

NARRATIVE NUTRIENT STANDARDS PROPOSAL

DEQ released an updated proposed rule package in December. The proposal for narrative nutrient standards using an adaptive management approach meets the requirements of Senate Bill 358 and allows for a watershed approach to managing nutrients.

DEQ has worked closely with the Nutrient Work Group—a group of stakeholders—and the Environmental Protection Agency. The proposal provides a workable solution.

The Proposal At A Glance

- **Science:** Based on decades of relevant science in Montana’s watersheds, and around the United States and world.
- **Meets Water Acts:** Meets the requirements of Montana’s Water Quality Act and the Federal Clean Water Act.
- **Toolkit:** A diverse toolkit of options for all dischargers, including those who have invested money into their facilities.
- **Watershed Approach:** Increased opportunities to offset permit limits for dischargers by addressing nonpoint source to reduce pollution in the watershed.
- **Phosphorus:** Prioritizes phosphorus reduction as required by Senate Bill 358.
- **Narrative Standard:** Based off of a narrative standard that has been in use since the 1970s, but uses a more comprehensive translator to ensure beneficial uses are protected.
- **Permit Limits:** Where needed, permit limits from regionally-applicable ranges will be used until site-specific data are collected.
- **Montana Approach:** A Montana approach to nutrient management—Montana science, Montana law, Montana policy.

If the Proposal is Adopted, DEQ will be Providing:

- Monitoring training.
- Webinars on how the new process works.
- Guidance documents.
- A dedicated position to assist dischargers with the Adaptive Management program.
- A team of experts who can answer questions on the science, monitoring, watershed coordination, and successful best management practices for projects within watersheds.

Protective and Implementable

The proposal is as protective as the previous numeric standards. The proposal requires monitoring of not only phosphorus and other nutrient levels, but also response variables (biological measurements) in the watershed.

The proposal incorporates feasible options for achieving approvable discharge limits. Flexibility is incorporated, for example, through variances, compliance schedules with interim limits, and the ability to refine final effluent limits based on site-specific information.