

The Water Classification Regulation – Planning for Water Quality

In order for New Brunswick's existing surface and groundwater water resources to supply us with abundant clean water for the foreseeable future, they need to be protected and managed with care.

The *Water Classification Regulation* is a regulation under the *Clean Water Act*. The purpose of water classification is to set goals for surface water quality and promote management of water on a watershed basis. The *Water Classification Regulation* establishes water quality classes, and associated water quality standards, and outlines administrative processes and requirements related to the classification of water.

Water classification places the water of lakes and rivers or segments of rivers into categories or classes based on water quality goals. Each class is then managed according to the goal. The goals associated with a specific class are set according to the intended uses of the water, and the water quality and quantity required to protect the intended uses.



Public involvement is a cornerstone of the *Water Classification Regulation*. The Water Classification Program has been developed to help watershed and other multi-stakeholder community groups plan and set goals for surface water quality, and to help them achieve water quality goals through the establishment of water quality standards, action planning and watershed management.

This information sheet tells about the New Brunswick *Water Classification Regulation* and explains how the *Regulation* will be used to plan for water quality. It also explains how watershed and community groups can be involved in the process of setting water quality goals for their watersheds.

Water Classification – A Step-by-Step Process

The *Water Classification Regulation* outlines a step-by-step process for setting water quality goals, on a watershed basis. Water Classification places rivers or segments of rivers (including estuaries), tributaries and lakes into one of six possible categories, called classes. Each of these classes has its own set of water quality standards, designed to protect various uses of the water. Once waters are classified, they can be managed according to these standards.

The Classes:

	Outstanding Natural Waters
AP	Designated Drinking Water Supplies
AL	Lakes not classified as O or AP
A	Excellent Water Quality
B	Good Water Quality
C	Acceptable Water Quality

The Process of Water Classification has several important steps.

First, stakeholders are **identified and involved** early in the process, so that groups can build understanding and work to make decisions together.

Another important early step is **measurement and interpretation of existing water quality**. Historical information and newly collected data on water quality are used to build a picture of how the water quality may have changed in a watershed. Knowing the existing water quality helps a group make realistic decisions about the future of the watershed.

Water Classification – Step-by-Step

- identify and involve stakeholders
- gather water quality information
- assemble land and water use information
- set goals for water quality
- prepare and implement action plans

The next step is **mapping of land and water information**. Understanding the topography, geology, soils and vegetation cover in an area helps to explain water quality characteristics. Often ecological land classification can help to integrate the interpretation of these features. Land use and geology mapping helps to explain water quality changes from the natural system, and shows where sources of pollutants occur.

Once information is assembled, **stakeholders are involved in setting water quality goals** for waters in the watershed. The various stakeholders who have an interest in a watershed and its water are encouraged to work together to build consensus on water quality issues and goals.

Stakeholders include various landowners, residents and those who come from outside the watershed to use or enjoy the water. Stakeholders also include various groups of land users: farmers, foresters, industry (including those in the mining, pulp and paper, and aquaculture industries), anglers, canoeists, residential and recreational users, and others. Other stakeholders are the various levels of government: aboriginal, federal, provincial and municipal. Each of these groups has an interest in the water and, potentially, an influence on water quality.

By involving stakeholders early in the Water Classification process, everyone can understand why the water quality is the way it is, and what will result from actions to maintain, protect or restore that quality. This includes the economic, social and environmental consequences of decisions that are made and goals that are set.

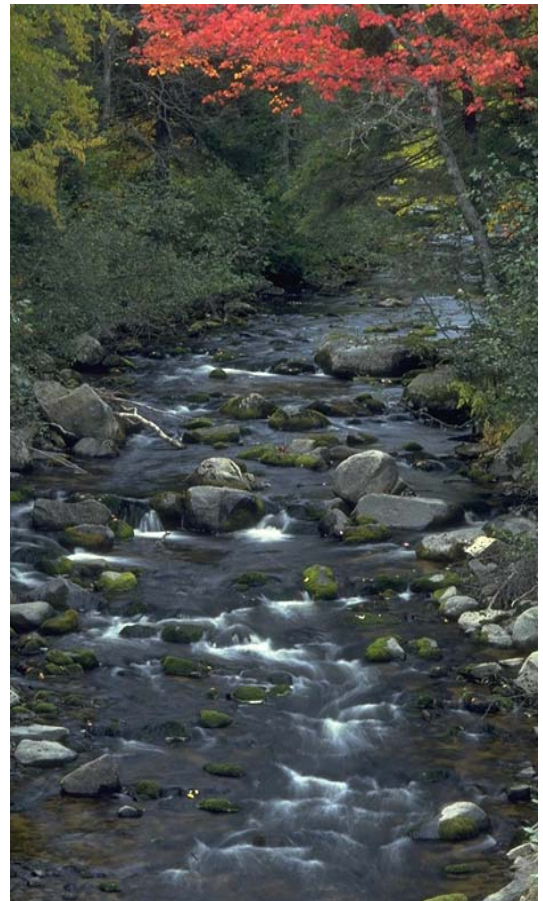
The Classes

The Outstanding Natural Waters Class

The Outstanding Natural Waters Class is a special class for protecting the water of unique or representative lakes or rivers, which have essentially natural water quality and have had little disturbance from human activities. Groups or individuals are able to nominate lakes or rivers to this class, as long as the waters meet specific objective criteria. A Review Panel with representatives from various sectors will be established to consider nominations for inclusion in the Outstanding Natural Waters Class.

The AP Class

The AP Class is designed to further protect the surface watersheds which are designated as municipal drinking water supplies under the *Watershed Protected Area Designation Order, Clean Water Act*. There are 30 of these watersheds in the province. Waters in these watersheds are classified into the AP Class on the commencement date of the *Water Classification Regulation*.



The AL Class

Lakes are known to be very sensitive systems that must be managed differently from rivers and streams. For this reason, all lakes not classified in the Outstanding or AP Classes will automatically be placed into the AL Class on the commencement date of the *Water Classification Regulation*. Lakes will be managed on the basis of their trophic level, which is a measure of their productivity as related to nitrate and phosphate concentrations. Some impoundments will not be included in the AL Class.



The A, B and C Classes

Rivers and other watercourses not included in the above classes will be classified into one of three Classes, A, B or C. Each of these Classes will have their own water quality standards and management features. Waters will be classified into these classes watershed by watershed over the next few years.

Setting Goals for Water Quality

The six Classes represent goals for water quality. In most cases, the water will already meet the goal and actions taken will be to maintain the existing water quality. Sometimes, stakeholders will agree that a higher Class should be the goal and actions will be geared towards gradually improving water quality.

Implementation

Once the classification of a particular river system is accomplished, an implementation phase begins. One role of watershed groups, including stakeholders, will be to assist with action planning. An action plan lists and prioritizes achievable activities that will help to protect or restore a river system according to the goals set through Water Classification.

Other aspects of implementation will involve the design and promotion of voluntary Best Management Practices. Regulatory tools will include the standards

Best Management Practices (BMPs)

BMPs are methods of using land or water resources that minimize environmental impacts. BMPs are designed to be technically and economically feasible. BMPs can be designed for any sector of land and water use, including forestry, agriculture, urban development, and recreation.

under the *Water Classification Regulation*, as well as the existing approvals and permitting system that focuses on pollution sources and watercourse alterations.

The standards associated with the *Water Classification Regulation* include standards for microbiology, dissolved oxygen, aquatic life and (for the AL Class) trophic or nutrient status. There are also mixing zone standards to help industry achieve the in-stream standards. Some activities are prohibited or limited in certain classes of water. For specific information on the water quality and aquatic life standards, please see Table 1.

Water Classification is both a regulatory tool and a watershed management mechanism. The step-by-step achievement of water quality goals, accomplished by understanding the water and its watershed, and by involving stakeholders in establishing a vision for the water quality, makes Water Classification a means by which a watershed group can be focused, empowered and made action-ready.

The involvement of various stakeholders in the process of Classification helps to build stronger, more broadly based watershed management groups, which will benefit from new ideas and the understanding of various points of view long after the classification exercise is complete. Water Classification leaves a legacy of knowledge as well as concrete tools such as land and water mapping and water quality data. Action plans completed as a result of Classification can be used to prioritize activities and set objectives for maintenance or restoration initiatives. This provides the watershed group with focus and direction in the future.

Working with Watershed Groups

Water Classification is already a feature of watershed-based activities in New Brunswick. The Department of the Environment and Local Government is presently working in various parts of the province with watershed and community groups that have, or can develop, a watershed focus to begin the classification process in their area.

Examples of this partnership include the Eastern Charlotte Waterways ACAP (Atlantic Coastal Action Program) group that has undertaken the first steps of a Water Classification for the West Fundy Composite Watershed (the Magaguadavic and adjacent rivers). Working towards the eventual goal of classification, they have monitored the water quality, mapped the watershed, and begun the process of discussing a preliminary classification with stakeholders throughout the watershed. Eastern Charlotte Waterways Inc. has also produced a **Guidebook on Water Classification**, including six modules and a toolkit to take a watershed group step-by-step through the process of water classification and watershed management.

The Department of the Environment and Local Government has also begun to work toward water classification with established groups in other watersheds in the province. The Hammond River Angling Association, St. Croix International Waterway

Commission, and Tabusintac Watershed Association have also prepared preliminary water classifications for the associated watersheds.

Other groups working on the step-by-step process of classification include the following: Shediac Bay Watershed Association, Kennebecasis Watershed Restoration Committee, Chaleur Bay Watersheds, Friends of the Kouchibouguacis, Comité de gestion intégrée du bassin versant de la baie de Caraquet, Société d'aménagement de la rivière Madawaska et du lac Témiscouata inc., Comité de gestion environnementale de la rivière Pokemouche, Nashwaak Watershed Association, Inc., Petitcodiac Watershed Monitoring Group, and Kent Watersheds Coalition.

As Water Classification progresses, watershed by watershed, groups like these will provide the focal point for community involvement, collection of new information, and determination of public vision in the goal setting process. Watershed groups will also be involved in implementing Water Classification through action planning and follow-up.

Watershed groups provide community-level input to water quality and water use management in New Brunswick. The Department of the Environment and Local Government applauds the hard work of these groups to facilitate the protection and improvement of New Brunswick's lakes and rivers. With their help, and with the help of all stakeholders, we look forward to implementing the *Water Classification Regulation* and long-term management of the province's lake and river systems.

Cette information est aussi disponible en français.

[For more information, please contact:](#)

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