

Water Quality Management Improvement Work

Water Quality for Aquatic Resources Workshop Pre-Meeting
June 2, 2026



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Presentation Overview

- DOH's role in water quality management
- Point vs. nonpoint source pollution
- Priorities for program improvement
- Need for coordination

Regulatory Role of DOH

- Serves as Hawaii's Water Quality Standards (WQS) authority.
- Administers WQS and regulates water pollution through laws, rules, permitting compliance, enforcement, and oversight.
- Regulates responsible parties rather than performing pollution-mitigation activities directly.

PART III. WATER POLLUTION CONTROL

§342D-50 Prohibition. (a) No person, including any public body, shall discharge any water pollutant into state waters, or cause or allow any water pollutant to enter state waters except in compliance with this chapter, rules adopted pursuant to this chapter, or a permit, water quality certification, or variance issued by the director.

(b) No person, including any public body, shall knowingly establish, extend, or alter any system of drainage, sewage, or water supply, or undertake any project in sewage outfall areas where there may be a possibility of alteration of currents depended upon for dilution without first securing approval in writing from the director.

(c) No person, including any industrial user, shall discharge any water pollutant or effluent into a publicly owned treatment works or sewerage system in violation of:

- (1) A pretreatment standard established by the department or the publicly owned treatment works; or
- (2) A pretreatment condition in a permit issued by the department or a publicly owned treatment works.

(d) No person, including any public body, shall violate any rule adopted pursuant to this chapter or any permit, water quality certification, or variance issued or modified pursuant to this chapter. [L 1989, c 212, pt of §2; am L 1995, c 180, §14; am L 2023, c 233, §7]

**Nonpoint Sources
Typically Discharge
Indirectly to
Waterways:**

- Agriculture
- Hydromodification
- Urban Runoff
- Roads, Highways and Bridges
- Abandoned Mine Drainage
- Atmospheric Deposition
- Marinas and Boating
- Timber Harvest
- Septic System



**Point Sources
Typically Discharge
Directly to
Waterways:**

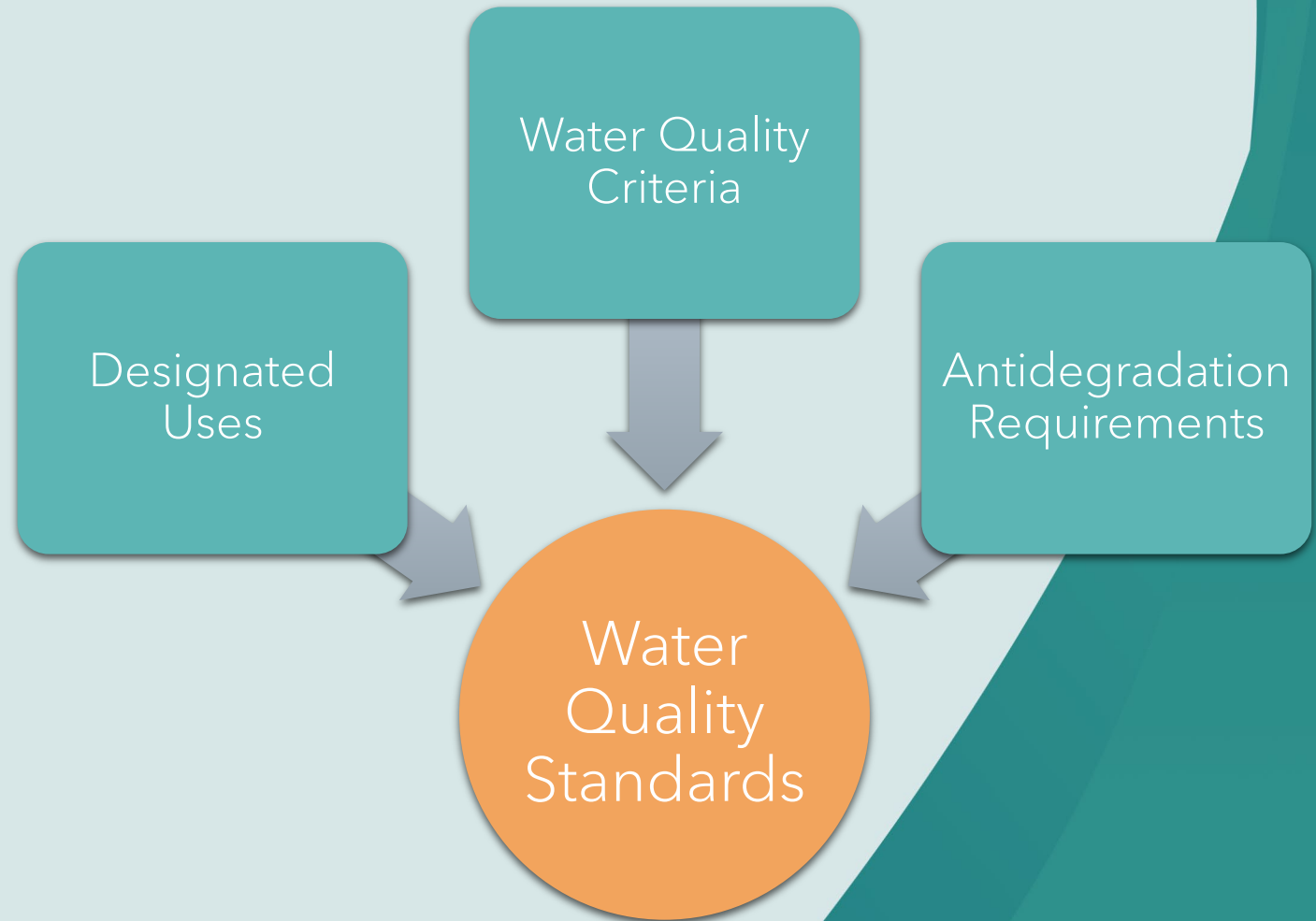
- Factory
- Wastewater Treatment Plant
- Stormwater Discharge

Hydrologic Cycle:

- Overland Flow
- Infiltration
- Groundwater Flow
- Transpiration
- Evaporation
- Rainfall
- Aquifer

Water Quality Standards (HAR 11-54)

- Legal basis to control water pollution.
- Discharges to State surface waters must comply with WQS.
- Processing and issuance of NPDES permits and Water Quality Certifications implement WQS.

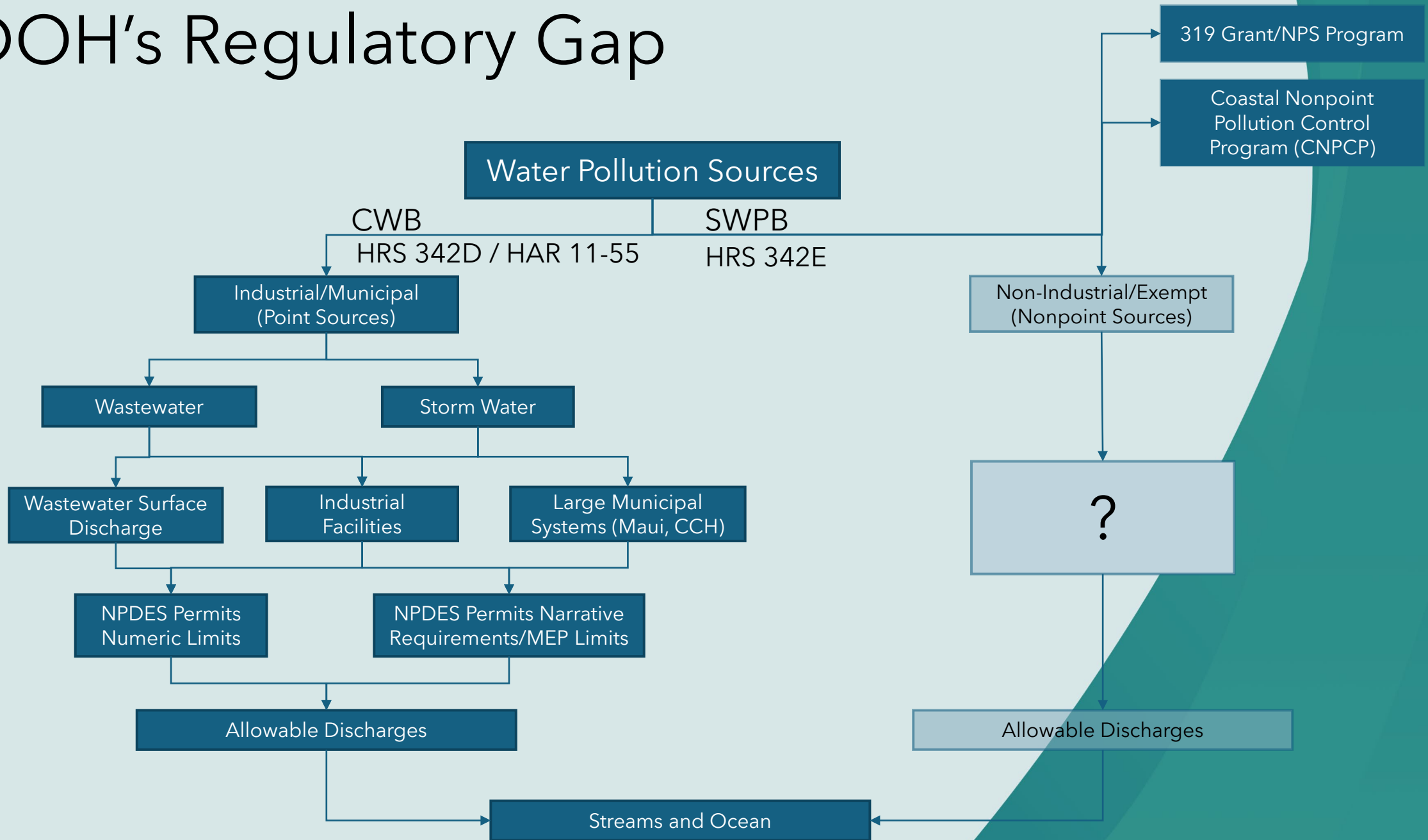


Priority Initiatives

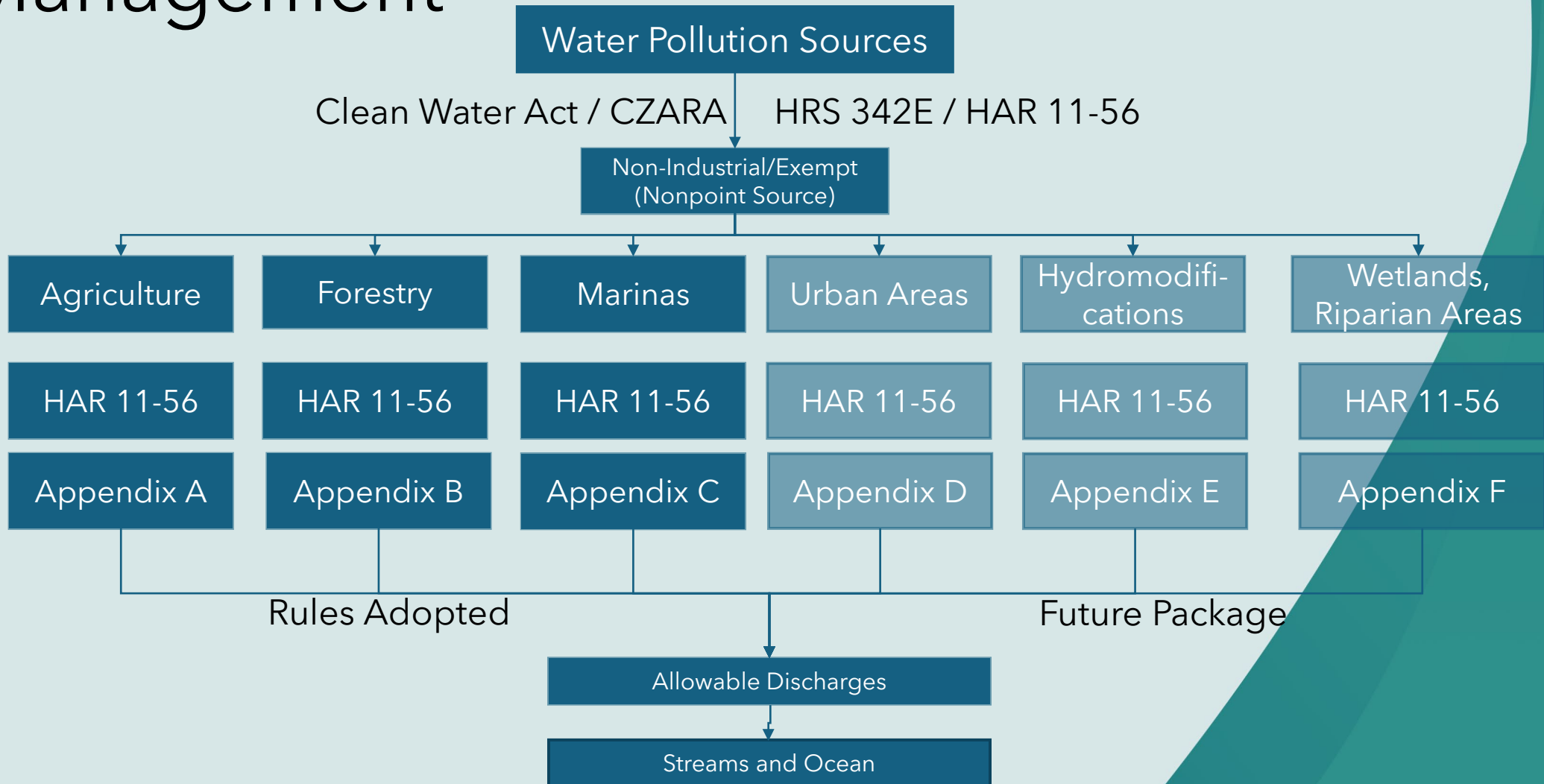
1. Establish the Surface Water Protection Branch to regulate and enforce nonpoint source pollution.
 - Point source program well established > Working to improve how we address nonpoint source pollution.
2. Improve how water quality is managed in Hawaii.
 - Overall idea is to provide clear workflow that identifies actions DOH will take in response to point and nonpoint source pollution events.
 - Includes addressing water quality problem in systematic and transparent process from beginning (problem identification) to end as defined by DOH.
 - Includes process for other departments such as DLNR involved in improving water quality.

Priority Initiative 1:
Establishment of the Surface
Water Protection Branch (SWPB)

DOH's Regulatory Gap



New Regulatory Construct over NPS Management

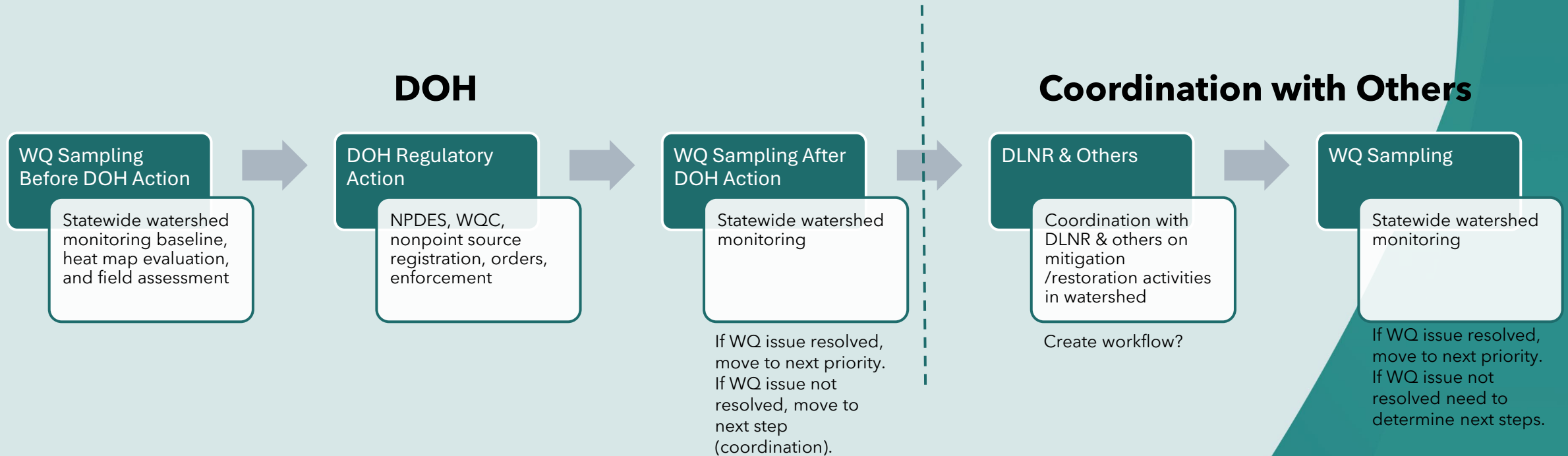


Priority Initiative 2:
Water Quality Management (WQM)
Improvement Project

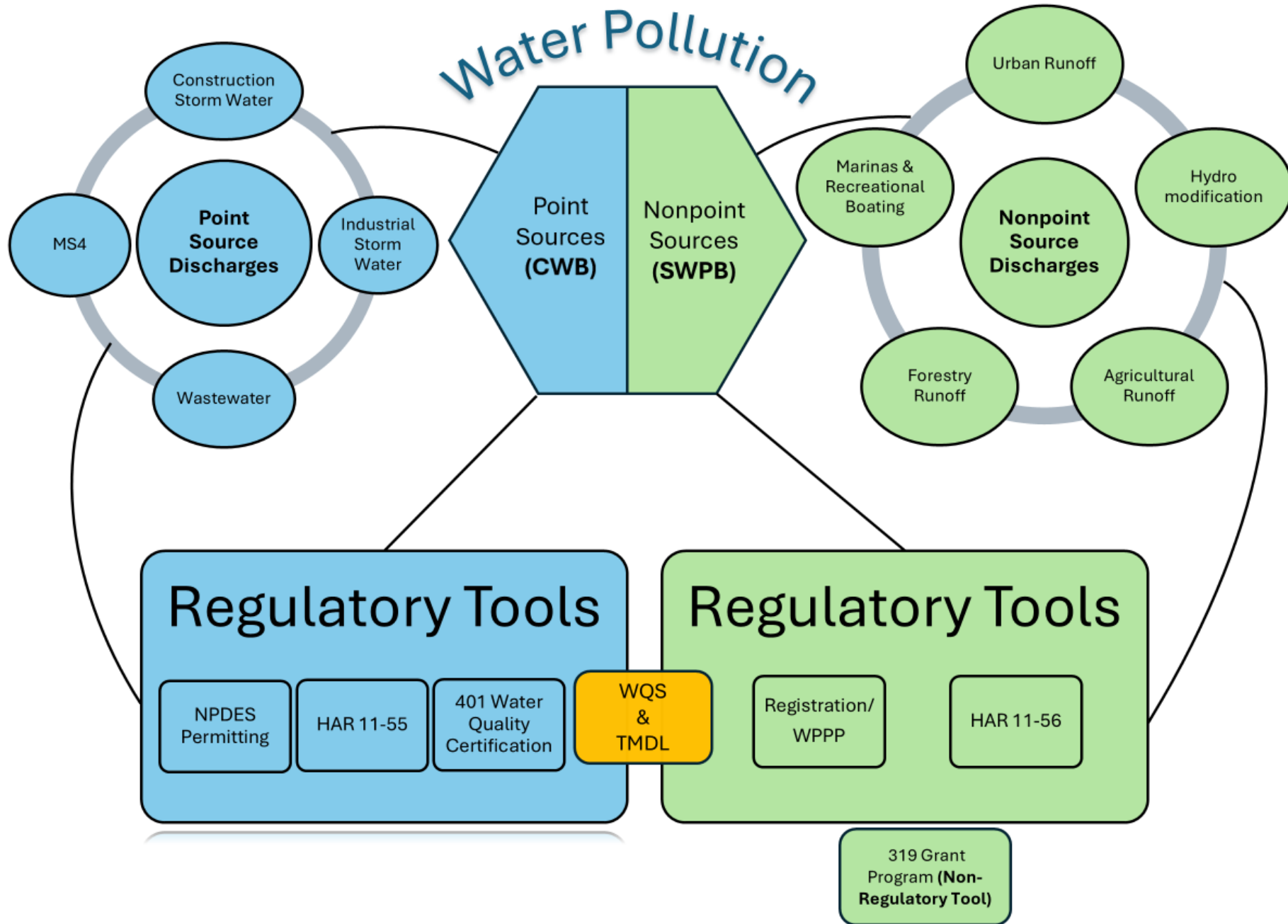
WQM Improvement Project

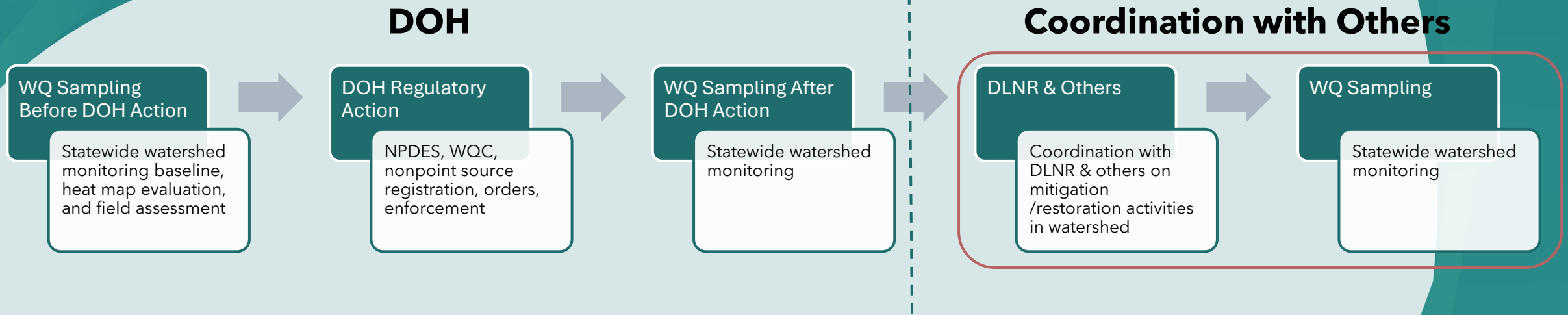
- The Water Quality Management improvement work with statewide water quality monitoring program is being created to:
 - Tie the water pollution control process together (point and nonpoint source);
 - Direct DOH action so water quality complaints and problems can be addressed;
 - Provide the public a structured and transparent process to address water pollution; and
 - To use water quality monitoring data to drive management decisions.

Basic Process



Note: DOH will have a website summarizing this entire process and decision making to show how the water quality issue was resolved from beginning to end.



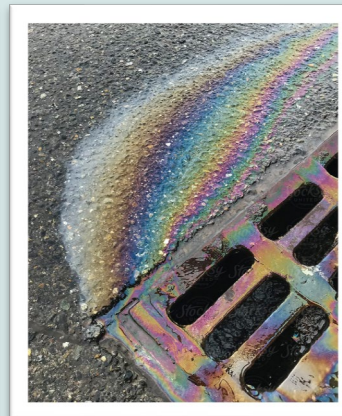
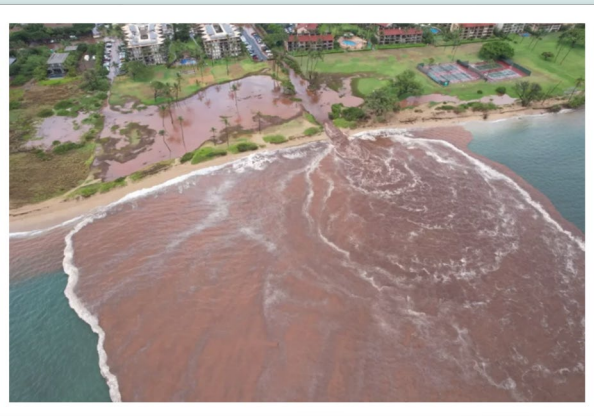


7. If criteria are not met, coordinate with others to narrow down potential causes:

- Regulated sources that have been addressed by DOH action can be ruled out.
- Pollutant sources determined or presumed to originate from cesspools will be documented. Cesspools are scheduled to be banned in 2050, and those sources are expected to be mitigated by this action (although follow-up monitoring should be conducted and documented).
- Consult with other departments such as DLNR and counties to determine whether there are any planned or ongoing activities in the area and coordinate with them to reduce pollutant loads.
- Explore 319 funding opportunities in area through interested community/watershed groups.
- Determine and verify whether pollutant source(s) may be due to natural background conditions, and if so, document specific pollutants, provide rationale, and move on.
 - 319 funds may also be used to mitigate sources of pollution.

Water Quality Management Challenges

- Pollution comes from everything we do - from the way we use land, the policies we create, the products we consume, and the everyday choices we make.
- Who should be held responsible for that pollution? Would regulation or enforcement be fair?



A Work In Progress

- DOH is committed to moving the WQM Improvement Project forward.
- Anticipate process will be more iterative than linear.
- “How” to coordinate is still unclear.
 - Watershed-based plans and TMDL implementation plans can be valuable tools, but there are limitations.
 - Existing rules and plans cannot address every situation and every source.

Value of Coordination

We each play an important role in improving water quality, but we need work towards the same goal.

