

Special Protection Waters: Keeping the Clean Water Clean



Delaware River Basin Commission
DELAWARE • NEW JERSEY
PENNSYLVANIA • NEW YORK
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



The shaded area in this map depicts the drainage area to DRBC SPW.

What are Special Protection Waters?

DRBC's Special Protection Waters (SPW) program was initially adopted in 1992 and expanded in 1994 and 2008. It is designed to prevent degradation in streams and rivers where existing water quality is better than the established standards. This is accomplished through stricter control of wastewater discharges and reporting requirements. Currently, the entire 197-mile non-tidal Delaware River from Hancock, N.Y. to Trenton, N.J. is considered Special Protection Waters, three-quarters of which is also included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

How does the SPW Program Work?

The program states that there will be no measurable change in existing water quality (EWQ) of SPW waters except towards natural conditions. It allows new or expanded pollutant loadings as long as they do not measurably change the EWQ and considers the cumulative impacts of these loadings, rather than just looking at them individually.

Monitoring of SPW is required to determine if measurable change is occurring at designated interstate and boundary control points where EWQ has been defined. This monitoring program is conducted through an informal partnership between the National Park Service (NPS) and the DRBC called the Scenic Rivers Monitoring Program.

Is the SPW Program Effective?

In 2016, DRBC published the Lower Delaware Water Quality Assessment, which compared water quality data initially collected from 2000-2004 to the assessment period of 2009-2011. The report showed that for most water quality parameters at most locations, there were no measurable changes to EWQ in this 76-mile stretch of river from Portland, Pa. to Trenton, N.J. These results demonstrate that the program is effective and plays an important role in managing water quality in the Delaware River Basin.

DRBC believes that its SPW regulations establish an anti-degradation policy on the longest stretch of any river in the nation. Ensuring that the level of water quality in SPW is not degrading over time is the ultimate goal of the program: to keep water quality above existing standards, or, simply, to keep the clean water clean.

Learn more: <http://www.nj.gov/drbc/programs/quality/spw.html>

DRBC: Managing, Protecting & Improving the Basin's Water Resources Since 1961

The Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) is a federal-interstate compact agency created in 1961 to manage the water resources of the Delaware River Basin without regard to political boundaries. The commission's members are the governors of the four basin states (Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania) and the Commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers North Atlantic Division, who serves as the federal representative.

The commission was formed in response to major water resource challenges requiring regional solutions, and to this day is a successful model for federal-state collaboration.

DRBC programs include water quality protection, water supply allocation, regulatory review, water conservation, drought management, watershed planning, flood loss reduction, and education/outreach.

Highlights of DRBC accomplishments, in addition to the SPW program, include the following:

- * DRBC regulations have helped to dramatically improve dissolved oxygen levels in the Delaware Estuary, allowing for migratory and resident fish populations to thrive;
- * DRBC's Pollutant Minimization Plan regulations have helped to significantly reduce PCB loadings to the river; and
- * DRBC has been recognized for its comprehensive water conservation, drought management, and watershed planning programs.

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