

# What is Antidegradation Policy?

*To answer this question, it is important to note that under the federal Clean Water Act, states are required to adopt Water Quality Standards.*

## Water Quality Standards

- Define water quality goals of each waterbody—stream or river segment, or lake.
- This is accomplished by:
  - *Designating the use or uses* of each waterbody (recreational, drinking water, etc.)
  - *Setting water quality criteria* for each use (For example: for the use of recreation, dissolved oxygen in the water should be at x level...or nitrogen levels should be no higher than x.)
  - *Preventing degradation* of water quality – This is accomplished by **Antidegradation policy/rules**

## How Antidegradation Rules Work

Antidegradation policy applies when an individual or business intends to do something which requires a new permit or certification from the Iowa DNR with regard to water quality protection. Examples include construction permits, certification of Army Corps of Engineers dredge and fill permits, stormwater discharge permits, septic tank discharge permits, gravel pit and quarry permits, open feedlots with over 1000 cattle, etc. The following framework of tiers must be followed, as the DNR considers each permit:

Tier 1 – protect existing uses – permits no activity that would eliminate, interfere with or lower the water quality necessary to support the existing use (example: swimming, fishing, drinking water) of the waterbody.

Tier 2 – where the water quality is better than the minimum water quality criteria, that level of quality must be maintained and protected unless a review of reasonable alternatives and social and economic considerations justifies the degradation.

Tier 2.5 – Outstanding Iowa Waters – where high quality waters constitute an outstanding state resource, such as waters of exceptional recreational or ecological significance, that water quality shall be maintained and protected at its current high quality level. However, an exception may be made for permanent new or expanded pollution sources that, “overall, serve to maintain or enhance the value, quality, or use of the OIW.” Prior to allowing exceptions, the Iowa DNR will work with the project applicant to identify the least degrading alternative. For example, a new or expanded source of pollution from a wastewater treatment facility associated with a visitor center may be authorized where reasonable non-degrading or less degrading treatment alternatives are not available.

Tier 3 – Outstanding National Resource Waters – where high quality waters constitute an outstanding national resource, such as waters of National and State parks, that water shall be maintained and protected at its current high quality level. Any proposed activity that would result in a permanent new or expanded direct source of pollutants is strictly prohibited.

NOTE: All waters are given Tier 2 protections unless...

- They have been designated as Tier 2.5 or Tier 3 waters
- They are on the state’s list of impaired waters. In this case, they are given Tier 1 protection.

## Outstanding Iowa Waters

To see a list of Iowa rivers, streams and lakes currently proposed to be designated as Outstanding Iowa Waters, go back to the Antidegradation page on this site

(<http://www.iaenvironment.org/waterQuality/Antidegradation1.htm>) and click on this link: Proposed Outstanding Iowa Waters

### **Outstanding National Resource Waters**

Currently no Iowa water has been proposed by the Iowa DNR to be designated as an Outstanding National Resource Water. However, once the proposed antidegradation rules are adopted, some communities, who believe their Outstanding Iowa Waters should be designated as Outstanding National Resource Waters, may request or nominate their water for this designation. A nomination process is being established. To learn more about this process, go back to the Antidegradation page on this site (<http://www.iaenvironment.org/waterQuality/Antidegradation1.htm>) and click on this link: ONRW Nomination Process.