

Sec. 1. FINDINGS

The General Assembly finds that:

(1) Within the borders of Vermont there are 7,100 miles of rivers and streams and 812 lakes and ponds of at least five acres in size.

(2) Vermont's surface waters are vital assets that provide the citizens of the State with clean water, recreation, and economic opportunity.

(3) The federal Clean Water Act and the Vermont Water Quality Standards require that waters in the State shall not be degraded and instead shall be managed to protect, maintain and improve water quality;

(4) To prevent degradation of waters and to preserve the uses, benefits, and values of the lakes, rivers, and streams of Vermont, the Vermont Water Quality Standards provide that it is the policy of the State to prevent, abate, or control all activities harmful to water;

(5) Despite the State and federal mandates to maintain and prevent degradation of State waters, multiple lakes, rivers, and streams in all regions of the State are impaired, at risk of impairment, or subject to water quality stressors, as indicated by the fact that:

(A) There are 81 waters or segments of waters in the State that are impaired and require a total maximum daily load (TMDL) plan;

(B) There are 114 waters or segments of waters in the State that are impaired and that have been issued a TMDL;

(C) There are at least 115 waters or water segments in the State that are stressed, meaning that there is one or more factor or influence that prohibits the water from maintaining a higher quality;

(D) there are at least 56 waters in the State that are altered due to aquatic nuisance species, meaning that one or more of the designated uses of the water is prohibited due to the presence of aquatic nuisance species; and

(E) there are 73 waters or water segments in the State that are altered by flow regulation, meaning aquatic habitat or designated uses in the waters have been altered due to the occurrence or presence of flow fluctuation, obstructions or other manipulation of water levels;

(4) Impairments and other alterations of water can significantly limit how a water is used and whether it can maintained for traditional uses. For example:

(A) Aquatic life is only supported in 59 percent of the State's inland lakes, and

(B) Swimming is only supported on 76 percent of the State's inland lakes.

(5) Without State action to improve the quality of State waters and prevent further degradation of the quality of existing waters, the State of Vermont will be at risk of losing the valuable, if not necessary functions and uses that the State's waters provide;

(6) Sufficiently addressing, improving, and forestalling degradation of water quality in the State in a sustainable and effective manner will be expensive and the burden of the expense will be felt by all citizens of the State, but without action the economic, cultural, and environmental losses to the State will be immeasurable;

(7) To protect the waters of the State and preserve the quality of life of the citizens of Vermont, the State of Vermont should:

(A) fully implement the antidegradation implementation policy in the Vermont Water Quality Standards;

(B) Enhance, implement, and enforce regulatory requirements for water quality, and

(C) Sufficiently and sustainably financing all water quality programs within the State.