

Roanoke River, Tinker Creek and Wolf Creek TMDL Study – Community Engagement Meeting, April 2, 2025

Meeting Summary

The meeting began with a welcome from Aerin Portner (Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Blue Ridge Regional Office). Aerin gave a presentation on the cleanup study that will be developed for Roanoke River, Tinker Creek and Wolf Creek. She shared a map of the three impaired segments included in the project area and explained the aquatic life use designation that Virginia's waterways must meet and described how attainment of this designated use is determined. Aerin then reviewed the Stream Condition Index scores (VSCI) for each impaired stream that was derived from biological monitoring data collected by DEQ Regional Biologists.

Aerin provided a summary from the 2024 Draft Benthic Stressor Analysis that has been completed for the impaired streams. Sediment has been identified as the primary pollutant responsible for the impairment of the aquatic life use designation in Wolf Creek. In Tinker Creek, sediment and sediment PCBs have been identified as the primary pollutants for this use. A TMDL has already been developed to address the sediment PCBs in Tinker Creek. Therefore, sediment TMDLs are proposed to address excess sediment in Wolf Creek and Tinker Creek. Phosphorus, nitrogen, sediment, and the Niagara Dam have been identified as the primary stressors in the Roanoke River. A TMDL has already been developed to address the sediment in Roanoke River. A TMDL can only be developed for pollutants, so the influence from Niagara Dam will not be addressed in this study. Therefore, phosphorus and nitrogen TMDLs are proposed to address excess nutrients in Roanoke River.

Aerin provided a summary of the public comments received after the first public meeting for this study. These comments included suggestions for additional sampling and changes to the study design. Some of these suggestions, such as collection of additional evidence for benthic stressor analysis, repeated algae biomass sampling and a more detailed algae analysis, will be conducted soon. One suggestion to conduct manipulative field experiments to remove dam influences and determine limiting nutrients was pursued, but there was no interest from the contacted groups to perform this type of research. Follow through on the suggestion to conduct additional water quality modeling will be performed after the algae analysis and revision of the draft benthic stressor analysis. The suggestion to pursue an advanced restoration plan will be discussed in upcoming meetings.

Aerin then shared DEQ's objectives for 2025, including additional sampling. More specifically, repeated algae biomass sampling and more detailed algae analysis (algae speciation by the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, Patrick Center for Environmental Research) with results being available in the fall, at the earliest. DEQ will update the draft Benthic Stressor Analysis using the additional data. The revised draft may be available by December or January, depending on the availability of monitoring results. And DEQ will establish a TMDL Advisory Group (TAG). Aerin explained what a TAG is and how interested stakeholders can request to become a member.

Aerin provided an itemized timeline of community involvement in this cleanup study, where we are in the process, and what is next. The next step is a 30-day public comment period, ending May 2nd, with community members expressing interest to join the TAG. After that, members of the TAG will be

notified and polled to determine the first TAG meeting. Aerin encouraged community members to remain involved in this effort and attend meetings even if they cannot commit to becoming a TAG member. Aerin also provided a brief timeline for TMDL development, with monitoring results becoming available in the fall, at the earliest, an updated draft Benthic Stressor Analysis being available in December or January, and TMDL development continuing through 2026.

Once the presentation was concluded, Aerin opened the floor for questions.

Question: Is there a recommendation on how many people from a specific organization could be a TAG member?

Answer: Aerin responded that ideally there are about ten people selected as TAG members. So, the number from each organization will depend on interest in the TAG. Interested parties that are not selected as TAG members can be alternates and anyone can also still attend meetings and submit questions to their organization's TAG member to bring up at meetings. Jason Hill (Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Blue Ridge Regional Office) also reiterated that anyone can attend the TAG meetings as an observer. He also mentioned that the TAG could be set up with one open seat and if you are not a TAG member, you may still have an opportunity to "sit at the table" in at least one TAG meeting.

Question: Will a plan detailing the sampling and monitoring would be provided to the public?

Answer: Aerin explained that the process used to sample algae biomass in the Jackson River would be used for this study.

Follow-up question: What is the expected timeline for release of data to the public?

Answer: Aerin estimated there would be a three- or four-month turnaround to receive results from the detailed algae analysis, but that depends on Drexel's timeline. Once the data have been assessed, the data will be available on DEQ's website.

Question: Will members of public who are not on the TAG have the opportunity to provide comments?

Answer: Aerin said that she is open to taking comments between meeting dates.

Question: When is the next meeting?

Answer: Aerin responded hopefully in June. The next meeting will be a discussion of how to run the TAG meetings.

Question: Can TAG meetings have a virtual option?

Answer: Aerin replied that virtual options are usually a no-go because of FOIA requirements.

Question: Do you have a sense of intervals between meetings, and if there will be homework between meetings?

Answer: Aerin answered that the TAG could establish meetings on a regular basis (such as quarterly or monthly) if they choose, or that the meetings could be set up to only occur when there is new content to discuss.

Question: Is new content being provided that should be reviewed during this 30-day public comment period?

Answer: Aerin replied that there was no new content presented at this meeting. The meeting was set up with a 30-day public comment period to provide time to respond to the invitation to join the

TAG. Also, the meeting was posted on the Virginia Regulatory Town Hall to reach a broader audience.

Comment/Question: I'm surprised no one was interested in the dam study. Could that be opened or explored again?

Answer: Aerin responded that DEQ asked multiple universities and contractors if they knew of anyone interested in the study, with no interest. DEQ would be interested in exploring the opportunity if it could be done this summer. Aerin also noted that the dam is probably not a significant contributor to the impairment based on the benthic data, given that there are times when the benthic health is good (VSCI > 60).

Question: Could another station be added further downstream to reduce the influence of the dam, given that the current monitoring station is in the recovery zone for the benthic community?

Answer: Aerin explained that a monitoring station further downstream would be in the lake zone. DEQ does not have a protocol to analyze benthic health in lake zones.

Comment: Station 198 (4AROA198.08) should not have been picked.

Response: Aerin noted that Save Our Streams recommended that site.

Question: Is that site still being sampled for nutrients?

Answer: Aerin answered that nutrient data are collected regularly since it is a trend site.

Comment: Since nutrients are the most probable stressors, there should be more sampling.

Comment/Question: Glad that an advanced restoration plan (ARP) is up for discussion. How will that happen?

Answer: Aerin responded that an ARP takes substantial community buy-in. There are over 50 permitted sources in this study area that would have to be involved in the development. An ARP is a good option but would still need the TMDL framework. Questions need to be addressed, for example, how will reductions be implemented voluntarily under an ARP? It is worthwhile to talk about this approach.

Question: Are there guidelines for a TAG?

Answer: Aerin will post more information about TAGs on the DEQ website.

Question: Will the same contractor work on updating the benthic stressor analysis?

Answer: Aerin replied that yes, the same contractor will work on the updated version.

Question: Will TAG meetings be during office hours?

Answer: Aerin said that will depend on polling of TAG members.

Aerin thanked participants for attending and noted that she will be reaching out with more information after the 30-day comment period.