

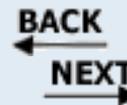


U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Watershed Academy Web

Introduction to the Clean Water Act

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Introduction to WQS

Water quality standards (WQS) are aimed at translating the broad goals of the CWA into waterbody-specific objectives. Ideally, WQS should be expressed in terms that allow quantifiable measurement. WQS, like the CWA overall, apply only to the waters of the United States. As defined in the CWA, "waters of the United States" apply only to surface waters—rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters, and wetlands. Not all surface waters are legally "waters of the United States." Generally, however, those waters include the following:

- All interstate waters
- Intrastate waters used in interstate and/or foreign commerce
- Tributaries of the above
- Territorial seas at the cyclical high tide mark
- Wetlands adjacent to all the above

The exact dividing line between "waters of the United States" according to the CWA and other waters can be hard to determine, especially with regard to smaller streams, [ephemeral](#) waterbodies, and wetlands not adjacent to other "waters of the United States." In fact, the delineation changes from time to time, as new court rulings are handed down, new

Set Goals and Water Quality Standards



**Water Quality Standards:
Translating CWA goals into measurable objectives**

regulations are issued, or the Act itself is modified.

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