

# INFORMATION SHEET

## **Proposed Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the Shamokin Creek Watershed, Northumberland, Montour, and Columbia Counties, Pennsylvania**

### ***What is being proposed?***

A TMDL plan to improve the quality of water in Shamokin Creek and its tributaries, including North Branch Shamokin Creek, Quaker Run, Coal Run, Carbon Run, Locust Creek, and Buck Run.

### ***Who is proposing the plan? To whom and why?***

The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC), in cooperation with the Pottsville District Mining Office, is proposing to submit the plan to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (Pa. DEP) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) for review and approval as required by federal regulation.

In 1995, U.S. EPA was sued for not developing TMDLs when Pennsylvania failed to do so. Pa. DEP has entered into an agreement with U.S. EPA to develop TMDLs for certain specified waters over the next several years. In order to assist Pennsylvania in the development of TMDLs, the SRBC entered into contract with Pa. DEP to develop several TMDLs within the Susquehanna River Basin. This TMDL has been developed in compliance with the state/U.S. EPA agreement.

### ***What is a TMDL?***

A Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) sets a ceiling on the pollutant loads that can enter a water body so the water body will meet water quality standards. The Clean Water Act requires states to list all waters that do not meet their water quality standards even after pollution controls required by law are in place. For these waters, the state must calculate how much of a substance can be put in the water without violating the standard and distribute that quantity to all the sources of the pollutant on that water body. A TMDL plan includes waste load allocations for point sources, load allocations for non-point sources, and a margin of safety.

The Clean Water Act requires states to submit their TMDLs to U.S. EPA for approval. If a state does not develop the TMDL, the Clean Water Act states that U.S. EPA must do so.

### ***What is a water quality standard?***

The Clean Water Act sets a national minimum goal that all waters be “fishable” and “swimable.” To support this goal, states must adopt water quality standards.

Water quality standards are state regulations that have two components. The first component is a designated use, such as “warm water fishes” or “recreation.” States must

assign a use, or several uses, to each of their waters. The second component relates to the in-stream conditions necessary to protect the designated use(s). These conditions or “criteria” are physical, chemical, or biological characteristics, such as temperature and minimum levels of dissolved oxygen, and maximum concentrations of toxic pollutants.

It is the combination of the “designated use” and the “criteria” to support that use that make up a water quality standard. If any criteria are being exceeded, then the use is not being met and the water is said to be in violation of water quality standards or impaired.

***What is the purpose of the plan?***

The pH of Shamokin Creek and its tributaries is impaired due to acid mine drainage (AMD) contributions to the water bodies. Shamokin Creek and its tributaries are also impaired by high concentrations of metals, specifically total iron, total manganese, and total aluminum, due to AMD. The plan includes a calculation for the loading of total iron, total manganese, total aluminum, and acid, a surrogate for pH, which will meet Pennsylvania water quality objectives.

***Why did we choose Shamokin Creek and its tributaries?***

In 1996, Pa. DEP listed Shamokin Creek and its tributaries under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act as having an impaired pH and high concentrations of metals due to acid mine drainage.

***What pollutants does this TMDL address?***

The proposed plan provides calculations of Shamokin Creek and its tributaries’ total capacity to accept acidity and metals to meet Pennsylvania water quality objectives.

***Where do the pollutants come from?***

The pollutants come primarily from abandoned mine workings. The Shamokin Creek Watershed was mined for anthracite coal from the late 18<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The effects of this previous mining are still present.

***How was the TMDL developed?***

Monte Carlo simulation techniques were used to determine the long-term average daily loads that a stream segment could accept and still meet water quality criteria 99% of the time. Monte Carlo simulation allows for the expansion of a data set based on its statistical makeup. Since there was no one critical flow condition where criteria were exceeded, the average flow value was used to weight the pollutant concentrations. All analyses were started at the headwaters of each stream segment.

***How much pollution is too much?***

The allowable amount of pollution in a stream varies depending on several conditions. TMDLs are set to meet water quality standards at the defined critical flow condition. If there is more than one critical flow condition, the TMDL must be constructed to meet water quality criteria at all flow conditions. This is the case in the Shamokin Creek Watershed. For this reason, the long-term average daily load values that will meet water quality criteria 99% of the time were used as the basis for the TMDL.

The applicable water quality criteria for pH are dependent on the alkalinity present in-stream. A balance between the in-stream acidity and alkalinity is necessary so that a minimum net alkalinity of zero is maintained in-stream 99% of the time. For a given stream segment, the in-stream alkalinity was used as the water quality standard for pH; because different segments had different amounts of in-stream alkalinity, the water quality standard for pH varied from segment to segment.

The applicable water quality criteria for metals are a daily average of 1.5 mg/l total iron, a one hour maximum of 0.75 mg/l total aluminum, and a maximum of 1.0 mg/l total manganese.

***How will these limits be met?***

A remediation plan will need to be developed for the Shamokin Creek Watershed in order to meet the water quality objectives outlined in this report. The Northumberland County Conservation District is presently working on a comprehensive watershed plan.

***How can I get more information on the TMDL?***

The TMDL can be accessed through the DEP Website (<http://www.dep.state.pa.us>) by typing "TMDL" in the direct link field, and clicking GO. The data and all supporting information used to develop the proposed TMDL are available from the Department. To request a copy of the proposed TMDL, contact Lee McDonnell, Dept. of Environmental Protection, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor RCSOB, P.O. Box 8555, Harrisburg, PA 17105-8555, (717) 783-2938. Email will be received at [Mcdonnell.Lee@dep.state.pa.us](mailto:Mcdonnell.Lee@dep.state.pa.us). Persons with a disability may use the AT&T Relay Service by calling 1-800-654-5984 (TDD users) or 1-800-654-5988 (voice users) and request that the call be relayed. Directions to the Mount Carmel Public Library can also be obtained by contacting this address. Comments will not be accepted by facsimile or voice mail.

***How can I comment on the proposal?***

You can provide written comments received no later than February 13, 2001 to the above address.