

New Jersey's vision, as refined in the draft 2014 Integrated Report (http://www.nj.gov/dep/wms/bears/2014_integrated_report.htm):

1.2: Comprehensive Regional Assessment Using a Rotating Basin Approach

The Department initiated the Barnegat Bay Ten-Point Action Plan in 2010 as a model for regional water quality assessment and restoration.⁸ This approach encourages the development of measures to restore, maintain, and enhance water quality uses tailored to address an issue or a region. Measures developed are designed to maximize effectiveness and efficiency in achieving positive environmental outcomes. This approach is consistent with USEPA guidance related to strategies and priorities for water quality restoration, “A Long-Term Vision for Assessment, Restoration, and Protection under the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) Program”. To advance this approach, the Department refined its assessment methods for the 2012 Integrated Report to include an in-depth analysis of any changes in assessment outcomes from the prior cycle. This more comprehensive assessment was used to confirm water quality conditions by considering water chemistry, physical, and biological data along with other factors such as hydrology, geology, land use, habitat, and other relevant environmental considerations. This allowed the Department to address multiple water resource concerns based on an assessment of the specific environmental conditions affecting the focus areas. Beginning with the 2014 cycle, this approach was enhanced to include a thorough evaluation of the broader set of factors. Assessment decisions in the Atlantic Coastal Region were based on multiple lines of evidence to confirm water quality conditions, including water quality monitoring data and other factors including hydrology, geology, land use, biological habitat conditions, meteorology, restoration activities, point and nonpoint sources, use designation, stream classification, and other environmental considerations relevant to determining overall water quality, resulting in a high degree of confidence in the assessment decisions. Better assessment decisions help ensure that restoration strategies are focused on real water quality problems and their sources. The Department plans to apply this methodology to one of New Jersey's five water regions, Atlantic Coastal, Raritan, Lower Delaware, Upper Delaware and Northeast (see Figure 1.1) each cycle, beginning with the Atlantic Coastal Region. This “rotating basin approach” (Figure 1.2) will produce a comprehensive assessment of the entire state every ten years. This approach will support development of measures to restore, maintain, and enhance water quality uses that maximize effectiveness and efficiency in achieving positive environmental outcomes that are tailored to the unique circumstances of each region. This new approach is explained in more detail in the 2014 Methods Document and is similar to those employed by other states, such as New York State's Rotating Integrated Basin Studies program.