

Implications of Putting the 17 Million Chesapeake Bay Watershed Residents on a Regulatory Pollution Diet

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Against the backdrop of over 45,000 TMDLs approved by EPA nationwide over the past two decades, the six watershed states, the District of Columbia, and EPA have developed a historic and comprehensive “pollution diet” with rigorous accountability measures to initiate sweeping actions to restore clean water in the Chesapeake Bay and the region’s streams, creeks and rivers. Despite extensive restoration efforts and significant pollution reductions during the past 25 years, the TMDL was prompted by insufficient progress and continued poor water quality in Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries.

The Chesapeake Bay TMDL was designed to ensure that all pollution control measures needed to fully restore the Bay and its tidal rivers are in place by 2025, with at least 60 percent of the actions completed by 2017. The TMDL assigns responsibilities for reducing and then capping sources through waste load and load allocations to regulated and non-regulated sources, respectively. Separate nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment allocations were made for each of 92 watershed draining directly into each tidal Bay segment, further subdivided by state jurisdiction. These allocations will be further subdivided to ‘local area targets’ by the seven watershed jurisdictions working with local governments and stakeholders during the Phase II of the Bay TMDL process.

The Bay TMDL is supported by rigorous accountability measures to ensure cleanup commitments are met, including short-and long-term benchmarks, a tracking and accounting system for jurisdiction activities, and federal contingency actions that can be employed if necessary to spur progress. Watershed Implementation Plans, which detail how and when the six Bay states and the District of Columbia will meet pollution allocations, played a central role in shaping the TMDL.

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