

THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY
YOUTH GOVERNOR WILLIAM HUANG
COMMISSIONER OF THE ENVIRONMENT:
MEG SIMONS

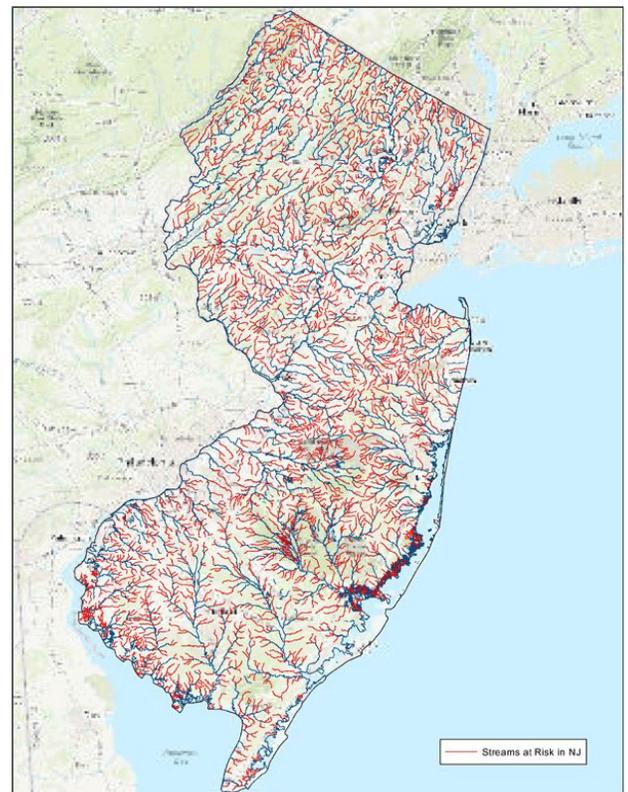


Dear Delegates,

According to federal officials, New Jersey is *still* struggling to clean up its rivers, lakes and streams, as required by the provisions set forth by the Clean Water Act of 1972. To build upon those provisions, the Clean Water Rule was established in 2015 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers to clarify which bodies of water are protected by the federal Clean Water Act. According to the EPA, a total of 13,000 miles of rivers, 27,000 acres of lakes and ponds, 200 square miles of bays and estuaries, and 370 square miles of ocean and coastal waters in New Jersey are unsafe for fishing, swimming, boating, or drinking because of polluted runoff.

Currently, an estimated fewer than 3 percent of New Jersey's waterways meet federal standards that would make them "fishable and swimmable," down from 10 percent a decade earlier, according to a Sierra Club analysis of EPA data. The problems range from dioxin-contaminated fish in the Newark estuary to contamination of shellfish beds at the Jersey Shore.

The root of the problem seems to be the inefficiency of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. While the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) does require municipalities to take steps to reduce runoff through permits, those permits haven't been updated in almost a decade. Their existing requirements are so ambiguous and weak that they've been entirely ineffective at protecting water quality, which continues to grow worse across the state. The DEP is renewing the permits now, but the proposal aims to keep the same weak requirements in place, with next to no impactful changes.



One big problem is that the permits don't require the use of modern technologies that have proven effective at reducing runoff pollution. "Green infrastructure" practices, like rain gardens, green roofs, permeable pavement, and cisterns, let rainwater soak into the ground or get taken up by plants, meaning that polluted water doesn't dump contaminants into nearby waterways. Green infrastructure also provides wide ranging benefits like cleaner air, fewer asthma and heat-related illnesses, lower energy demand for heating and cooling, and increased property values. However, New Jersey's permits and regulations don't require the use of these technologies; they don't even require other types of pollution controls, like the reduction of stormwater runoff or the disposal of waste, to be adequately maintained. Lawmakers and environmentalists argue that safeguards are needed in New Jersey more than anywhere else, as it is the most densely populated and urbanized state in the nation.

Many have suggested that, instead of issuing permits with the same ineffective requirements, the DEP should take this opportunity to modernize stormwater control standards and require clean-up plans for local water bodies. We, as the Governor's Cabinet, look forward to reading bills concerning the quality of water in New Jersey, the pollution of waterways, the promotion of "green infrastructure," etc.

Sincerely,

Meg Simons
Commissioner of the Environment

Sources:

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https://ofmpub.epa.gov/waters10/attains_state.control?p_state=NJ