



# Nonpoint Pointers

Understanding and managing nonpoint source pollution in your community

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## Protecting Coastal Waters from Nonpoint Source Pollution

Coastal waters provide homes for an amazing array of plants and animals and are recreational havens for more than 180 million visitors each year. Yet, high levels of pollution prevented people from swimming safely at coastal beaches on more than 12,000 occasions from 1988 through 1994, and the latest *National Water Quality Inventory* reports that one-third of surveyed estuaries (areas near the coast where seawater and freshwater mixing occurs) are damaged. Rapidly increasing population growth and development in coastal regions could be a source of even more coastal water quality problems in the future.


*Coastal waters include estuaries, sounds, bays, lagoons, and other bodies of water that have a large percentage of seawater, as well as the Great Lakes.*

A significant portion of the threats to coastal waters are caused by nonpoint source pollution (NPS). Major sources in coastal waters include agriculture and urban runoff. Other significant sources include faulty septic systems, forestry, marinas and recreational boating, physical changes to stream channels, and

habitat degradation, especially the destruction of wetlands and vegetated areas near streams.

In 1990, Congress passed the Coastal Zone Act Reauthorization Amendments (CZARA) to tackle the nonpoint source pollution problem in coastal waters. Section 6217 of CZARA requires the 29 states and territories with approved Coastal Zone Management Programs to develop Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Programs. In its program, a state or territory describes how it will implement nonpoint source pollution controls, known as management measures, that conform with those described in *Guidance Specifying Management Measures for Sources of Nonpoint Pollution in Coastal Waters*.

If these original management measures fail to produce the necessary coastal water quality improvements, a state or territory then must implement additional management measures to address remaining water quality problems. Approved programs will update and expand upon NPS Management Programs developed under section 319 of the Clean Water Act and



A series of fact sheets on nonpoint source (NPS) pollution

***Did you know that by 2010, almost one-half of the U.S. population will live near coastal waters in regions that make up only 10 percent of our country's land areas?***

NPS pollution occurs when water runs over land or through the ground, picks up pollutants, and deposits them in surface waters or introduces them into ground water.

## RELATED PUBLICATIONS

- Additional fact sheets in the Nonpoint Pointers series (EPA-841-F-96-004)
- Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program: Program Development and Approval Guidance (EPA-841-B-93-003)
- Global Marine Biological Diversity, Center for Marine Conservation, Island Press, Washington, DC, 1993
- Guidance Specifying Management Measures for Sources of Nonpoint Pollution in Coastal Waters (EPA-840-B-92-002)
- The Quality of Our Nation's Water: 1994 (EPA-841-S-95-004)
- Testing the Waters V: Politics and Pollution at US Beaches, Natural Resources Defense Council, June 1995

To order any EPA documents call or fax the National Center for Environmental Publications and Information.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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<http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/index.html>

Coastal Zone Management Programs developed under section 306 of the Coastal Zone Management Act.

The coastal nonpoint program strengthens the links between federal and state/territory coastal zone management and water quality programs in order to enhance efforts to manage land management activities that degrade coastal waters and coastal habitats. State and territorial coastal zone agencies and water quality agencies have coequal roles, as do the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at the federal level.

## Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Programs

In 1995, coastal states and territories submitted their coastal nonpoint programs to EPA and NOAA for review and approval. States and territories are scheduled to implement the first phase of their approved program by 2004 and, if necessary, the second phase by 2009. Approved programs include several key elements, described below.

**Boundary.** The boundary defines the region where land and water uses have a significant impact on a state's or territory's coastal waters. It also includes areas where future land uses reasonably can be expected to impair coastal waters. To define the boundary, a state or territory may choose a region suggested by NOAA or may propose its own boundary based on geologic, hydrologic, and other scientific data.

**Management Measures.** The state or territory coastal nonpoint program describes how a state or territory plans to control NPS pollution within the boundary. To help states and territories identify appropriate technologies and tools, EPA issued *Guidance Specifying Management Measures for Sources of Nonpoint Pollution in Coastal Waters*. This technical guidance describes the best available, economically achievable approaches used to control NPS pollution from the major categories of land management activities that can degrade coastal water quality. States or territories may elect to implement alternative measurement measures as long as they will achieve the same environmental results as those described in the guidance.

**Enforceable Policies and Mechanisms.** States and territories need to ensure implementation of the management measures. Mechanisms may include, for example, permit programs, zoning, "bad actor" laws, enforceable water quality standards, and general environmental laws and prohibitions. States and territories may also use voluntary approaches like economic incentives if they are backed by appropriate regulations.

## Final Approval and Conditional Approval

In certain circumstances, NOAA and EPA may grant a program conditional approval for up to five years. Conditional approval provides a state or territory additional time to fully develop its management program while it begins initial program implementation. Conditional approval would include benchmarks for progress toward eventual full program development and approval.