



**Association of Idaho Cities**  
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December 17, 2018

Mr. Dan Opalski, Director of US EPA Region 10 Office of Water and Watersheds  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10  
Office of Water and Watersheds  
1200 Sixth Avenue, Suite 155, OWW-191  
Seattle, Washington 98101

Re: City of Pocatello, City of Chubbuck, Bannock County, Idaho Transportation Department-District #5, and Idaho State University Draft MS4 Permit - November 2018; NPDES Permit #IDS028053 (Pocatello Area MS4 Phase 2 Permit)

Dear Mr. Opalski,

The Association of Idaho Cities (AIC) serves to advance the interests of the cities of Idaho through legislative advocacy, technical assistance, training, and research. Idaho cities play important roles as primary implementers of the Clean Water Act, representing over 70% of all Idaho residents. These stakeholders have a significant interest in the development of stormwater permits and other federal programs related to the protection of human and aquatic life. AIC is actively engaged in water quality issues through the work of our Environment Committee, chaired by Boise City Council President Pro Tem Elaine Clegg and our Municipal Water Users Group, chaired by Jerome City Council President Bob Culver.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 10 proposes to issue a NPDES permit authorizing the discharge of stormwater from all municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) outfalls owned and/or operated by the City of Pocatello, City of Chubbuck, Bannock County, Idaho Transportation Department-District #5, and Idaho State University. AIC has prepared the attached comments on the draft Permit in light of the statewide impact and precedence established regarding a number of important issues.

AIC urges the EPA to carefully consider the comments submitted by the Permittees, supplemented by those attached to this letter prior to making a final decision regarding the permit's scope and requirements. Should you have questions concerning our attached comments, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jess Harrison", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Jess Harrison, Executive Director

cc: Elaine Clegg, AIC Environment Committee Chair  
Bob Culver, AIC Municipal Water Users Group Chair  
Misha Vakoc, US EPA R10 Municipal Storm Water Permit Coordinator  
Lynn Van Every, IDEQ Pocatello Regional Office  
AIC Stormwater Technical Task Force

Attachment



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## **General Comments**

AIC appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed individual Phase 2 MS4 permit and Idaho 401 Certification. AIC understands that the Permittees look forward to working with our state and federal partners in the development of final permit conditions that conform with federal EPA Phase 2 regulations, protects water quality in Idaho in areas where stormwater may be having the most potential effect, and thus achieves a cost-effective use of local funding and resources to manage stormwater. AIC seeks to support the Permittees in these efforts because many of the Idaho MS4 Permittees are AIC's members.

The protection of public health and safety is an important responsibility of Idaho communities. AIC has observed how these stakeholders consistently seek to ensure compliance, and wish to preserve their ability to comply over the long term with Clean Water Act regulations. Both financial and technical resources are required by Idaho communities in order to ensure these investments are made in a manner that will ensure long-term compliance under the Clean Water Act. Idaho communities' investments must be informed through a well-supported Clean Water Act MS4 permitting program that takes into account the need to employ adaptive management strategies over the long term.

## **Individual Versus General Permitting Approach**

The EPA was previously working on a statewide General Permit that would cover all Phase 2 regulated MS4s in Idaho (i.e., during 2016 through the first half of 2018). During this period of time, the EPA received comments from AIC and other stakeholders on two versions of the draft general permit. As the Fact Sheet Supporting the Pocatello Area MS4 Phase 2 Permit states the "EPA has decided to issue individual permits instead of a general permit" and that the "information received, in conjunction with the permit renewal application and Annual Reports, has been used to inform the current draft Permit."

Given this history, AIC wishes to go on record as strongly urging the EPA to carefully reconsider the decision to develop multiple individual permits rather than a statewide Phase 2 MS4 General Permit. There are many compelling reasons that support a statewide General Permit approach, including but not limited to the following:

- Reduced regulatory agency workload (both federal and state)
- Improved Permittee coordination of resources
- Fairness and consistency across Idaho
- Better supports a transition to Idaho primacy

## AIC's Support for a Number of Proposed Permit Requirements

AIC supports a number of proposed Permit requirements and wishes to draw attention to a few in particular:

- Establishing numerous placeholders throughout the proposed Permit for the "Permit Effective Date," in order to invite input from the Permittees regarding a feasible time line for the schedule of program development and compliance elements (See Schedule on page 2 or 68, and numerous other places in the proposed Permit).
- Providing the affirmative statement that "If the Permittees comply with all the terms and conditions of this Permit, it is presumed that the Permittees are not causing or contributing to an excursion above the applicable Idaho Water Quality Standards." (See Section 2.1).
- Clarifying allowable non-stormwater discharges through a detailed list of common urban infrastructure and situations (See Section 2.4.5).
- Ensuring that valid receiving water impacts and the significance to public health are taken into consideration prior to determining whether a stormwater discharge is a source of pollution to Water of the United States (See Section 2.4.5.2).
- Acknowledging the limited legal authority of the Permittees provided by Idaho law and providing for progress reports as a compliance pathway where limited regulatory mechanisms are available (See Section 2.5.4).
- Recognizing that some of the Permittees are a type of entity that do not have legal authority over private property and revising permit requirements accordingly (See Section 3.1.4).
- Construction site plans for projects disturbing **one or more acres** for Permittees review (See Section 3.3, emphasis added).
- Recognizing that some of the Permittees are a type of entity with limited legal authorities and, therefore, may comply with the permit through the development of an enforcement response plan that is "appropriate to its organization" (See Section 3.3.6).
- Controls at new development and redevelopment project sites that result in land disturbance of **greater than or equal to one (1) acre** (including construction project sites less than one acre that are part of a larger common plan of development or sale that would disturb one acre or more) **and that discharge into the MS4** (See Section 3.4, emphasis added).
- Providing for "alternatives for local compliance" in those situations where onsite retention is not technically feasible (See Section 3.4.2.2).

- The affirmative statement that “A Permittee will be presumed to be in compliance with applicable Idaho Water Quality Standards if the Permittee is in compliance with the terms and conditions of this Permit,” (See Section 5).
- Ensuring the Permittees have adequate time to prepare annual reports by providing 61 days following the end of each reporting period (See Section 6.4).
- The affirmative statement that “The provisions of this Permit are severable, and if any provision of this Permit, or the application of any provision of this Permit to any circumstance, is held invalid, the application of such provision to other circumstances, and the remainder of this Permit, shall not be affected thereby.” (See Section 8.12).

## **Permit Effective Date**

AIC supports the Permittees’ request that the Permit become effective on October 1, 2019, the start of the Permittees’ fiscal year(s). This start date was previously discussed during the development of the Idaho MS4 General Permit and would provide much needed opportunities for planning the funding for the new requirements in the Permit. The deadlines for the MOUs and the development and public review of Alternative Control Measures should also be revised based on an October 1, 2019 effective date.

While the EPA may strive to have the effective date of December 31, 2018, AIC notes that this is not possible at this time given the current public review schedule and response to comments time provisions.

Further, given the financial burdens and affordability considerations, AIC supports EPA’s adoption of a time line that provides 4.5 years for implementation updates to the six (6) minimum control measures. That is, AIC requests that the deadline for these mostly programmatic measures be set for 4.5 years following the effective date of the permit; concurrent with the re-application deadline.

## **Schedule of Compliance**

AIC appreciates EPA’s commitment and intentions to construct the proposed Permit in a manner that preserves the “Maximum Extent Practicable” (MEP) standard under the Clean Water Act.<sup>1</sup> However, AIC believes the final Permit requires an affirmative statement regarding how the MEP standard will be achieved. Therefore, AIC strongly urges the EPA to insert the following paragraph into Section 2.1, “Compliance with Water Quality Standards:”

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<sup>1</sup> Maximum Extent Practicable: Municipal stormwater dischargers must control the discharge of pollutants to the “maximum extent practicable” (“MEP”) by implementing best management practices that control runoff. (33 U.S.C. § 1342(p)(3)(B))

To ensure that the Permittee's activities achieve timely compliance with applicable water quality standards, the Permittees shall implement the Storm Water Management Program, monitoring, reporting and other requirements of this permit in accordance with the time frames established in the permit. This timely implementation of the requirements of this permit shall constitute the authorized schedule of compliance.

It is AIC's intention to support both the EPA and Idaho in the preservation of the MEP standard in this and other MS4 permits and offers the following justifications in support of the inclusion of this language in final Permits:

- Congress did not mandate a "minimum standards" approach or specify that the EPA develop minimal performance requirements;<sup>2</sup>
- Under 33 U.S.C. § 1342(p)(3)(B)(iii) the EPA's choice to include either management practices or numeric limitations in the permits is within its discretion;<sup>3</sup> and,
- EPA understands that MS4s need the flexibility to determine appropriate BMPs to satisfy each of the six minimum control measures through an evaluative process.<sup>4</sup>

With respect to how the recommended affirmative statement complies with the Idaho water quality standards and associated 401 Certification, AIC respectfully points out that additional and important justifications can be found in the EPA approved 2010 Portneuf River TMDL Addendum:<sup>5</sup>

- "...implementation of the Pocatello Urbanized Area (PUA) Phase II Stormwater Permit is in its fourth year and is geared toward decreasing the impact of urban stormwater on the Portneuf River and select tributaries. It is anticipated that through implementation of the provisions in the Federal Phase II Stormwater permit that sediment, nutrients, bacteria and oil and grease will be reduced to the maximum extent practicable and ***move the river towards compliance*** with the pollutant reductions detailed in this TMDL revision. (DEQ, 2010; Portneuf River TMDL Revision and Addendum, Reasonable Assurance, pg. 152)

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<sup>2</sup> See 1992 Natural Resources Defense Council Inc. vs. US EPA; <https://openjurist.org/966/f2d/1292/natural-resources-defense-council-inc-v-united-states-environmental-protection-agency>

<sup>3</sup> See 1999 Defenders of Wildlife vs. Browners; [https://yosemite.epa.gov/oa/eab\\_web\\_docket.nsf/8362EA577FA6FBF3852570830051362A/\\$File/Ariz.%20Mun.%20SW%209th%20Cir.%20Dec..1.17.2018pdf.pdf](https://yosemite.epa.gov/oa/eab_web_docket.nsf/8362EA577FA6FBF3852570830051362A/$File/Ariz.%20Mun.%20SW%209th%20Cir.%20Dec..1.17.2018pdf.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See 81 FR 237, pg. 89323, December 9, 2016; <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-12-09/pdf/2016-28426.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.deq.idaho.gov/media/464542-water\\_data\\_reports\\_surface\\_water\\_tmdls\\_portneuf\\_river\\_portneuf\\_river\\_revision\\_addendum\\_final.pdf](http://www.deq.idaho.gov/media/464542-water_data_reports_surface_water_tmdls_portneuf_river_portneuf_river_revision_addendum_final.pdf)

- **“No time frame is proposed** for the overarching goal of restoring beneficial uses throughout the Portneuf River subbasin...” (DEQ, 2010; Portneuf River TMDL Revision and Addendum, Implementation Strategies, pg. 154)
- **“...DEQ is encouraged by the apparent decreasing phosphorus concentrations** and is hopeful this trend continues.” (DEQ, 2010; Portneuf River TMDL Revision and Addendum, Response to Comments, pg. 342) (emphasis added)

## Requirements Associated with the Phase 2 Remand Rule

Regarding how the proposed Permit addresses the Phase 2 Remand Rule:

- AIC supports EPA Region 10’s proposal to address the Phase 2 MS4 Remand Rule requirements by applying Option 2 – the “Two-Step Approach.”
- AIC urges EPA to provide a generous implementation time line, including a reasonable amount of time to develop the Alternative Controls (i.e., based on the most complex alternative controls). Specifically, AIC suggests that submission of the Alternative Controls, Monitoring Assessment Plan, and Pollutant Reduction Activities should be required to be submitted **2 years following the effective date of the permit**. This request would then provide for these alternative controls to be understood 2.5 years prior to when the 6 minimum control measures would be required to be in place (i.e., 4.5 years following the permit’s effective date).

AIC and the Permittees suggest adding the following after the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph in Section 2.6.4 “Recognition of Alternative Control Measures:

EPA recognizes integrated planning as a way that municipalities can realize efficiencies in improving receiving water quality by sequencing investments so that the highest priority projects come first. This approach can also lead to more sustainable and comprehensive solutions, such as green infrastructure, that improve water quality and provide multiple benefits that enhance community vitality. Terms identifying this as a possibility, along with EPA’s guidance document referenced, should be included to recognize integrated planning within the guidelines set forth by EPA.

## Information Supporting Water Quality Trading

AIC recommends that the Permit affirmatively provide for the development and application of pollutant credit trading. AIC suggests referring to the 2010 Portneuf River TMDL Addendum and the 2016 State of Idaho Water Quality Trading Guidance.<sup>6</sup> AIC perceives that this may require that addition of a new Section 2.7.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.deq.idaho.gov/media/60179211/water-quality-trading-guidance-1016.pdf>

Suggested language for Section 2.7,” Information Supporting Water Quality Trading:”

Any water quality trading used to meet the conditions of this permit shall be in compliance with EPA’s Water Quality Trading Policy (dated January 13, 2003), any applicable EPA trading guidance, and the 2016 IDEQ Water Quality Pollutant Trading Guidance. If such provisions allow trading with pollution sources, water quality trading provisions may be included in a manner consistent with proposed Alternative Control Measures.

## **Information Supporting Integrated Planning**

AIC recommends that the Permit affirmatively provide for EPA’s 2012 Integrated Municipal Stormwater and Wastewater Planning Approach Framework.<sup>7</sup> AIC perceives that this may require an addition of a new Section (i.e., 2.8).

Suggested language for Section 2.8,” Information Supporting Integrated Planning:”

Any integrated stormwater planning activities used to meet the conditions of this permit shall be in compliance with EPA’s Integrated Municipal Stormwater and Wastewater Planning Approach Framework (dated June 5, 2012) and any applicable EPA Integrated Planning guidance. If an integrated planning approach were to be implemented, it may be undertaken if information related to the integrated plan is submitted and approved by EPA and IDEQ.

## **Language Not Directly Applicable to Stormwater Permits**

The text in the Draft Permit includes language copied from wastewater permits that is not suitable or relevant to stormwater. AIC urges the EPA simplify Section 7 so that only the language directly applicable to stormwater permits be included in the final permit. There is precedence for not including these provisions in MS4 permits. These sections are not included in Montana Phase 2 General permit, precisely because they do not apply to stormwater permits.

The permit language can be simplified to address stormwater responsibilities. This could be done by removing Sections 7.6, 7.7, and 7.11. Section 2.8 in the fact sheet states that there are provisions in Section 7 that do not apply to MS4s. If the provisions do not apply to the discharge permit, they should be removed.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www3.epa.gov/npdes/pubs/integrated\\_planning\\_framework.pdf](https://www3.epa.gov/npdes/pubs/integrated_planning_framework.pdf)

AIC cites as examples EPA's (2008) TMDLs to Stormwater Permits Handbook that clearly states the differences between stormwater and wastewater and the need for unique and distinct permit language.

Therefore, AIC requests that EPA remove Sections 7.6, 7.7, and 7.11 in their entirety.

AIC proposes removing the last two bullets in Section 7.9 in order for this section to be applicable to stormwater noncompliance reporting.

AIC also proposes alternative language for Section 7.10 that could be interpreted in light of a stormwater treatment system be replaced with text that applies to an MS4 and clarifies the actions required by the Permittee. The following text, adapted from the Eastern Washington Phase 2 general MS4 permit, is directly applicable to stormwater and would be more suitable for this permit. AIC recommends the EPA use the following as a replacement for the language in the proposed Permit:

- The Permittees are prohibited from intentionally bypassing stormwater from all or any portion of a stormwater treatment BMP as long as the design capacity of the BMP is not exceeded unless the following conditions are met.
  - Bypass is: (1) unavoidable to prevent the loss of, personal injury, or severe property damage or (2) necessary to perform construction or maintenance-related activities essential to meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act (CWA); and
  - There are no feasible alternatives to bypass, such as the use of auxiliary treatment facilities, retention of untreated stormwater, or maintenance during normal dry periods.