

Water Quality Assessment Grants

Overview & Application

Notice: Water Quality Assessment Projects funded through the NDDEQ Watershed Management Program (WMP) and the Nonpoint Source (NPS) Program are strictly voluntary and non-regulatory.

Data collected through these projects will not be used for regulatory or enforcement purposes.

Watershed projects often begin with an observed water quality concern such as elevated nutrients, harmful algal blooms, or declining biological condition.

A structured water quality monitoring and assessment effort is used to:

- ✓ Confirm and quantify the problem
- ✓ Identify likely pollutant sources
- ✓ Understand timing and conditions driving impacts
- ✓ Provide the technical foundation for effective watershed planning and implementation

These projects are typically the first phase of a larger watershed-based effort. NDDEQ watershed management program staff will assist with setting up a water quality assessment project. Generally, this will follow the following process:

Existing Data Review

North Dakota has extensive existing water quality data from state, federal, and local programs. Before proposing a new assessment, we will review available datasets for your area of interest to determine if it is:

- ✓ Recent (generally within the last 5–10 years)
- ✓ Spatially representative
- ✓ Sufficient to characterize conditions and trends

In a few cases, existing data may fully meet project needs, or help refine where additional monitoring is most valuable

Develop a Sampling & Analysis Plan

Applicants will coordinate with a NDDEQ environmental scientist to develop and Sampling & Analysis Plan (SAP) that:

- ✓ Follows approved methods and quality assurance requirements
- ✓ Aligns with statewide data needs and assessment frameworks
- ✓ Can be used for reporting purposes (e.g., Integrated Report)

The SAP will include:

- ✓ Monitoring objectives (what questions are being answered)
- ✓ Sampling locations (representative sites across the watershed)
- ✓ Parameters (e.g., nutrients, sediment, biology, chlorophyll-a)
- ✓ Sampling frequency and timing
- ✓ Roles of various project partners (generally the applicant will take the primary role with NDDEQ supporting as needed)

Most water quality assessment projects follow a standard timeline and seasonal approach:

Duration: Typically 2 years

Sampling Season: April through October

Typical Frequency: Streams – Weekly; Lakes - Every 2 weeks

Note: Frequency and duration may vary depending on project goals, watershed size, and parameters of concern.

Grant Information

Applications are accepted and funds are awarded on an ongoing basis. However, grant applications received after February 1st of any calendar year will generally not begin sampling until the following calendar year. The average two-year water quality assessment grant is under \$20,000. Grants are 100% (no cost share required) and may be used for:

- ✓ Personnel time or contractual fees to accomplish sampling, attend required trainings, and prepare samples for analysis (shipped to or dropped-off in Bismarck)
- ✓ Fringe benefits associated with personnel time
- ✓ Mileage reimbursement for sampling activities, at the current federal rate
- ✓ Water quality sampling (small) equipment and supplies, shipping supplies, postage
- ✓ Stakeholder outreach and engagement
- ✓ Administrative overhead at the de minimus 15% or negotiated federal rate (capped)

Water Quality Summary Reports

A successful water quality assessment project will result in the development of various water quality summaries. These summaries may be in a presentation, handout or a report format distributed to local stakeholders and project sponsors or developed into more technical documents such as Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) or Watershed Based Plans (WBPs). Regardless of format, all summaries will include:

- ✓ An analysis of data collect (trends, comparison to WQ standards/targets, etc.)
- ✓ A robust dataset suitable for decision-making

- ✓ Readiness to pursue implementation funding

Parallel Watershed Planning Activities

During the assessment period, sponsors are strongly encouraged to begin watershed planning and coordination activities, which may include:

- ✓ Stakeholder identification and engagement
- ✓ Formation of a local watershed group or advisory committee
- ✓ Outreach and education efforts
- ✓ Review of land use and potential pollutant sources
- ✓ Preliminary identification of Best Management Practices (BMPs)
- ✓ Coordination with partners (NRCS, local governments, conservation districts)
- ✓ Securing landowner interest and participation
- ✓ Exploring additional funding opportunities
- ✓ Reviewing past or ongoing projects in the watershed

Important Considerations

- ✓ Projects must be led by an eligible local sponsor (not individuals)
- ✓ Data collected must meet state and EPA quality standards
- ✓ Early coordination with NDDEQ is critical
- ✓ Strong projects integrate assessment + planning, not assessment alone

Water Quality Assessment Grant Application

To apply for a Water Quality Assessment Grant, please contact Emilee Novak, NPS Program Coordinator at 701-328-5240 or by email to ejnovak@nd.gov. Be prepared to provide the following information:

- ✓ Waterbody of concern and type of concern(s)
- ✓ Name of local sponsor and how they meet eligibility criteria
- ✓ How the results of the assessment will support future planning
- ✓ Project partners