



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**  
**REGION I**  
**5 POST OFFICE SQUARE, SUITE 100**  
**BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02109-3912**

May 4, 2017

Martin Suuberg, Commissioner  
Department of Environmental Protection  
One Winter Street  
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Approval of the Final Westport River Estuarine System TMDL for Total Nitrogen

Dear Commissioner Suuberg:

Thank you for your Department's submittal of the TMDL analysis for Westport River Estuarine System on April 4, 2017. We appreciate your efforts and involvement with our office to finalize these TMDLs. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the document entitled "Final Westport River Estuarine System Total Maximum Daily Load for Total Nitrogen", Control #375.1, April 2017, and it is my pleasure to approve the Total Nitrogen TMDL and 6 protective TMDLs. EPA has determined, as set forth in the enclosed review document, that these TMDLs meet the requirements of Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act (CWA) and EPA's implementing regulations at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 130.

MassDEP's efforts will help restore water quality and prevent further degradation of these, and adjacent, waterbody segments. My staff and I look forward to continued cooperation with the Massachusetts DEP in exercising our shared responsibility of implementing the requirements under Section 303(d) of the CWA. If you have any questions regarding this approval, please contact Ralph Abele at (617) 918-1629 or have your staff contact Bryan Dore of my staff at (617) 918-1211.

Sincerely,

/s/

Arthur Johnson, Acting Director  
Office of Ecosystem Protection

Enclosure

cc:  
Rebecca Weidman, MassDEP  
Kimberly Groff, MassDEP  
Barbara Kickham, MassDEP  
Lynne Hamjian, EPA  
Ralph Abele, EPA  
Bryan Dore, EPA

## EPA NEW ENGLAND'S TMDL REVIEW

**DATE:** May 4, 2017

**TMDL:** Final Westport River Estuarine System TMDL for Total Nitrogen

**STATUS:** Final

**IMPAIRMENT/POLLUTANT:** 3 Total Nitrogen TMDLs and 6 Pollution Prevention TMDLs  
(See Attachment 1)

**BACKGROUND:** EPA Region 1 received the *Westport River Estuarine System Total Maximum Daily Loads for Total Nitrogen* (Control Number: CN 375.1) with a transmittal letter dated April 4, 2017. In addition to the Final Nitrogen TMDL itself, the submittal included, either directly or in reference, the following documents:

- Public Meeting Information and Response to Comments, Appendix E
- Massachusetts Surface Water Quality Standards (WQS)
- Massachusetts Estuaries Project, Linked Watershed-Embayment Approach to Determine Critical Nitrogen Loading Thresholds for the Westport River Embayment System, Town of Westport, Massachusetts.  
[http://www.oceanscience.net/estuaries/report/Westport/Westport\\_MEP\\_FINAL-8MB.pdf](http://www.oceanscience.net/estuaries/report/Westport/Westport_MEP_FINAL-8MB.pdf)
- Massachusetts Year 2014 Integrated List of Waters: Final Listing of the Condition of Massachusetts' Waters Pursuant to Sections 305(b), 314 and 303(d) of the Clean Water Act (CN 450.1), December 2015.  
<http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dep/water/resources/07v5/14list2.pdf>
- Massachusetts Estuaries Project Embayment Restoration and Guidance for Implementation Strategies, MassDEP 2003. <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dep/water/resources/a-thru-m/mepmain.pdf>

The following review explains how the TMDL submission meets the statutory and regulatory requirements of TMDLs in accordance with § 303(d) of the Clean Water Act and EPA's implementing regulations in 40 CFR Part 130.

**REVIEWERS:** Bryan Dore (617-918-1211) e-mail: [dore.bryan@epa.gov](mailto:dore.bryan@epa.gov)

## REVIEW ELEMENTS OF TMDLs

*Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act (CWA) and EPA's implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. § 130 describe the statutory and regulatory requirements for approvable TMDLs. The following information is generally necessary for EPA to determine if a submitted TMDL fulfills the legal requirements for approval under Section 303(d) and EPA regulations, and should be included in the submittal package. Use of the verb "must" below denotes information that is required to be submitted because it relates to elements of the TMDL required by the CWA and by regulation.*

### **1. Description of Waterbody, Pollutant of Concern, Pollutant Sources and Priority Ranking**

*The TMDL analytical document must identify the waterbody as it appears on the State/Tribe's 303(d) list, the pollutant of concern and the priority ranking of the waterbody. The TMDL submittal must include a description of the point and nonpoint sources of the pollutant of concern, including the magnitude and location of the sources. Where it is possible to separate natural background from nonpoint sources, a description of the natural background must be provided, including the magnitude and location of the source(s). Such information is necessary for EPA's review of the load and wasteload allocations which are required by regulation. The TMDL submittal should also contain a description of any important assumptions made in developing the TMDL, such as: (1) the assumed distribution of land use in the watershed; (2) population characteristics, wildlife resources, and other relevant information affecting the characterization of the pollutant of concern and its allocation to sources; (3) present and future growth trends, if taken into consideration in preparing the TMDL; and, (4) explanation and analytical basis for expressing the TMDL through surrogate measures, if applicable. Surrogate measures are parameters such as percent fines and turbidity for sediment impairments, or chlorophyll a and phosphorus loadings for excess algae.*

#### **A. Description of Waterbody, Priority Ranking, and Background Information**

The Westport River Estuarine System is located in southeastern Massachusetts on the Massachusetts-Rhode Island state boundary. The system is comprised of two river valley estuaries (east and west branches), a coastal lagoon (Westport Harbor) and a relict tidal inlet (The Let). Westport Harbor is situated at the confluence of the east and west branches and exchanges tidal waters with Buzzards Bay through a single tidal inlet to the southwest. The Westport River Estuary and much of its watershed are located primarily within the Town of Westport. The estuary watershed extends north into Freetown and the city of Fall River and east into the town of Dartmouth as well as westerly, encompassing small areas in Tiverton and Little Compton, RI.

The TMDL document presents a sound overview of the estuary system's and the companion Massachusetts Estuaries Project final report (May 2013) presents a thorough description of the Westport River estuarine system. The MEP project divided the Westport River estuary system into 9 distinct areas for analysis: East Branch of the Westport River (characterized by the MEP report as the North East and South East branches), West Branch of the Westport River, The Let, Westport River (referred to as Westport Harbor in the MEP Technical Report and TMDL report), Old County Road (Bread and Cheese Brook), Kirby Brook, Adamsville Brook, Angeline Creek, and Snell Creek. The East Branch of the Westport River, West Branch of the Westport River, and the Westport Harbor are impaired for nutrients, while The Let, Bread and Cheese Brook, Kirby Brook, Adamsville Brook, Angeline Creek, and Snell Creek were not found to be impaired for total nitrogen. MassDEP has determined that because the waterbodies are linked, that pollution prevention TMDLs are needed for those segments.

MassDEP has determined that all nutrient impaired segments in the Commonwealth are a high priority. See the Massachusetts 2014 Integrated List of Waters at: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dep/water/resources/07v5/14list2.pdf>

## **B. Pollutant of Concern**

In the Westport River Estuarine System, the pollutant of concern is the nutrient nitrogen. Impairments include excess nutrients, dissolved oxygen depletion, decreased diversity and quantity of benthic animals, and phytoplankton blooms.

## **C. Pollutant Sources**

The TMDL document identifies that the predominate sources of controllable N affecting this system originate from agricultural activities and from on-site subsurface wastewater disposal systems (septic systems). Additional controllable sources include the runoff from impervious surfaces, lawn fertilizers, and landfills. Other sources, not locally controllable, include atmospheric nitrogen deposition to the estuary and natural surfaces (pages 20 of the TMDL document).

**Assessment:** EPA Region 1 concludes that the TMDL document meets the requirements for describing the TMDL waterbody segments, pollutants of concern, identifying and characterizing sources of impairment, and priority ranking.

## **2. Description of the Applicable Water Quality Standards and Numeric Water Quality Target**

*The TMDL submittal must include a description of the applicable State/Tribe water quality standard, including the designated use(s) of the waterbody, the applicable numeric or narrative water quality criterion, and the antidegradation policy. Such information is necessary for EPA's review of the load and wasteload allocations which are required by regulation. A numeric water quality target for the TMDL (a quantitative value used to measure whether or not the applicable water quality standard is attained) must be identified. If the TMDL is based on a target other than a numeric water quality criterion, then a numeric expression, usually site specific, must be developed from a narrative criterion and a description of the process used to derive the target must be included in the submittal.*

Water quality classification for the saltwater portion of the Westport River estuarine system is SA, except for the East Branch of the Westport River which is classified as SB. Freshwater portions of the system are classified as B, except for the Copicut Reservoir and its tributaries in the headwaters of the East Branch, classified as Class A. The TMDL document identifies several provisions of the Commonwealth's water quality standards that are relevant to the cultural eutrophication in these waters, including numeric criteria for dissolved oxygen and narrative criteria for nutrients, aesthetics, excess plant biomass, and nuisance vegetation (page 19). As stated on pages 20-21 of the TMDL document and in EPA guidance, individual estuarine and coastal marine waters tend to have unique characteristics and therefore, site-specific analyses of the individual water body are typically required. For example, the loading of nitrogen that a specific water body can handle without becoming impaired varies. Factors that influence the effect of nitrogen include: flow velocity, tidal hydraulics, dissolved oxygen, and sediment adsorption and desorption of nitrogen.

The Massachusetts Estuaries Project analytical method is the Linked Watershed-Embayment Management Model (Linked Model), discussed on pages 21-29 of the TMDL document. It links watershed inputs with embayment circulation and nitrogen characteristics, and:

- requires site-specific measurements within each watershed and embayment;

- uses realistic “best-estimates” of nitrogen loads from each specific type of land-use;
- spatially distributes the watershed nitrogen loading to the embayment;
- accounts for nitrogen attenuation during transport to the embayment;
- includes a 2D or 3D embayment circulation model depending on embayment structure;
- accounts for basin structure, tidal variations, and dispersion within the embayment;
- includes nitrogen regenerated within the embayment;
- is validated by both independent hydrodynamic, nitrogen concentration, and ecological data; and
- is calibrated and validated with field data prior to generation of “what if” scenarios.

Two sentinel stations were identified in the embayment system at locations at which restoration will necessarily result in high quality habitat throughout the system and attainment of water quality standards (page 24 of the TMDL document). For the Westport River system, high habitat quality was defined as stable eelgrass beds extending into the upper and mid regions of the East and West Branches of the Westport River (to documented 1951 coverage) and overall diverse benthic animal communities and dissolved oxygen levels that would support Class SA (West Branch) and SB (East Branch) waters. Sentinel stations were placed near the midpoint of West Branch (W12) and East Branch (E33) estuaries (page 24 of the TMDL document, Figure 5). These sites were selected such that the restoration of these sites will necessarily bring the other regions of the system to acceptable habitat quality levels.

Per the TMDL document, the determination of the critical nitrogen threshold for maintaining high habitat quality with the Westport River estuarine system is based predominately on temporal trends in eelgrass distribution but also considers the nutrient and oxygen levels, and benthic community indicators. The MEP study indicates that the nitrogen threshold level supportive of high quality eelgrass habitat in this basin appears to be a tidally averaged concentration between 0.43 mg/L and 0.51 mg/L. Eelgrass habitat in both the East and West Branches is impaired in areas that presently support tidally averaged TN levels of 0.57 mg/L and >0.50 mg/L, respectively, with losses observed in the East Branch and signs of stress in the West Branch at concentrations over 0.506 mg/L (See Sections VII and VIII of the MEP report for a complete discussion of the threshold nitrogen concentration). The target threshold nitrogen concentrations selected for the system is 0.49 mg/L at the sentinel station in the East Branch (Station E-33) and 0.48 mg/L at the sentinel station (W-12) in the West Branch (Table 3, page 24 of the TMDL document). By attaining the modeled nitrogen targets at the appointed sentinel locations through implementation of the TMDL, eelgrass areal extent may increase and existing beds may see increases in shoot density, reduction in epiphytes and continued low levels of drift algae. It is important to note that the concentration necessary for healthy eelgrass habitat restoration in the basins presents some level of uncertainty, which will be addressed by the adaptive management approach taken in the TMDL document. Should the target concentration be met at the sentinel stations without eelgrass habitat restoration in the lower reaches of both the East and West Branches, as well as improvement in numbers and diversity of benthic macroinvertebrates in the upper reaches, the target concentration will be re-evaluated (page 66 of the TMDL document). - Additionally, nitrogen loading reductions should improve benthic infaunal habitat with an increase in shellfish habitat and shift toward larger, longer lived, deep burrowing organisms. MassDEP’s commitment to monitor the receiving water response is, in EPA’s view, a reasonable measure designed to manage the inherent uncertainty around selecting an instream target against a backdrop of considerable scientific and technical uncertainty. While there is sufficient basis in the administrative record at the time of approval to conclude that the selected target will be protective, EPA will coordinate with the MassDEP to review any additional monitoring data or other information that may

become available concerning eelgrass populations in the receiving waters, consistent with MassDEP's commitment to evaluate the adequacy of the target.

**Assessment:** The use of the Linked Model, the description of the process in the TMDL document, and the companion Technical Report to this TMDL document adequately demonstrate the basis for deriving the target nitrogen loads and demonstrating that the targets will achieve water quality standards. EPA Region 1 concludes that MassDEP has properly presented its numeric water quality targets and has made a reasonable and appropriate interpretation of its narrative water quality criteria for the designated uses of the Westport River Estuarine System. In addition, MassDEP's adaptive management approach to the TMDL allows for revision if the target concentration is reached but habitat indicators are not met.

### **3. Loading Capacity - Linking Water Quality and Pollutant Sources**

*As described in EPA guidance, a TMDL identifies the loading capacity of a waterbody for a particular pollutant. EPA regulations define loading capacity as the greatest amount of loading that a water can receive without violating water quality standards (40 C.F.R. § 130.2(f)). The loadings are required to be expressed as either mass-per-time, toxicity or other appropriate measure (40 C.F.R. § 130.2(i)). The TMDL submittal must identify the waterbody's loading capacity for the applicable pollutant and describe the rationale for the method used to establish the cause-and-effect relationship between the numeric target and the identified pollutant sources. In most instances, this method will be a water quality model. Supporting documentation for the TMDL analysis must also be contained in the submittal, including the basis for assumptions, strengths and weaknesses in the analytical process, results from water quality modeling, etc. Such information is necessary for EPA's review of the load and wasteload allocations which are required by regulation.*

*In many circumstances, a critical condition must be described and related to physical conditions in the waterbody as part of the analysis of loading capacity (40 C.F.R. § 130.7(c)(1)). The critical condition can be thought of as the "worst case" scenario of environmental conditions in the waterbody in which the loading expressed in the TMDL for the pollutant of concern will continue to meet water quality standards. Critical conditions are the combination of environmental factors (e.g., flow, temperature, etc.) that results in attaining and maintaining the water quality criterion and has an acceptably low frequency of occurrence. Critical conditions are important because they describe the factors that combine to cause a violation of water quality standards and will help in identifying the actions that may have to be undertaken to meet water quality standards.*

As stated in the TMDL document, the Linked Model is a robust and fairly complicated model that determines an embayment's nitrogen sensitivity, nitrogen threshold watershed loading levels and response to changes in the loading rate. A key feature of the approach involves the selection of sentinel locations that have the poorest water quality in the embayment system. If these degraded areas come into compliance with the TMDL, other areas will also achieve water quality standards for nitrogen in the system. This approach captures the critical targets needed to address the impaired segments.

The percent reductions of existing nitrogen loads necessary to meet the target threshold watershed loads range from 0% to 56% with an overall required reduction of 18.3% for the Westport River System as a whole (Table 6 below, page 28 of the TMDL document). As described in the TMDL document, these loads represent one scenario using the Linked Model that could achieve the target threshold N concentration at the sentinel station. An alternative scenario to meet the target threshold N concentration can also be evaluated as part of the MEP process, at the town's request.

**TABLE 5.** Present Watershed Nitrogen Loading Rates, Calculated Loading Rates that are Necessary to Achieve Target Threshold Nitrogen Concentrations, and the Percent Reductions of the Existing Loads Necessary to Achieve the Target Threshold Loadings

<b>Sub-embayment</b>	<b>Present Total Watershed Load<sup>1</sup> (kg/day)</b>	<b>Target Threshold Watershed Load<sup>2</sup> (kg/day)</b>	<b>% Watershed Load Reductions Needed to Achieve Target</b>
Old County Road	162.6	111.8	-31.2%
Kirby Brook	21.0	13.2	-37.2%
Snell Creek	8.1	3.6	-56.0%
North East Branch	103.1	93.0	-9.8%
South East Branch	62.3	46.5	-25.4%
The Let	5.8	5.8	0.0
Angeline Creek	34.3	34.3	0.0
Adamsville Brook	47.6	47.6	0.0
West Branch	32.9	32.9	0.0
Westport Harbor	10.3	10.3	0.0
System Total	488.0	398.9	-18.3%

<sup>1</sup> Includes fertilizers, runoff, farm animals, landfill, atmospheric deposition to lakes and natural surfaces and wastewater inputs

<sup>2</sup>Target threshold watershed load is the N load from the watershed (including natural background) needed to meet the target threshold N concentration identified in Table 3 of the TMDL document. Taken from Tables ES-2 and VIII-3 in the MEP Technical Report

The TMDL for each embayment considers all sources of N, and is therefore the sum of the calculated target threshold watershed load, atmospheric deposition load, and benthic flux load from sediment sources (Table 6 below, page 36 of the TMDL document). The TMDLs for Westport River Estuarine System range from 3.58 kg N/day to 111.82 kg N/day. The TMDL for the Westport River System as a whole is 457.34 kg N/day.

**Table 6:** The Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for the Westport River Estuarine System

Sub-embayment	Target Threshold Watershed Load <sup>1</sup> (kg N/day)	Atmospheric Deposition (kg N/day)	Nitrogen Load from Sediments <sup>2</sup> (kg N/day)	TMDL <sup>3</sup> (kg N/day)
Old County Road	111.82	-	-	111.82
Kirby Brook	13.17	-	-	13.17
Snell Creek	3.58	-	-	3.58
North East Branch	93.03	4.36	0	97.39 <sup>4</sup>
South East Branch	46.48	20.92	0	67.4 <sup>4</sup>
The Let	5.76	1.97	11.81	19.54
Angeline Creek	34.3	-	-	34.3
Adamsville Brook	47.62	-	-	47.62
West Branch	32.9	11.15	0	44.05
Westport Harbor	10.25	8.23	0	18.48
<b>System Total</b>	<b>398.9</b>	<b>46.63</b>	<b>11.81</b>	<b>457.34</b>

<sup>1</sup> Target threshold watershed load (including natural background) is the load from the watershed needed to meet the embayment target threshold nitrogen concentration identified in Table 3 of the TMDL Document.

<sup>2</sup> Projected sediment N loadings obtained by reducing the present benthic flux loading rates (Table 4 of the TMDL) proportional to proposed watershed load reductions and factoring in the existing and projected future concentrations of PON. (Negative fluxes set to zero.)

<sup>3</sup> Sum of target threshold watershed load, sediment load and atmospheric deposition load.

<sup>4</sup> The TMDL for East Branch Westport River is the sum of the North and South or 164.79 kg N/day.

**Assessment:** The TMDL document explains and EPA concurs with the approach for applying the Linked Model to specific embayments for the purpose of developing target nitrogen loading rates and in identifying sources of needed nitrogen load reduction. EPA believes that this approach is reasonable because the factors influencing and controlling nutrient impairment were well justified, as demonstrated by the foregoing and the TMDL's administrative record.

#### 4. Load Allocations (LAs)

*EPA regulations require that a TMDL include LAs, which identify the portion of the loading capacity allocated to existing and future nonpoint sources and to natural background (40 C.F.R. § 130.2(g)). Load allocations may range from reasonably accurate estimates to gross allotments (40 C.F.R. § 130.2(g)). Where it is possible to separate natural background from nonpoint sources, load allocations should be described separately for background and for nonpoint sources.*

*If the TMDL concludes that there are no nonpoint sources and/or natural background, or the TMDL recommends a zero load allocation, the LA must be expressed as zero. If the TMDL recommends a zero LA after considering all pollutant sources, there must be a discussion of the reasoning behind this decision, since a zero LA implies an allocation only to point sources will result in attainment of the applicable water quality standard, and all nonpoint and background sources*

*will be removed.*

Using the Linked Model, MassDEP has identified the portion of the loading capacity allocated to existing and future non-point sources necessary to meet water quality standards. Within the Westport River estuary system, the majority of locally-controllable non-point source loadings are the result of agricultural activities, in addition to on-site subsurface wastewater disposal systems (septic systems). Additional nitrogen sources include: lawn fertilizers and storm water runoff from impervious surfaces, landfills, and atmospheric deposition. The percent contribution of locally controllable sources of nitrogen to the Westport River system is approximately 57 % from agricultural activities, 34% from septic systems, 5% from stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces (except stormwater from directly-connected impervious areas, which are considered waste loads), 3% from lawn fertilizers, and 1% from landfills. Natural background loading is included in the estimates, but is not presented separately.

MassDEP describes the load allocations for natural background sources (see page 30 of the TMDL document).

**Assessment:** EPA concludes that the TMDL document sufficiently addresses the calculation of the load allocations, as demonstrated by the foregoing and by the TMDL's administrative record.

## **5. Wasteload Allocations (WLAs)**

*EPA regulations require that a TMDL include WLAs, which identify the portion of the loading capacity allocated to existing and future point sources (40 C.F.R. § 130.2(h) ). If no point sources are present or if the TMDL recommends a zero WLA for point sources, the WLA must be expressed as zero. If the TMDL recommends a zero WLA after considering all pollutant sources, there must be a discussion of the reasoning behind this decision, since a zero WLA implies an allocation only to nonpoint sources and background will result in attainment of the applicable water quality standard, and all point sources will be removed.*

*In preparing the wasteload allocations, it is not necessary that each individual point source be assigned a portion of the allocation of pollutant loading capacity. When the source is a minor discharger of the pollutant of concern or if the source is contained within an aggregated general permit, an aggregated WLA can be assigned to the group of facilities. But it is necessary to allocate the loading capacity among individual point sources as necessary to meet the water quality standard.*

*The TMDL submittal should also discuss whether a point source is given a less stringent wasteload allocation based on an assumption that nonpoint source load reductions will occur. In such cases, the State/Tribe will need to demonstrate reasonable assurance that the nonpoint source reductions will occur within a reasonable time.*

The Commonwealth assigned to the WLA those point sources (1) that “discharge” pollutants to waters of the United States within the meaning of the Act and (2) that are subject to the NPDES permitting program (existing and future); it allocated sources that did not meet these two criteria to the LA. Thus, for example, the pollutant loads from Directly Connected Impervious Areas (DCIA's) which discharge stormwater directly to waterbodies via a conveyance system such as a swale, pipe, or ditch were included in the WLA. The remaining sources of nitrogen (e.g., septic systems and agricultural runoff) that are initially released to ground and enter the receiving waters only after traveling through soils and groundwater, were included in the LA portion of the load.

Based on land use, the Linked Model accounts for loading of stormwater, but does not explicitly breakout stormwater into a load and waste load allocation. Whereas the surficial geology of the Cape

and the Islands consists primarily of coarse deposits of stratified drift including glacial outwash plains and moraines, the surficial geology of the Westport River watershed is primarily till, with smaller areas of coarse stratified drift deposits. Therefore, for this TMDL, MassDEP utilized EPA methodology (EPA 2010) to determine the percent DCIA for each landuse type in the each subembayment watershed in order to distinguish the point source or waste load allocation of stormwater originating from DCIAs from the nonpoint source stormwater contribution (load allocation) (page 31 of TMDL Document). MassDEP has determined that stormwater discharge from all DCIAs (including those in non-regulated areas as well as urbanized regulated areas) shall be treated as part of a waste load allocation. Since there are no other point sources of nitrogen in the Westport River watershed the DCIA stormwater load is the total waste load allocation for the TMDL. The Westport River watershed DCIA area accounts for approximately 3% of the total watershed area (total DCIA area / total watershed area) (page 31 of TMDL document). Although the loading contribution from the point source discharges is insignificant compared to the non-point sources, the point source discharges are subject to the Phase II Stormwater NPDES Program and their collective load is to be treated as a WLA. In the absence of site-specific information on direct discharge sources, EPA believes the approach set out in the TMDL for the WLAs is reasonable. The specific WLAs are set forth in Appendix C and on pages 30-31 of the TMDL document.

**Assessment:** EPA concludes that the TMDL document sufficiently addresses the calculation of the waste load allocations, as demonstrated by the foregoing and by the TMDL's administrative record.<sup>1</sup>

## **6. Margin of Safety (MOS)**

*The statute and regulations require that a TMDL include a margin of safety to account for any lack of knowledge concerning the relationship between load and wasteload allocations and water quality (CWA § 303(d)(1)(C), 40 C.F.R. § 130.7(c)(1) ). EPA guidance explains that the MOS may be implicit, i.e., incorporated into the TMDL through conservative assumptions in the analysis, or explicit, i.e., expressed in the TMDL as loadings set aside for the MOS. If the MOS is implicit, the conservative assumptions in the analysis that account for the MOS must be described. If the MOS is explicit, the loading set aside for the MOS must be identified.*

MassDEP employs an implicit MOS in these TMDLs, described in the TMDL document on pages 33-34. There are several factors that contribute to the margin of safety inherent in the approach used to develop this TMDL including:

### **1) Use of conservative data in the Linked Model as follows:**

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<sup>1</sup> The categorization of the pollutant sources on Cape Cod (*i.e.*, whether a particular source, or category of sources, is required as a matter of law to be placed within the WLA or LA) has been the subject of recent litigation. On August 24, 2010, CLF filed a complaint in the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts, captioned *Conservation Law Foundation et al. v. United States Environmental Protection Agency, et al.*, Action No. 1:10-cv-11455, challenging EPA's approval of thirteen (13) Total Maximum Daily Load determinations submitted to EPA by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts under section 303(d), 33 U.S.C. § 1313(d), of the Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §§ 1251-1387, as arbitrary and capricious, an abuse of discretion, and in violation of the Administrative Procedure Act, 5 U.S.C. § 706(2). EPA's positions on categorization, margin of safety, seasonal variation and other matters raised in the litigation, including climate change, have been described in the Agency's filings in that case; have been specifically considered and relied upon by EPA for the purpose of these TMDL approvals; and accordingly, have been incorporated into the TMDL's administrative record. Additionally, EPA has considered MassDEP's correspondence of April 3, 2015 regarding these issues, and EPA's analysis thereof has also been included in the administrative record.

- Nitrogen concentrations in the watershed that were used in the model are conservative because the model assumes 100% of the groundwater discharge load enters the embayment, and stream flow entering the embayment was directly measured to determine attenuation;
  - Agreement between the modeled and observed values has been approximately 95%;
  - Water column nitrogen validation dataset is conservative. High or low measurements are marked as outliers;
  - Reductions in benthic regeneration of nitrogen are most likely underestimates based on a reduced deposition of PON, due to lower primary production rates under the reduced N loading in these systems; and
- 2) **Conservative sentinel station/target threshold nitrogen concentrations.** The target nitrogen concentration was chosen based on sites that had stable eelgrass or benthic animal (infaunal) communities, and not those just starting to show impairment, which would have slightly higher N concentration. Meeting the target threshold N concentrations at the sentinel stations will result in reductions of N concentrations in the rest of the system; and
- 3) **Conservative approach.** The target loads were based on tidally averaged N concentrations on the outgoing tide, which is the worst case condition because that is when the N concentrations are the highest. The N concentrations will be lower on the flood tides and therefore this approach is conservative.

**Assessment:** EPA concludes that the approach used in developing the TMDL provides for an adequate implicit MOS, as demonstrated by the foregoing and by the TMDL’s administrative record.

## 7. Seasonal Variation

*The statute and regulations require that a TMDL be established with consideration of seasonal variations. The method chosen for including seasonal variations in the TMDL must be described (CWA § 303(d)(1)(C), 40 C.F.R. § 130.7(c)(1).*

The TMDLs for the water body segments identified in the document are based on achieving the nitrogen loads during the most critical time period, i.e., the summer growing season. Since the other seasons are less sensitive to nitrogen loading, the TMDLs are protective of all seasons throughout the year. Seasonal variation is addressed on page 35-36 of the TMDL document.

**Assessment:** Since the other seasons are less sensitive to nitrogen loading, EPA concludes that the TMDL is protective of all seasons throughout the year.

## 8. Monitoring Plan

*EPA’s 1991 document, Guidance for Water Quality-Based Decisions: The TMDL Process (EPA 440/4-91-001), and EPA’s 2006 guidance, Clarification Regarding “Phased” Total Maximum Daily Loads, recommend a monitoring plan when a TMDL is developed using the phased approach. The guidance indicates that a State may use the phased approach for situations where TMDLs need to be developed despite significant data uncertainty and where the State expects that the loading capacity and allocation scheme will be revised in the near future. EPA’s guidance provides that a TMDL developed under the phased approach should include, in addition to the other TMDL elements, a monitoring plan that describes the additional data to be collected, and a scheduled timeframe for revision of the TMDL.*

The TMDL document presents two forms of monitoring that would be useful to determine progress towards achieving compliance with the TMDL (page 43 of the TMDL document). MassDEP's position is that TMDL implementation will be conducted through an iterative process where adjustments may be needed in the future. The two forms of monitoring include 1) tracking implementation progress as approved in the CWMP plan and 2) monitoring water quality and habitat conditions in the estuaries, including but not limited to, the sentinel stations identified in the MEP Technical Report. Relative to water quality MassDEP believes that an ambient monitoring program much reduced from the data collection activities needed to properly assess conditions and to populate the model, will be important to determine actual compliance with water quality standards. Although more specific details need to be developed on a case-by-case basis, MassDEP believes that about half the current effort (using the same data collection procedures) would be sufficient to monitor compliance over time and to observe trends in water quality changes. In addition, the benthic habitat and infaunal communities would require periodic monitoring on a frequency of about every 3-5 years. Finally, in addition to the above, existing monitoring conducted by MassDEP for eelgrass should continue into the future to observe any changes that may occur to eelgrass populations as a result of restoration efforts.

**Assessment:** EPA concludes that the anticipated ambient water quality monitoring program approved in the CWMP by MassDEP is sufficient to evaluate the adequacy of the TMDL and attainment of water quality standards, although is not a required element of EPA's TMDL approval process.

## 9. Implementation Plans

*On August 8, 1997, Bob Perciasepe (EPA Assistant Administrator for the Office of Water) issued a memorandum, "New Policies for Establishing and Implementing Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)," that directs Regions to work in partnership with States/Tribes to achieve nonpoint source load allocations established for 303(d)-listed waters impaired solely or primarily by nonpoint sources. To this end, the memorandum asks that Regions assist States/Tribes in developing implementation plans that include reasonable assurances that the nonpoint source load allocations established in TMDLs for waters impaired solely or primarily by nonpoint sources will in fact be achieved. The memorandum also includes a discussion of renewed focus on the public participation process and recognition of other relevant watershed management processes used in the TMDL process. Although implementation plans are not approved by EPA, they help establish the basis for EPA's approval of TMDLs.*

The implementation plan for the total nitrogen TMDL for the Westport River system is described on pages 37-40 of the TMDL document. EPA concludes that the approach taken by MassDEP is reasonable because of the resources available to the local communities to address nitrogen such as the CWMP, additional linked model runs at nominal expense, assessment of cost-effective options for reducing loadings from individual on-site subsurface wastewater disposal systems, land use planning and controls, agricultural BMPs, water conservation, and stormwater control and treatment. The towns of Dartmouth and Westport are covered by their respective Phase II MS4 stormwater permits and therefore compliance with the permits will contribute to reducing the nitrogen load to the watershed of the Westport River estuary. As cited in Appendix C of the TMDL document, the majority of the WLA is attributed to the Old County Road watershed with contributions from Dartmouth, Freetown, Fall River and Westport. According to the most recent NPDES Phase II MS4 Annual Report, the town of Dartmouth is continuing work on storm drain mapping and has retained the services of a consultant to help with this endeavor. According to their most recent (2014) NPDES Phase II MS4 Annual Report, the City of Fall River updates their GIS stormwater map annually, conducts dry weather outfall screening and investigates stormwater infrastructure. The town of Freetown conducts a number of activities as part of their NPDES Phase II MS4 requirements, including ongoing public outreach, mapping its stormwater infrastructure, and working to prevent illegal dumping and remediation of failed septic tanks. The town of Westport also conducts a number of activities as part of their NPDES

Phase II MS4 requirements, including outreach, signage, staff training, catch basin cleaning and street sweeping, and other good housekeeping operations.

**Assessment:** MassDEP has addressed the implementation plan. Although EPA is not approving the implementation plan, EPA has concluded that it outlines a reasonable approach to implementation, as demonstrated by the foregoing and by the TMDL's administrative record.

## 10. Reasonable Assurances

*EPA guidance calls for reasonable assurances when TMDLs are developed for waters impaired by both point and nonpoint sources. In a water impaired by both point and nonpoint sources, where a point source is given a less stringent wasteload allocation based on an assumption that nonpoint source load reductions will occur, reasonable assurance that the nonpoint source reductions will happen must be explained in order for the TMDL to be approvable. This information is necessary for EPA to determine that the load and wasteload allocations will achieve water quality standards.*

*In a water impaired solely by nonpoint sources, reasonable assurances that load reductions will be achieved are not required in order for a TMDL to be approvable. However, for such nonpoint source-only waters, States/Tribes are strongly encouraged to provide reasonable assurances regarding achievement of load allocations in the implementation plans described in section 9, above. As described in the August 8, 1997 Perciasepe memorandum, such reasonable assurances should be included in State/Tribe implementation plans and "may be non-regulatory, regulatory, or incentive-based, consistent with applicable laws and programs."*

The TMDL targets for point sources in this TMDL are not less stringent based on any assumed nonpoint source reductions, so documentation of reasonable assurance in the TMDL is not a requirement. However, MassDEP addresses the concept of reasonable assurance insofar as it relates to overall TMDL implementation on pages 44-45 of the Final TMDL. In addition, Dartmouth and Westport have demonstrated their commitment to implement this TMDL through the comprehensive wastewater planning that they initiated well before the generation of this TMDL. The towns expect to use the information in this TMDL to generate support from their citizens to take the necessary steps to remedy existing problems related to nitrogen loading on-site subsurface wastewater disposal systems, agriculture, stormwater runoff (including lawn fertilizers), and to prevent any future degradation of these valuable resources. Enforcement of local, state, and federal programs for pollution control contribute to the level of reasonable assurance. There are also financial incentives to encourage the towns to follow through with its plans and prevent further degradation to water quality.

**Assessment:** Because MassDEP did not increase WLAs based on expected LA reductions, reasonable assurance is not required. However, EPA acknowledges MassDEP's reasonable assurance discussion for the record.

## 11. Public Participation

*EPA policy is that there must be full and meaningful public participation in the TMDL development process. Each State/Tribe must, therefore, provide for public participation consistent with its own continuing planning process and public participation requirements (40 C.F.R. § 130.7(c)(1)(ii) ). In guidance, EPA has explained that final TMDLs submitted to EPA for review and approval must describe the State/Tribe's public participation process, including a summary of significant comments and the State/Tribe's responses to those comments. When EPA establishes a TMDL, EPA regulations require EPA to publish a notice seeking public comment (40 C.F.R. § 130.7(d)(2) ).*

*Inadequate public participation could be a basis for disapproving a TMDL; however, where EPA determines that a*

*State/Tribe has not provided adequate public participation, EPA may defer its approval action until adequate public participation has been provided for, either by the State/Tribe or by EPA.*

The public participation process for the Westport River Estuarine System TMDL is described on page 45 of the TMDL document. MassDEP publically announced the draft TMDL and copies were distributed to key stakeholders. A public meeting to present the results of and answer questions on this TMDL was held on June 23, 2016 in the Westport Town Hall Annex for all interested parties. Comments received at the public meeting and received in writing within a 30-day comment period following the public meeting were considered by MassDEP. The attendance list, public comments from the meeting, written comments received by MassDEP, and the MassDEP responses are included in Appendix E of the TMDL document. MassDEP fully addressed all comments received in Appendix E of the TMDL document.

**Assessment:** EPA concludes that MassDEP has done a sufficient job of involving the public in the development of the TMDL, provided adequate opportunities for the public to comment and has addressed the comments received as set forth in the response to comment section of the TMDL document.

## **12. Submittal Letter**

*A submittal letter should be included with the TMDL analytical document, and should specify whether the TMDL is being submitted for a technical review or is a final submittal. Each final TMDL submitted to EPA must be accompanied by a submittal letter that explicitly states that the submittal is a final TMDL submitted under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act for EPA review and approval. This clearly establishes the State/Tribe's intent to submit, and EPA's duty to review, the TMDL under the statute. The submittal letter, whether for technical review or final submittal, should contain such information as the name and location of the waterbody, the pollutant(s) of concern, and the priority ranking of the waterbody.*

**Assessment:** On April 4, 2017, MassDEP submitted the Final Westport River Estuarine System TMDL For Total Nitrogen (Control #375.1) and associated documents for EPA approval. The documents contained all of the elements necessary to approve the TMDL

**Attachment 1: Westport River Estuarine System: Three Total Nitrogen TMDLs and Six Pollution Prevention TMDLs (taken from Appendix D of the TMDL)**

Sub-embayment	Segment ID/Description	Impairment/TMDL Status	TMDL (kgN/day)
North East Branch Westport River			97.39 <sup>1</sup>
South East Branch Westport River			67.40 <sup>1</sup>
<b>East Branch Westport River</b>	MA95-41	Impaired for nutrients (estuarine bioassessments) and in Category 5 of the MA 2014 Integrated List.	<b>164.79<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>West Branch Westport River</b>	MA95-37	Impaired for nutrients (estuarine bioassessments) and in Category 5 of the MA 2014 Integrated List.	<b>44.05</b>
The Let	--	Not impaired for total nitrogen, but TMDL needed since embayments are linked. (Pollution Prevention TMDL)	19.54
<b>Westport River<sup>2</sup></b>	MA95-54	Impaired for nutrients (estuarine bioassessments) and in Category 5 of the MA 2014 Integrated List.	<b>18.48</b>
Old County Road (Bread and Cheese Brook)	MA95-58	Not impaired for total nitrogen, but TMDL needed since waterbodies are linked. (Pollution Prevention TMDL)	111.82
Kirby Brook	--	Not impaired for total nitrogen, but TMDL needed since waterbodies are linked. (Pollution Prevention TMDL)	13.17
Adamsville Brook	--	Not impaired for total nitrogen, but TMDL needed since waterbodies are linked. (Pollution Prevention TMDL)	47.62
Angeline Creek	--	Not impaired for total nitrogen, but TMDL needed since waterbodies are linked. (Pollution Prevention TMDL)	34.30
Snell Creek	MA95-59	Not impaired for total nitrogen, but TMDL needed since waterbodies are linked. (Pollution Prevention TMDL)	3.58
Westport River System Total			457.34

<sup>1</sup> The TMDL for the East Branch of the Westport River is the combined TMDL for the North East and South East segments.

<sup>2</sup> Segment referred to as Westport Harbor in the MEP Technical report and the MassDEP TMDL report.

<b>Data for entry in EPA's National TMDL Tracking System</b>							
TMDL Name		<b>Westport River Estuarine System TMDL for Total Nitrogen</b>					
Number of TMDLs*		3					
Type of TMDLs*		Total Nitrogen					
Number of listed causes (from 303(d) list)		3					
Lead State		Massachusetts (MA)					
<b>Individual TMDLs listed below</b>							
TMDL Segment name	TMDL Segment ID #	TMDL Pollutant ID# & name	TMDL Impairment Cause(s)	Pollutant endpoint (Class: geometric mean;10% or SSM <sup>+</sup> )	Unlisted?	NPDES Point Source & ID#	Listed for anything else?
East Branch Westport River	MA95-41	772 (Total Nitrogen)	Total Nitrogen	0.49 mg/L Total Nitrogen	No	-	Fecal Coliform (TMDL)
West Branch Westport River	MA95-37	772 (Total Nitrogen)	Total Nitrogen	0.48 mg/L Total Nitrogen	No	-	Fecal Coliform (TMDL)
Westport River	MA95-54	772 (Total Nitrogen)	Total Nitrogen	0.48 mg/L Total Nitrogen	No	-	Fecal Coliform (TMDL)
<b>303(d)3 Pollution Prevention TMDLs</b>							
The Let	--	772 (Total Nitrogen)	Total Nitrogen	0.48 mg/L Total Nitrogen	Yes		No
Old Country Road (Bread and Cheese Brook)	MA95-58	772 (Total Nitrogen)	Total Nitrogen	0.48 mg/L Total Nitrogen	Yes		Fecal Coliform (TMDL)
Kirby Brook	--	772 (Total Nitrogen)	Total Nitrogen	0.48 mg/L Total Nitrogen	Yes		No
Adamsville Brook	--	772 (Total Nitrogen)	Total Nitrogen	0.48 mg/L Total Nitrogen	Yes		No
Angeline Creek	--	772 (Total Nitrogen)	Total Nitrogen	0.48 mg/L Total Nitrogen	Yes		No
Snell Creek	MA95-59	772 (Total Nitrogen)	Total Nitrogen	0.48 mg/L Total Nitrogen	Yes		Fecal Coliform (TMDL)
TMDL Type		Nonpoint Sources					
Establishment (approval)*		Date May 4, 2017					

EPA Developed	No
Towns affected*	Dartmouth, Fall River, Freetown, Westport