OREGON ENVIROTHON

CURRENT ISSUE ORAL PRESENTATION 2026

Nonpoint Source Pollution Mitigation – It Begins at Home!

Background

Clean water is essential for healthy people, communities and ecosystems. Yet about 37% of Oregon's rivers, lakes and streams do not meet state water quality standards. A major cause is **nonpoint source pollution**, which comes from many scattered sources that are hard to manage, unlike pollution from sources such as wastewater treatment plants or factories. When rain or snowmelt runs over land, it can carry oil, fertilizers, pesticides, soil and other nonpoint source pollutants into nearby waterways. This runoff degrades streams and rivers and harms water quality. It also affects the aquatic habitats of species such as salmon, which rely on clean, cold water to survive.

The **Clean Water Act (CWA)** is the main federal law protecting the nation's waters. One way the CWA helps states reduce nonpoint source pollution is through a process called **Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)**. A TMDL sets the maximum amount of a pollutant a water body can receive while still meeting water quality standards.

In Oregon, the **Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)** manages this TMDL work through the Nonpoint Source Program. Each water body on the state's polluted waters list — known as the 303(d) list or Integrated Report — has a TMDL plan that identifies the sources of pollution and sets limits to reduce it. Under **Section 319 of the CWA**, states also receive grant money for projects that reduce nonpoint source pollution.

Oregon's **Section 319 Nonpoint Source Grant Program** provides project funding to local partners, such as watershed councils or Tribes, to address nonpoint source pollution. Many of these efforts promote **best management practices (BMPs)**, practical methods that reduce runoff and prevent pollutants from entering waterways. Example BMPs include planting vegetation along streams, encouraging residents to grow native plants, managing fertilizer use and maintaining healthy forest cover.

Together, the TMDL process, community organizations implementing BMPs and the Section 319 grant program help Oregon communities protect clean water for people, wildlife and future generations.

Oral Presentation Overview

The local watershed council has hired your team to develop a grant proposal for Oregon DEQ's Section 319 Nonpoint Source Grant Program. Your goal is to design a socially and scientifically grounded project that reduces nonpoint source pollution in your community's watershed or another watershed.

Your Task

Your team's task is to develop a 10-minute oral presentation pitching your Section 319 grant proposal to a review panel of DEQ and watershed council representatives. Your team must:

1. **Define the problem**
   Identify the watershed and the water quality concern your project will address. Describe what human activities may be contributing to the problem and how the problem affects people, wildlife and/or the environment. Use data to show why this issue matters.
2. **Set a goal**
   Identify which pollutant your project aims to reduce, and explain why you selected it.
3. **Describe your proposed solution**
   Propose a project to reduce the nonpoint source pollutant of concern in the chosen watershed. Your project must incorporate at least one best management practice or action (e.g., buffer zone or rain garden) and at least one element of community engagement (e.g., signage, social media, education program or volunteer recruitment). Identify key partners who will help conduct the project, and describe how the project will raise awareness or change behaviors.
4. **Promote equity**
   Show how your project engages with diverse or underserved groups in the watershed to address their needs and value their experiences. (To gain a better understanding of how diverse communities in Oregon interact with water, you can consult the Oregon Water Futures Report, listed in Resources.)
5. **Outline expected results**
   Identify expected results and explain how you will track success.
6. **Provide a simple budget**
   Include a simple budget showing how a Section 319 grant would support your project. Note that projects must provide at least 40% of the total project cost in matching resources (e.g., other grants, donations or volunteer time). In 2025, the average grant awarded was $15,000.

Successful Proposals

We are looking for projects that creatively and realistically address a nonpoint source pollution issue in the chosen watershed. Successful proposals focus on a well-defined project with clear objectives and rationale, and include all six elements outlined above.

See the following table for some sample projects from past proposals. Also see the Oral Presentation Score Sheet for a scoring rubric.

Sample Projects From Past Proposals				
Watershed	**Setting**	**TMDL Goal**	**Best Management Practice**	**Project**
Johnson Creek (Portland Metro)	Urban	Reduce bacteria	Control pet waste	Installing pet-waste stations in public spaces, with signage
South Santiam	Agricultural	Reduce nutrients	Manage fertilizer applications to avoid runoff	Developing a farmer-to-farmer learning network
Upper Rogue	Rural	Temperature control	Restore vegetation to riparian areas	Working with Tribal youth corps for streamside plantings

Resources

Oregon Nonpoint Source Program & Section 319 Grant Programs

- Oregon DEQ Nonpoint Source Program: https://www.oregon.gov/deq/wq/programs/Pages/Nonpoint.aspx
- Oregon Section 319 Nonpoint Source Implementation Grants (2025): https://www.oregon.gov/deq/wq/Documents/nps319rfp2025.pdf
- Oregon DEQ Water Quality Grants: https://www.oregon.gov/deq/wq/programs/pages/wqgrants.aspx
- Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Grant Programs: https://www.oregon.gov/oweb/grants/

Water Quality & TMDL Data

- Oregon DEQ TMDL Program Overview: https://www.oregon.gov/deq/wq/tmdls/

- Integrated Report (303(d) List) Data Viewer: https://www.arcgis.com/apps/instant/sidebar/index.html?appid=7d13b19e01a44f1dbfd12903576e6d29

Community Engagement

- OSU Extension Service Water Program: https://extension.oregonstate.edu/water
- The River Starts Here (Oregon public education campaign toolkit):
- https://theriverstartshere.org/
- SOLVE Oregon (volunteer mobilization and cleanup programs): https://www.solveoregon.org/

Equity

- Oregon DEQ Environmental Justice: https://www.oregon.gov/deq/about-us/Pages/Environmental-Justice.aspx
- Oregon Water Futures Report: https://www.oregonwaterfutures.org/report-20-21