VERMONT

Protecting Vermont's Very High Quality Waters

The Vermont Water Quality Standards establish designated uses, such as for aquatic biota and wildlife, swimming, boating, and fishing. These uses must be protected and maintained in all waters.

A lake or stream is classified for each designated use, based upon its water quality. There are four possible classes:

- A(1), our highest quality waters;
- B(1), which have very good water quality;
- B(2), which have good water quality; and
- A(2), waters that are suitable for a public water source with filtration and disinfection.

The class of the water determines the management objectives and the minimum water quality criteria necessary to protect its uses.

All waters above 2,500 are A(1), except those that are classified as a public water source, A(2). All other waters in the state are B(2) unless they have been reclassified. In 2017, all surface waters in the wilderness areas of Green Mountain National Forest were reclassified to A(1), as well as three streams in or near Ripton, Vermont, in 2022. There are many other B(2) lakes and streams that could be reclassified because water quality data meets or exceeds the A(1) or B(1) water quality criteria.

One statutory prohibition for Class A watersheds is no new indirect discharge systems (e.g., in-ground septic system) with a design flow greater than 1,000 gallons per day (10 V.S.A. § 1259). Today's permitting of onsite wastewater systems, including the technical standards these systems are designed to, protects water quality. Unfortunately, in certain situations, the 1,000-gallon prohibition can be a barrier to addressing water quality problems. For example, a new shared wastewater system greater than 1,000 gallons that meets today's design standards could replace several failing onsite wastewater systems that serve individual households, which would result in improved water quality.

The proposed Antidegradation Implementation Rule would require, in consideration of the location, size, and scale of the proposed activity, a site-specific analysis through the use of an individual permit in both A(1) and B(1) watersheds for all other applicable permits, including permits for onsite wastewater systems. This site-specific analysis, and if necessary, additional permit conditions, would ensure the protection and maintenance of very these very high quality waters.

For more information, visit https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/map/antidegradation.

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