Description of the 305(b)/303(d) List of Waters

Background

Before the 305(b)/303(d) List of Waters can be described, it is necessary to provide a little background information. Every waterbody in the State of Georgia has one or more designated uses. Examples of designated uses are "Fishing", "Recreation" and "Drinking Water". The State has also adopted water quality criteria to protect these uses. For instance, the State has determined that for a water to support its use of Fishing, it must have a daily average dissolved oxygen concentration of at least 5.0 mg/l and a minimum of 4.0 mg/l. Some other examples of parameters that have water quality criteria are pH, fecal coliform bacteria, temperature, metals and certain organic pollutants. Georgia's designated uses and water quality criteria can be found in Chapter 391-3-6-.03 of the Rules and Regulations for Water Quality Control.

GA EPD determines whether a waterbody is supporting its designated uses by collecting water quality data and comparing this data against the water quality criteria. It is the goal of the State of Georgia that all of its waters support their designated uses. If it is determined that a water is not supporting its designated use, then GA EPD will typically develop a total maximum daily load (TMDL) as the start of the process of restoring the water. A TMDL determines how much of a particular pollutant a waterbody can contain and still support its designated use. The TMDL will state how much the pollutant load to the water needs to be reduced in order for the water to support its designated use.

What are the 305(b) Report, the 303(d) List and the 305(b)/303(d) List of Waters?

Section 305(b) of the Clean Water Act requires States to assess and describe the quality of its waters every two years in a report called the 305(b) report. Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act requires States to submit a list of all of the waters that are not meeting their designated uses and that need to have a TMDL(s) written for them. The 303(d) list is also to be submitted every two years. Georgia submits a combined 305(b)/303(d) report. This combined report is called an Integrated Report and has typically been entitled the "Water Quality in Georgia" report. One section of the Integrated Report is the 305(b)/303(d) list of waters. This is a list of all of the waters that the State has assessed. This list of waters is developed as described below.

How does GA EPD Develop the 305(b)/303(d) List of Waters?

Every two years GA EPD gathers data that has been collected across the State. This data comes from a number of sources including GA EPD, other State agencies (such as the Wildlife Resources Division and the Coastal Resources Division), Federal Agencies (such as the US Geological Survey), and local governments and environmental groups. The water quality data are compared to the State's water quality criteria using GA EPD's listing assessment methodology. Based on the comparison of the data to the water quality criteria, GA EPD places each water into one of three broad groups. Waters are assessed as 1) supporting their designated use; 2) not supporting their designated use; or 3) assessment pending.

Description of the Five-Part Categorization System

In addition to the three broad groupings described above, GA EPD adopted a five-part categorization of its waters at the request of U.S. EPA in 2008. Each of the five categories corresponds to one of the three groups (supporting, not supporting, or assessment pending) as described below.

Category 1 – Data indicate that waters are supporting their designated use(s).
Category 2 – A water has more than one designated use and data indicate that at least one designated use is being supported, but there is insufficient evidence to determine that all uses are being supported.
Category 3 – There is insufficient data or other information to make a determination as to whether or not the designated use(s) is being supported.
Category 3N - Additional data/information is needed to determine if violations of water quality criteria are due to Natural Conditions.
Category 4a – Data indicate that at least one designated use is not being supported, but TMDL(s) have been completed for the parameter(s) that are causing a water not to meet its use(s).
Category 4b - Data indicate that at least one designated use is not being supported, but there are actions in place (other than a TMDL) that are predicted to lead to compliance with water quality standards.
Category 4c - Data indicate that at least one designated use is not being supported, but the impairment is not caused by a pollutant.
Category 5 - Data indicate that at least one designated use is not being supported and TMDL(s) need to be completed for one or more pollutants. Waters in Category 5 make up the 303(d) list.
Category 5R – Data indicate that at least one designated use is not being met; however, TMDL development is deferred while an alternative restoration plan is pursued. If the alternative restoration plan is not successful, then the water will be placed back in Category 5 and a TMDL will be developed.

In summary, waters supporting their designated use correspond to Category 1. Waters not supporting their designated use correspond to Categories 4a, 4b, 4c, 5 and 5R. Waters where the assessment for use support is pending correspond to Category 2, 3, and 3N.

Organization of the 305(b)/303(d) List of Waters

Since waterbodies (such as streams and rivers) are typically many miles long, it is usually not feasible to assess a whole waterbody as a single unit. Therefore each waterbody is typically broken into smaller portions called “reaches”. The size of each reach varies. For example, one reach of the Chattahoochee River starts where Utoy Creek enters the Chattahoochee River and ends where Pea Creek enters the River. Each row in the 305(b)/303(d) list of waters represents an assessed “reach”.

The 305(b)/303(d) list of waters includes a number of types of information about each assessed reach. While much of the information contained in the list of waters is self explanatory, a table of the different kinds of information included in the list is provided below.

Column Header	Explanation of Data in Column
Reach Name	Name of the Waterbody that was assessed
Reach ID #	Unique number assigned to each assessed reach
Reach Location	Narrative describing what portion of a waterbody the assessment applies to
County	Lists the County(s) in which the reach is located
River Basin	Lists the River Basin in which the reach is located
Use	Lists the Designated Use(s) of the waterbody
Assessment	Shows if the water was assessed as "Supporting", "Not Supporting" or "Assessment Pending"
Data Provider	Provides information as to what organization has submitted water quality data. See document "Data Source/Code Key for Abbreviations" for an explanation of the codes used.
Cause	This field is only populated for waters assessed as "Not Supporting" and it shows what criteria are not being met. See document "Data Source/Code Key for Abbreviations" for an explanation of the codes used.
Source	This field is only populated for waters assessed as "not supporting" and provides potential sources of the violated criterion. See document "Data Source/Code Key for Abbreviations" for an explanation of the codes used.
Size	Provides the length or area of the assessed reach
Unit	Provides the measurement unit for the size field (e.g. miles, acres, etc.)
Category	Refers to the five-part categorization of waters. Waters in Category 5 make up the 303(d) list
Priority	This field is only populated for reaches in Category 5. It provides the date by which GA EPD plans to draft the TMDL
Notes	Provides additional information such as what TMDLs have been completed or explains why a reach is in Category 3.

Finally, it is helpful to understand how the 305(b)/303(d) list of waters is arranged when reviewing it. As stated above, the 305(b)/303(d) list of waters is a list of all of the waters that have been assessed by the State. The 305(b)/303(d) list is first organized by waterbody type (i.e. streams, lakes, coastal beaches, etc.). Each waterbody type is further arranged alphabetically by River Basin and then alphabetically by waterbody name.