

Oklahoma's Use Support Assessment Protocols (USAP) An Historical Overview and Their Practical Application

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Mr. Cauthron works for the Oklahoma Water Resources Board where he serves as the Water Quality Monitoring Program Coordinator in the agency's Water Quality Division. He oversees the operation of the Oklahoma Beneficial Use Monitoring Program (BUMP), which is designed to assess the support status of Oklahoma's numerous lakes and streams. He is involved with development of the state's Use Support Assessment Protocols (USAP), which outlines standardized data requirements and decision criteria to be used when assessing if waters are meeting their assigned beneficial uses. He also oversees the agency volunteer monitoring program "Oklahoma Water Watch" and groundwater monitoring initiative. Mr. Porter, in his capacity as Streams/Rivers Monitoring Coordinator, manages all activities related to stream and river monitoring for the WQPD. He is a member of several technical work groups whose activities include the development of the state's USAP, the Continuing Planning Process, and statewide standard operating procedures. He also serves on several committees whose activities include the review and compilation of the state's 303(d) list and 305(b) report and the coordination of statewide monitoring activities.

Abstract

Implementation of Oklahoma's Water Quality Standards (OWQS) began in the mid-1990's and culminated in the adoption of OAC 785:46 by the Oklahoma Legislature in 1996. Over the years, items dealing with implementation of OWQS criteria have been added to the OWQS. However, no uniform protocols were available to use when assessing support of beneficial uses outlined in the OWQS. In 1999, Oklahoma's Use Support Assessment Protocols (USAP) were promulgated, and in 2000, the protocols were adopted by the Legislature. Outlining data requirements and assessment protocols for determining support, USAP represents the standardized assessment tool that was needed. The USAP's impact on Oklahoma's water quality management can already be seen. It has provided an implementation framework for water quality managers from not only state agencies but tribal governments and industry as well. The OWRB's Beneficial Use Monitoring Program (BUMP)—a statewide water quality monitoring program for lakes, rivers, and streams—serves as an excellent example of direct implementation of USAP. The BUMP's standard operating procedures and reporting process were specifically designed to follow the data requirements and decision-making protocols outlined in USAP. In addition, the identification of threatened and impaired waterbodies has been facilitated by USAP's adoption. The document outlines a uniform methodology for determining the addition or removal of many of the waterbody/pollutant pairs on the state's 305(b) report and 303(d) list. Recently, the USAP was revised and presented to the Oklahoma Legislature for adoption. Other modifications have been suggested and a working group of State and Federal agencies, along with academia continue to work together to enhance the utility and effectiveness of the Oklahoma USAP document.