

6. Margin of Safety (MOS)

The statute and regulations require that a TMDL include a margin of safety (MOS) to account for any lack of knowledge concerning the relationship between load and wasteload allocations and water quality (CWA §303(d)(1)(C), 40 C.F.R. §130.7(c)(1)). EPA's 1991 TMDL Guidance explains that the MOS may be implicit, i.e., incorporated into the TMDL through conservative assumptions in the analysis, or explicit, i.e., expressed in the TMDL as loadings set aside for the MOS. If the MOS is implicit, the conservative assumptions in the analysis that account for the MOS must be described. If the MOS is explicit, the loading set aside for the MOS must be identified.

Comments:

WDNR included an implicit margin of safety by accounting for additional reductions in sediment loads. Above and beyond the BMPs in the Watershed Plan, WDNR is also implementing activities under the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Plan (CREP). This will result in additional riparian vegetative buffers, resulting in an additional 10-15% greater control of sediment. WDNR also believes that the Wetland Reserve program will also help to reduce sediment, by restoring wetlands, which will reduce sediment inflow and stream velocities. In addition, WDNR believes the estimates of the total load capacity for the streams is likely less (more conservative) than may be needed to meet the designated uses. Based on preliminary work in a nearby creek, it appears that streambank restoration is the most important effort in reducing sediment impacts on the streams. As WDNR is implementing efforts on reducing overland sediment flow as well as streambank restoration, overall sediment reduction may be more than needed.

EPA finds that the TMDL document submitted by WDNR satisfies all requirements of this sixth element.

7. Seasonal Variation

The statute and regulations require that a TMDL be established with consideration of seasonal variations. The TMDL must describe the method chosen for including seasonal variations. (CWA §303(d)(1)(C), 40 C.F.R. §130.7(c)(1)).

Comments:

Sediment enters the six creeks through rainfall and snowmelt runoff events throughout the year. Most of the sediment enters during spring runoff and intense summer rainstorms, but to some extent year-round. The sediment enters the creeks due to episodic events (storms) rather than "seasonal" events. In addition, the BMPs selected to achieve the load allocation were selected and designed to function for the 10-year or 25-year, 24-hour design storms, in order to address these episodic events.

EPA finds that the TMDL document submitted by WDNR satisfies all requirements of this seventh element.

8. Reasonable Assurances

When a TMDL is developed for waters impaired by point sources only, the issuance of a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit(s) provides the reasonable assurance that the wasteload allocations contained in the TMDL will be achieved. This is because 40 C.F.R. 122.44(d)(1)(vii)(B) requires that effluent limits in permits be consistent with “the assumptions and requirements of any available wasteload allocation” in an approved TMDL.

When a TMDL is developed for waters impaired by both point and nonpoint sources, and the WLA is based on an assumption that nonpoint source load reductions will occur, EPA’s 1991 TMDL Guidance states that the TMDL should provide reasonable assurances that nonpoint source control measures will achieve expected load reductions in order for the TMDL to be approvable. This information is necessary for EPA to determine that the TMDL, including the load and wasteload allocations, has been established at a level necessary to implement water quality standards.

EPA’s August 1997 TMDL Guidance also directs Regions to work with States to achieve TMDL load allocations in waters impaired only by nonpoint sources. However, EPA cannot disapprove a TMDL for nonpoint source-only impaired waters, which do not have a demonstration of reasonable assurance that LAs will be achieved, because such a showing is not required by current regulations.

Comments:

WDNR has demonstrated adequate reasonable assurance that the necessary nonpoint source reductions will occur by having various programs in place that will address the sediment movement into the six segments. First, six creeks are part of a larger priority watershed project, A Non-point Source Control Plan for the Middle Trempealeau River Priority Watershed Project. A copy of the approved Watershed Plan is included as an attachment to the TMDL. The project has already been underway for several years. The concepts of long-term state cost sharing and local staff funding was discussed in the project plan. The approval of the Watershed Plan by WDNR allows for the availability of grants through Wisconsin’s nonpoint source program. Chapter 5 of the approved Watershed Plan includes an implementation plan for nonpoint sources, anticipated project costs, cost-share budgets, and staffing needs.

WDNR has an approved 319 Management Plan (approved by U.S. EPA in 2000). This 319 Management Plan describes a variety of financial, technical and educational programs in the state which support nonpoint source programs. Wisconsin’s Nonpoint Source Water Pollution Abatement Program set forth in Section 281.65 of the Wisconsin Statutes and Chapter NR 120 of the WAC is described in the 319 Management Plan. WDNR has a variety of voluntary and “back-up” enforcement authorities available under the 319 plan. Administrative rules passed by the Natural Resources Board indicate that watersheds with impaired waters will have the highest priority for enforcement.

Additionally, as discussed in the Margin of Safety section of the TMDL, the Conservation

Reserve Enhancement Program was approved for portions of Wisconsin. The Middle Trempealeau River subwatershed is included in the approved portions. This program can provide assistance to farmers and land owners for the installation of additional vegetative buffers along the two creeks.

EPA finds that the TMDL document submitted by WDNR satisfies all requirements of this eighth element.

9. Monitoring Plan to Track TMDL Effectiveness

EPA's 1991 document, *Guidance for Water Quality-Based Decisions: The TMDL Process* (EPA 440/4-91-001), recommends a monitoring plan to track the effectiveness of a TMDL, particularly when a TMDL involves both point and nonpoint sources, and the WLA is based on an assumption that nonpoint source load reductions will occur. Such a TMDL should provide assurances that nonpoint source controls will achieve expected load reductions and, such TMDL should include a monitoring plan that describes the additional data to be collected to determine if the load reductions provided for in the TMDL are occurring and leading to attainment of water quality standards.

Comments:

WDNR included a description of a monitoring program for the Middle Trempealeau River subwatershed. WDNR intends to monitor these impaired streams in 2005. The monitoring consists of a full array of chemical, biological and physical assessments, including fish population analyses and habitat assessment.

EPA finds that the TMDL document submitted by WDNR satisfies all requirements of this ninth element.

10. Implementation

EPA policy encourages Regions to work in partnership with States/Tribes to achieve nonpoint source load allocations established for 303(d)-listed waters impaired by nonpoint sources. Regions may assist States/Tribes in developing implementation plans that include reasonable assurances that nonpoint source LAs established in TMDLs for waters impaired solely or primarily by nonpoint sources will in fact be achieved. In addition, EPA policy recognizes that other relevant watershed management processes may be used in the TMDL process. EPA is not required to and does not approve TMDL implementation plans.

Comments:

The six segments are part of the Non-point Source Control Plan for the Middle Trempealeau River Priority Watershed Project. The Watershed Plan, Chapter 5 discusses implementation for nonpoint source pollution controls for the six impaired segments, as well as other waterbodies included in the Watershed Plan. Implementation includes the following:

- agencies involved
- BMPs necessary to control nonpoint source run-off

- funding sources
- information and education activities
- schedule for completion
- staffing needs and costs involved

While this information was reviewed, it did not form a basis for the decision.

11. Public Participation

EPA policy is that there should be full and meaningful public participation in the TMDL development process. The TMDL regulations require that each State/Tribe must subject calculations to establish TMDLs to public review consistent with its own continuing planning process (40 C.F.R. §130.7(c)(1)(ii)). In guidance, EPA has explained that final TMDLs submitted to EPA for review and approval should describe the State's/Tribe's public participation process, including a summary of significant comments and the State's/Tribe's responses to those comments. When EPA establishes a TMDL, EPA regulations require EPA to publish a notice seeking public comment (40 C.F.R. §130.7(d)(2)).

Provision of inadequate public participation may be a basis for disapproving a TMDL. If EPA determines that a State/Tribe has not provided adequate public participation, EPA may defer its approval action until adequate public participation has been provided for, either by the State/Tribe or by EPA.

Comments:

There was public participation in the development of the elements of the six TMDLs consistent with Wisconsin's continuing planning process in Sections NR 120.08 and NR 121.07(1) of the WAC. The load allocations set out in the six Middle Trempealeau River TMDLs were calculated and established during the development of the objectives in the Watershed Plan for reducing the overall amount of sediment in the Middle Trempealeau River watershed. Public meetings were held during the development of the Watershed Plan and a public hearing on the Watershed Plan was held on January 6, 1992. Public comments were incorporated into the final Watershed Plan. WDNR approved the final Watershed Plan on August 4, 1992.

The USEPA has decided to pursue additional public participation in the Middle Trempealeau watershed TMDLs, by opening very shortly a 30 day public comment period on the USEPA approval of the TMDLs. This will allow the public additional opportunity to provide comments or data regarding these TMDLs.

EPA finds that the TMDL document submitted by WDNR satisfies all requirements of this eleventh element.

12. Submittal Letter

A submittal letter should be included with the TMDL submittal, and should specify whether the TMDL is being submitted for a *technical review* or *final review and approval*. Each final TMDL submitted to EPA should be accompanied by a submittal letter that explicitly states

that the submittal is a final TMDL submitted under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act for EPA review and approval. This clearly establishes the State's/Tribe's intent to submit, and EPA's duty to review, the TMDL under the statute. The submittal letter, whether for technical review or final review and approval, should contain such identifying information as the name and location of the waterbody, and the pollutant(s) of concern.

Comments:

U.S. EPA received the six Middle Trempealeau River TMDLs on November 26, 2002, accompanied by a submittal letter dated November 14, 2002. The submittal letter states that this is the final TMDL submittal for the six segments listed in Table 1.

EPA finds that the TMDL document submitted by WDNR satisfies all requirements of this twelfth element

13. Conclusion

After a full and complete review, EPA finds that the TMDLs for the Middle Trempealeau Watershed satisfy all of the elements of approvable TMDLs. This document addresses a total of 6 TMDLs for 6 waterbodies with a total of 15 impairments from the 1998 Wisconsin 303d list (Table 1).

Table 1

<u>Waterbody</u>	<u>Pollutant</u>	<u>Impairments</u>
Welch Coulee Creek	sediment	loss of instream habitat sediment temperature
Irvin Creek	sediment	loss of instream habitat sediment
Newcomb Valley Creek	sediment	loss of instream habitat sediment turbidity
Swinns Valley Creek	sediment	loss of instream habitat sediment
Tappan Coulee Creek	sediment	loss of instream habitat sediment temperature
North Creek	sediment	loss of instream habitat sediment

Table 2 (Table 3 of the TMDL)

Sub-Watershed **	Cropland	Develop-ment	Grassland	Pasture	Woodlot Grazed	Ungrazed Woodlot	Wetlands	Total
Welch Coulee	831	80	6	33	4	0	3	957
Irvin Creek	1,024	133	6	47	9	13	0	1,232
American -Newcomb Valley	2109 (4,686)	119 (265)	1 (2)	33 (73)	34 (76)	18 (39)	1 (1)	2,314 (5,142)
Swinns Valley	3,442	94	0	115	168	30	0	3,899
Tappen Coulee	1,045	58	0	23	9	2	0	1,137
North Creek	1,699	51	4	85	26	10	1	1,876

** Except for Newcomb Valley Creek, the subwatershed listed includes at least the entire drainage area to the impaired stream. In general, the subwatershed also includes a very small direct drainage area to the Trempealeau River. For American Valley subwatershed, the drainage area to Newcomb Valley Creek is about 45% of the subwatershed. For American Valley Creek subwatershed, a proportional amount corresponding to the Newcomb Valley drainage area is listed and the entire subwatershed value is included in ().

Table 3 (page 9 of the TMDL)

Impaired Stream	Total Load Capacity (Average Tons/Year)
Welch Coulee Creek	42
Irvin Creek	1,028
Newcomb Valley Creek	1,752
Swinns Valley Creek	2,176
Tappen Coulee Creek	829
North Creek	1,136