

TMDL Stream Regulations: What Are They & What Do They Mean for Horse Owners?

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TMDL stands for Total Maximum Daily Load. A TMDL is a calculation of the maximum amount of pollution that a waterbody can receive and still meet water quality standards. TMDLs must be developed for impaired waterways under Federal and State laws. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (EPA) and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) are responsible for developing the TMDLs.

The first TMDL to be developed for our area is for Cedar Run. The Cedar Run watershed (the land area that drains into Cedar Run) includes much of Nokesville south of route 28. The nearly 87,000 acre watershed continues into Fauquier County. Both counties will be working together to develop the TMDL and to reduce pollution in this impaired waterway.

Levels of fecal coliform bacteria in Cedar Run exceed water quality standards and pose a potential health risk. The sources of fecal coliform bacteria must be identified and reduced. E. coli is the bacterium present that is of the most concern. The presence of E. coli in water samples is a strong indicator of sewage or animal waste contamination. DEQ will be using a process called bacteria source tracking to identify the source(s) of E. coli. This process will identify whether the bacteria are from humans (sewage/septic systems), farm livestock, or wildlife. The process is not able to tell if the bacteria come from horses versus cows. DEQ will be using water sampling and bacteria source tracking to identify the sources of pollution.

What is your role as a county citizen and responsible horse owner?

- 1. Look at your own operation or your boarding facility. Does it border a stream? What stream is it? Do horses have access to the stream? Are they possible contributors of the pollution? Might drinking the contaminated water harm them? Where is manure stored? How is it handled? It is applied to the pasture? At what rate, what season?**
- 2. Call the Conservation District for help or an assessment of the current land management practices. Learn more about how your land management can positively impact water quality. Find how you can organize a group to Adopt-A-Stream or become trained water quality monitors. The Conservation District is a non-regulatory agency devoted to working with landowners that choose to do so voluntarily.**
- 3. Attend public meetings to learn more about the TMDL process and voice your opinion.**

Nobody wants to hear about more regulations but sometimes they are necessary to protect the greater good. The reality is that if livestock waste is determined to be a contributor of pollution, some horse farms in our area will need to change their land management practices. Prince William County only has four working dairy farms and the horse farms greatly out number the beef cattle operations.

I know many of you are District cooperators that follow our recommendations adopt Best Management Practices as you are able, and are learning more all the time. Thank you for your commitment and enthusiasm. For those others that have yet to be motivated, give us a call. We'd be happy to work with to whatever extent you choose or are able.