

PA Environment Digest

An Update On Environmental Issues In PA

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EPA Approves PA Impaired Waters List Without Listing Lower Susquehanna

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Thursday approved Pennsylvania's [2012 final list of impaired waters](#) without listing the lower Susquehanna River as impaired. The lower Susquehanna listing was changed from unimpaired to having insufficient water quality data to make a determination as recommended by the Department of Environmental Protection.

The list is part of a bi-annual monitoring and assessment report characterizing the condition of Pennsylvania's surface waters.

The 2012 list submitted by the Department of Environmental Protection contains 7,009 impaired waters, of which 263 are newly listed including portions of Buffalo Creek and Plum Creek in the Upper Juniata watershed.

The list also includes more than 650 stream miles within the Susquehanna River Basin that were added or updated in the 2012 list. The new list removes 39 water bodies that were on the previous list including over 96 miles in the Upper Susquehanna-Lackawanna basin and 27 miles of the Lehigh River.

The Clean Water Act requires states to analyze available water quality information to assess the health of waters, and every two years identify those waterbodies that do not meet water quality standards. The impaired waters list is then submitted to EPA for review and approval. States or EPA must subsequently develop cleanup plans to restore the impaired waterways.

The final report includes a change in the designation for a nearly 100-mile section of the main stem of the Susquehanna River from "unimpaired" for aquatic life and recreational uses, to having insufficient water quality data to make an impairment determination.

That change from the draft to the final report reflects comments submitted to PADEP from EPA and others, as well as ongoing efforts to identify the cause of health impacts to the Susquehanna's smallmouth bass population.

PADEP initiated a special study of the fish health problem in 2012 and is continuing its data

collection efforts in 2013 to further assess water quality in the Susquehanna River and its major tributaries, and identify the cause(s) for the decline in smallmouth bass.

Information and data from this effort can be found at the PA [DEP website](#).

While these steps are underway, the Chesapeake Bay pollution budget or TMDL and accompanying Pennsylvania Watershed Implementation Plans require action to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollution within the Susquehanna watershed.

Pennsylvania will update its statewide assessment when it submits its list of impaired waterways for 2014.

A complete list of impaired waters as approved by EPA [is available online](#).

“Our experts put together this report using scientific rigor and a lot of hard work,” Department of Environmental Protection Acting Secretary Chris Abruzzo said. “We are pleased EPA has recognized our efforts and that we can continue to move forward with protecting the state’s waters.”

Alisa Harris, DEP Special Deputy for External Affairs, said in an email circulating the approved list, “Both agencies, PA DEP and EPA, agree that listing this portion of the Susquehanna River where smallmouth bass are under stress without concretely knowing the cause does very little to enhance the protection of the river.

“In fact, as erroneously mentioned in numerous statements and news articles about this issue, an impairment designation does not bring with it financial resources to study or resolve the issue.

“We remain committed to expanding our research and working in tandem with other statewide agencies and partners. Until we uncover the root cause of what’s affecting the smallmouth bass population, we cannot forge an effective plan to address it. When we have answers, I assure you we will work swiftly and aggressively to remedy the issue.”

For more information, visit DEP’s [Susquehanna River Study Updates](#) webpage.

NewsClips:

[EPA: Susquehanna Not Impaired, But Not Unimpaired Either](#)
[EPA Does Not List Lower Susquehanna River As Impaired, Yet](#)
[SRBC Defends Role In Overseeing Water Quantity](#)
[Dealing With Sediment At The Conowingo Dam](#)