This document contains the National Water Quality Inventory: Report to Congress, 2004 Reporting Cycle: Future Reporting

The report can be downloaded from:

http://www.epa.gov/305b/

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Future Reporting

In March 2003, EPA issued guidance describing the basic elements of a state monitoring and assessment program. In response to this guidance, the states have prepared long-term strategies that address comprehensive monitoring of all water types, including those for which little data currently exist. Along with the traditional, targeted monitoring approach, which describes the condition of individual waters of concern, probability surveys are an important component of comprehensive water monitoring programs, providing a cost-effective means of assessing and reporting on status and trends in overall populations of waters (e.g., streams, rivers, lakes). In the future, 305(b) reports will be able to provide statistically valid water quality data that are comparable across the states.

The states and EPA are taking steps toward streamlining and improving water quality monitoring and assessment by integrating monitoring and reporting requirements under sections 305(b) and 303(d) of the Clean Water Act (see the section *Background, Integrated Water Quality Reporting* of this report). EPA has issued guidance to the states to clarify reporting requirements for the 2008 reporting cycle and has established a goal that all 50 states and 6 territories and jurisdictions use the integrated reporting format by 2008. EPA continues to promote this comprehensive assessment approach to improve the states' ability to track both the programmatic and environmental goals of the Clean Water Act, and ideally, to increase the pace of achieving these important environmental goals. (See *http://www.epa.gov/owow/tmdl* for more information on EPA's national water quality reporting guidance.)

Electronic reporting of water quality information is a continuing EPA priority and involves a significant commitment at the state and national levels. EPA and the states are working to ensure that each assessed watershed and waterbody is identified using a consistent national surface water locational system—the National Hydrography Dataset (see *http://nhd.usgs.gov* for more information)—and that electronic reporting continues to improve. EPA intends to continually adapt and improve the ATTAINS database to reflect new reporting requirements and the full range of state monitoring activities, including state-scale probability-based surveys, and will continue to fully support state efforts to adopt electronic reporting. This commitment to providing more comprehensive, easily shared water quality information will help managers and the public make more informed decisions about the future of our waters.