

Water quality at a Glance

Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forests

Forest Collaborative Meeting

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Water quality can be separated into two basic categories: 1) water for drinking and 2) water to support beneficial uses (e.g., fish and wildlife). Forests and grasslands have long been relied upon as sources of clean drinking water for two reasons: (1) forests mainly grow under conditions that produce relatively reliable water runoff, and (2) properly managed forests and grasslands can yield water relatively low in contaminants when compared with many urban and agricultural land uses. There are a myriad of laws, both State and Federal, which govern water quality. However, the primary laws are the Federal Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act. Idaho DEQ has been delegated authority by the federal government to administer Idaho's Drinking Water Program under the provisions of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act and the Idaho Rules for Public Drinking Water Systems; while the Environmental Protection Agency administers the Clean Water Act.

Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, and Idaho State Water Quality Laws

The U.S. Congress justified passing the Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996 (SDWA) [Public Law 104–182, codified at 42 U.S.C. sec. 300j–14], by stating “safe drinking water is essential to the protection of public health.” The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) is the main federal law that ensures the quality of Americans' drinking water. Under SDWA, EPA sets standards for drinking water quality and oversees the states, localities, and water suppliers who implement those standards. SDWA was originally passed by Congress in 1974 to protect public health by regulating the nation's public drinking water supply. The law was amended in 1986 and 1996 and requires many actions to protect drinking water and its sources: rivers, lakes, reservoirs, springs, and ground water wells. (SDWA does not regulate private wells which serve fewer than 25 individuals.)

The Clean Water Act (CWA) [(Public Law 80–845), codified at 33 U.S.C. Sec.1251] is the primary federal law in the United States governing water pollution.[1] Passed in 1972, the act established the goals of eliminating releases of high amounts of toxic substances into water, eliminating additional water pollution by 1985, and ensuring that surface waters would meet standards necessary for human sports and recreation by 1983. Point sources may not discharge pollutants to surface waters without a permit from the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). This system is managed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in partnership with state environmental agencies.

The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality's (IDEQ's) Water Quality Division is responsible for ensuring that Idaho's surface, ground, and drinking water resources meet state water quality standards.

In addition there are Executive Orders 11988 and 11990 regarding Floodplain and Wetland Management. EO 11988 directs the Forest to “*restore and preserve the natural and beneficial values*

served by floodplains". EO 11990 directs the Forest to "*minimize the destruction, loss or degradation of wetlands*". .

A provision of the Organic Act of 1897 (30 Stat. 11), [codified at 16 U.S.C. Subsec. 473–475, 477–482, 551], that established the national forests "for the purpose of securing favorable conditions of water flows," has been interpreted to authorize managing his land for water resources.