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ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS AND THE PROTECTION OF DESIGNATED USES

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ABSTRACT: Environmental flows have significant connections to Clean Water Act Designated Uses. Environmental flows can protect and add value to uses such as public water supplies, propagation of fish and wildlife, recreation, agricultural, industrial, and cultural and others. Environmental flows can also offer opportunities when implementing TMDLs. States across the nation are recognizing that it is often impractical, and in many cases impossible, to improve water quality without hydrologic alteration issues being addressed. Other important areas where environmental flows can play important roles in State water quality programs are with the Section 401 certification process and wetlands protection. Environmental flows will be increasingly important in the face of increasing hydrologic stress from population growth, associated water demand and development, and from climate change. We review a range of approaches of state and tribal efforts at developing and implementing environmental flows as a way of highlighting the important goals and outcomes of state and tribal efforts to define and implement ecological flow standards, and why they are important.

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