

and implemented for all watershed projects, whether they are designed to protect unimpaired waters, restore impaired waters, or both.

For projects funded with incremental dollars, where a NPS TMDL for the affected waters has already been developed and approved or is being developed, the watershed-based plan must be designed to achieve the load reductions called for in the NPS TMDL. However, where a NPS TMDL has not yet been developed and approved or is not yet being developed for the waters, the State may use Section 319 funds to develop a watershed-based plan in the absence of the TMDL. In such cases, the plan must be designed to reduce nonpoint source pollutant loadings that are contributing to water quality threats and impairments. Where feasible, the plan should be designed to meet water quality standards. In this way, progress towards achieving water quality standards continues even before a TMDL is established. Once the TMDL is completed and approved, the plan must be modified as appropriate to be consistent with the load allocation portion contained within the TMDL. Alternatively, through the course of implementing the plan, the State may find that water quality standards are met, obviating the need to establish the TMDL. EPA believes that improving the integration of TMDLs and watershed plans to implement nonpoint source management measures will provide the most effective means for accelerating achievement of water quality standards.

To ensure that Section 319 projects make good progress towards remediating waters impaired by nonpoint source pollution, a watershed-based plan must have been completed before a State implements a watershed-based plan funded with incremental Section 319 dollars. These watershed-based plans must include the information set forth in items (a)–(i) below. This information will help provide assurance that the nonpoint source load allocations identified in the NPS TMDL (and/or anticipated in NPDES permits for the watershed) will be achieved. Furthermore, this information is critical in any case for ensuring the development of realistic plans to achieve protection goals or water quality standards, while at the same time providing a significant degree of flexibility to work with stakeholders in the watershed to use a range of innovative approaches to implement the plan.

To the extent that necessary information already exists in other documents (e.g., various State and local watershed planning documents, or

watershed plans developed to help implement conservation programs administered by USDA), the information may be incorporated by reference. In addition, we encourage States to incorporate by reference any voluminous material that already exists in other documents. Thus, the State need not duplicate any existing process or document that already provides needed information.

Components of a Watershed-Based Plan

Beginning in FY 2004, the following information must be included in watershed-based plans to restore waters impaired by nonpoint source pollution using incremental Section 319 funds. These requirements are not retroactive to watershed plans developed in accordance with the FY 2002 or FY 2003 Section 319 guidelines; those plans may continue to be developed and implemented with funds available in FY 2004 and future years in accordance with the previously applicable requirements of the Section 319 guidelines.

a. An identification of the causes and sources or groups of similar sources that will need to be controlled to achieve the load reductions estimated in this watershed-based plan (and to achieve any other watershed goals identified in the watershed-based plan), as discussed in item (b) immediately below. Sources that need to be controlled should be identified at the significant subcategory level with estimates of the extent to which they are present in the watershed (e.g., X number of dairy cattle feedlots needing upgrading, including a rough estimate of the number of cattle per facility; Y acres of row crops needing improved nutrient management or sediment control; or Z linear miles of eroded streambank needing remediation).

b. An estimate of the load reductions expected for the management measures described under paragraph (c) below (recognizing the natural variability and the difficulty in precisely predicting the performance of management measures over time). Estimates should be provided at the same level as in item (a) above (e.g., the total load reduction expected for dairy cattle feedlots; row crops; or eroded streambanks).

c. A description of the NPS management measures that will need to be implemented to achieve the load reductions estimated under paragraph (b) above (as well as to achieve other watershed goals identified in this watershed-based plan), and an identification (using a map or a description) of the critical areas in

which those measures will be needed to implement this plan.

d. An estimate of the amounts of technical and financial assistance needed, associated costs, and/or the sources and authorities that will be relied upon, to implement this plan. As sources of funding, States should consider the use of their Section 319 programs, State Revolving Funds, USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Reserve Program, and other relevant Federal, State, local and private funds that may be available to assist in implementing this plan.

e. An information/education component that will be used to enhance public understanding of the project and encourage their early and continued participation in selecting, designing, and implementing the NPS management measures that will be implemented.

f. A schedule for implementing the NPS management measures identified in this plan that is reasonably expeditious.

g. A description of interim, measurable milestones for determining whether NPS management measures or other control actions are being implemented.

h. A set of criteria that can be used to determine whether loading reductions are being achieved over time and substantial progress is being made towards attaining water quality standards and, if not, the criteria for determining whether this watershed-based plan needs to be revised or, if a NPS TMDL has been established, whether the NPS TMDL needs to be revised.

i. A monitoring component to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation efforts over time, measured against the criteria established under item (h) immediately above.

EPA recognizes the difficulty of developing the information described above with precision and, as this guidance reflects, believes that there must be a balanced approach to address this concern. On one hand, it is absolutely critical that States make, at the subcategory level, a reasonable effort to identify the significant sources; identify the management measures that will most effectively address those sources; and broadly estimate the expected load reductions that will result. Without such information to provide focus and direction to the project's implementation, it is much less likely that the project can efficiently and effectively address the nonpoint sources of water quality impairments. On the other hand, EPA recognizes that even with reasonable steps to obtain and analyze relevant data, the available