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Water Quality Board Seeks Public Comment on Phosphorous Pollution Rule

Technology-Based Limits Would Reduce Phosphorous Discharges into Utah Waters

ST. GEORGE, UTAH –The Water Quality Board voted unanimously today to solicit public input on a proposed rule that would limit the amount of phosphorous that wastewater treatment plants can discharge into state waters. Limits on phosphorous will help address the growing problem of excess nitrogen and phosphorus, also known as nutrient pollution, in Utah waterways.

Nutrients in water support the growth of the algae and aquatic plants that provide food and habitat for fish and smaller aquatic organisms. But *excess* nitrogen and phosphorus can cause serious problems. Nutrient pollution impairs drinking water, endangers aquatic life, and jeopardizes recreational water uses. Approximately 38 percent of Utah's priority rivers and lakes have been listed as having impaired water quality, mostly due to nutrient-related issues.

The proposed regulation would establish a technology-based limit of 1 mg/L total phosphorous for all non-lagoon treatment plants, with some exceptions. These proposed limits will provide, on average, a 50 percent decrease in the phosphorous entering Utah's waters from treatment plants.

The Division of Water Quality (DWQ) will accept public comments on the proposed rule beginning June 1 and ending on August 1, 2014. DWQ will also hold six public hearings throughout the state on the proposal during that time.

"Nutrient pollution is by far the biggest water quality threat we face in Utah," explains Walt Baker, director of the Division of Water Quality. "If the state continued to control for nutrients under its current water quality policies, conditions would degrade at one-third of Utah lakes and nearly 50 percent of Utah rivers over the next 20 years."

Good water quality is important to the state's economy and quality of life. A 2013 economic benefits study showed that Utah residents spend an average of $1.4 to $2.4 billion on water-based activities and place great importance on preserving water quality for future generations.

Upgrading Utah's publicly-owned treatment works (POTWs) to meet the 1 mg/L phosphorous limit will provide the state with the most "bang-for-the-buck" for near-term reductions in nutrient levels in state waters. Utah households will see an estimated monthly increase of $1.34 to fund the upgrades.

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Baker believes the proposed rule to limit phosphorous is a modest, but positive, first step towards controlling nutrient pollution in Utah.

"Anything we can do to reduce nutrients in our waters today will pay off in a big way tomorrow."

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About DEQ: Established in 1991, the Utah Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) mission is to safeguard public health and quality of life by protecting and enhancing the environment. DEQ implements state and federal environmental laws and works with individuals, community groups and businesses to protect the quality of Utah's air, land and water. For more information, visit www.deq.utah.gov, follow DEQ on Facebook (newseq) and Twitter (@UTDEQ), or call 1-800-458-0145.