

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Site Specific Alternative Criterion

What is a Site Specific Alternative Criterion?

A Site Specific Alternative Criterion, or SSAC, is a water quality criterion developed for a particular waterbody or segment of a waterbody, designed to more accurately reflect site specific conditions. Criteria, including site specific criteria, are one of the components of Florida's surface water quality standards, and are intended to protect designated and existing uses of the state waters.

Development of an approvable site specific criterion is dependent on a demonstration that the different water quality criterion is more appropriate for the waterbody than the one normally used for the classification. When approved, a SSAC is used instead of (or sometimes in conjunction with) the surface water criterion that applies to the waters for that classification. A SSAC recognizes and accounts for the specific needs of the biological community native to the waterbody to make sure they are fully protected.

For more detail, see [Surface Water Quality Standards sections of Rule 62-302](#):

- **62-302.400** for classes and designated uses;
- **62-302.530** for a table of the criteria applicable to each class of water.
- **62-302.800** for more information on SSACs.

Why does the State adopt SSACs?

Florida uses a broad approach to manage and assess the wide variety of waters found here. All of Florida's surface waters are classified according to designated uses (Classes I-V); and water quality criteria that support the classes (and therefore, uses) apply uniformly to all waters within the state that have the same classification.

Florida recognizes that with the variety of waters, there may be situations where a generally applicable statewide criterion may not be appropriate for a waterbody or portion of a waterbody. The State adopted surface water quality standards largely to regulate end of pipe discharges, however when the criteria were adopted in 1979, the Environmental Regulation Commission recognized that with a broad approach, one or more of the criteria applicable to all waters within a classification may not be appropriate for a specific waterbody or segment of a waterbody. By gathering more current and specific data, the new information can be used to establish a SSAC that better protects the waterbody because it more specifically reflects the recreational use or the requirements of the organisms in that waterbody. This information provides the basis for a more appropriate site specific criterion that fully protects the waterbody and all of its uses.

How will the change affect the waterbody?

If adopted, a SSAC would change a specific criterion to better reflect the natural or unabatable conditions of a waterbody, without changing its designated use. For example, a SSAC in a Class III waterbody still must fully support all existing uses including protection of fish and wildlife and recreational uses.

After a SSAC is adopted, the new criterion applies to the waterbody in place of (or in conjunction with) the criterion that normally applies to all waters for that classification. Other criteria are not affected and the SSAC applies to anyone using the water.

Who will the change affect?

Anyone who seeks a permit for activities in these waters would need to meet the new criterion level. Additionally, the SSAC will be the basis of 303(d) assessments of the waterbody under the state's Impaired Waters Rule (Chapter 62-303, F.A.C.) and subsequent TMDL development if one is needed.

How is a SSAC created?

Anyone may petition the Department to develop a SSAC for a specific water quality parameter. The Department may also initiate SSAC development. Development of a SSAC includes public comment as well as state and federal approval of the water quality standard change for it to become effective. Like all criteria changes, a SSAC must be based on sound scientific rationale. Details of the process and information needed is described in the Surface Water Quality Standards Rule 62-302.800, F.A.C

Why are there two different types of SSACs and how are they different?

A Type I SSAC is based on natural background (minimally disturbed) conditions, and the required documentation is based on specified scientific methodology. A Type II SSAC may include some human influences on water quality, and may be based on alternative scientifically defensible methodologies. Both types of SSACs must demonstrate that the alternative criterion would fully maintain and protect the designated uses (human health and aquatic life), existing uses, and the water quality of adjacent waters and waters downstream of the SSAC.

Is there opportunity for public input in the SSAC process?

Yes, SSAC the process provides opportunities for public participation and the Department encourages comments and critique of the scientific merits used to determine the SSAC. The public is provided the opportunity to submit written comments. Additionally, a public workshop is held in the area affected by the proposed change (for a Type II SSAC), and if requested, for a Type I SSAC.

For further questions, please contact DEP's Bureau of Assessment and Restoration Support, 2600 Blair Stone Road – MS 3560; Tallahassee, Florida 32399-2400. Phone (850)245-8346.

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