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Water Quality

Indicator: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Index of Watershed Indicators (IWI). This index rates the condition and vulnerability of aquatic systems across the United States. It incorporates 16 data layers: seven for condition and nine for vulnerability. These layers include State/Tribal reports from section 305(b) of the Clean Water Act (meeting designated uses), presence of various toxics and pollutants, wetland loss, species at risk, urban and agricultural runoff potential, *etc*. A full listing and description of each layer can be found at: http://www.epa.gov/iwi/national/index.html. Overall scores are portrayed by subbasin (8-digit hydrologic unit), some of which have insufficient data to assign a rating. The map shows ratings for the subbasins that have at least 20 percent BLM-administered surface acreage.

Key Findings: At present, none of these subbasins has high vulnerability. Therefore, the map only portrays the three condition classes, all of which correspond to low vulnerability. Of the 253 subbasins that are displayed, 114 have insufficient data to be assigned a condition rating. Of the remaining 139 subbasins, 20 show the highest (best) rating, 52 fall in the intermediate class, and 69 warrant the lowest (worst) rating.

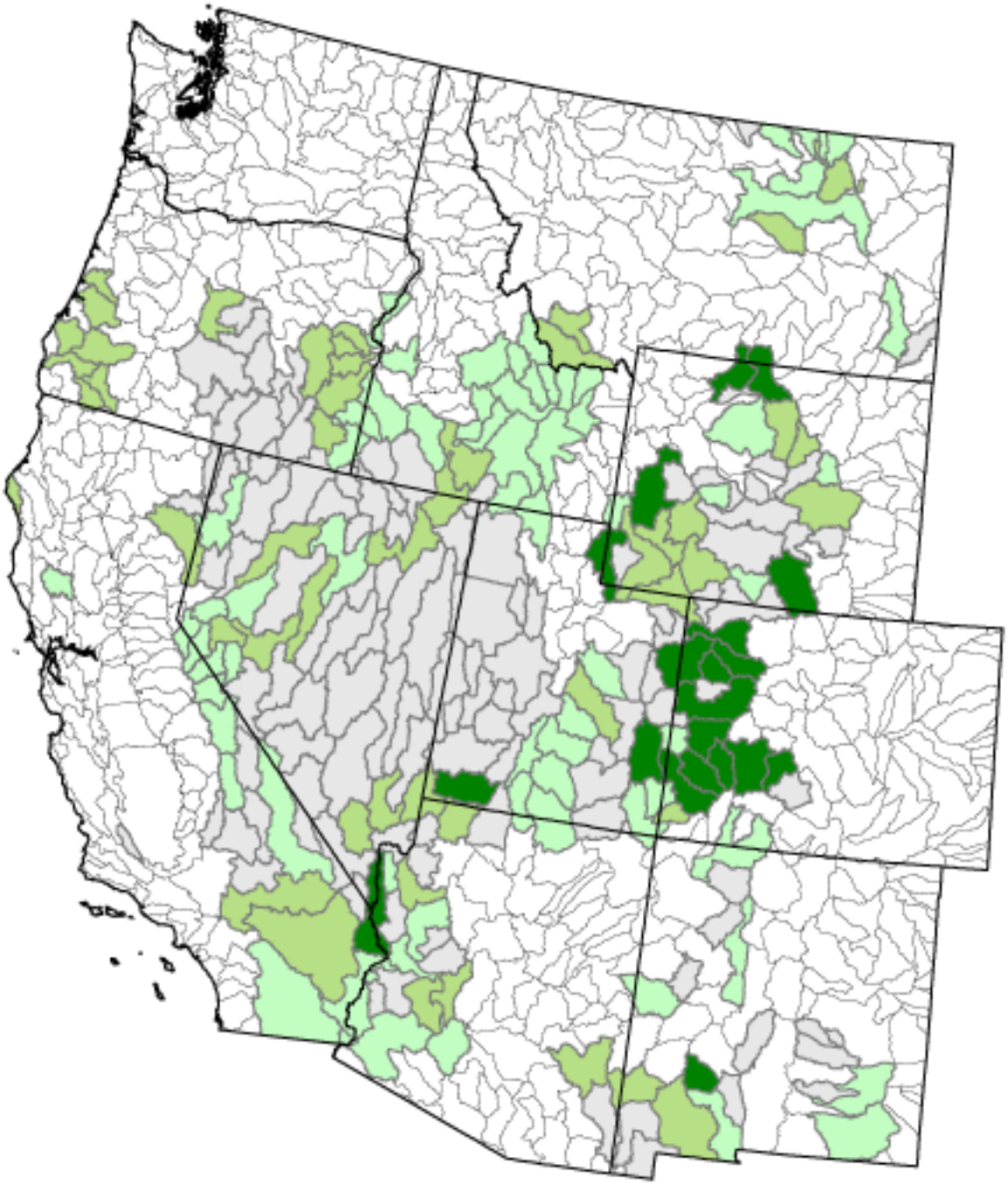
Because this index is a composite of several factors, it is important to determine the reason(s) for the assigned rating for any given subbasin, This can be done on the web. To do so, go to: http://www.epa.gov/surf3/locate/map2.html to select the state and subbasin of interest. Click on "Index of Watershed Indicators" to see the summary rating. Then click on "Condition and Vulnerability Indicator Graphs" to view the rating for each individual data layer. For example, the Middle Humboldt subbasin in north-central Nevada is rated as having "more serious water quality problems." This subbasin has more than 80 percent BLM surface. Closer analysis reveals that the rating is due to not meeting all designated uses, not meeting community water source standards (before treatment), and exceeding reference levels for ambient water quality. To a lesser degree, wetland loss is also a contributor. The extent to which BLM-administered lands contribute should be carefully analyzed at the state and field office levels.

Limitations: Many of the included data layers include inconsistent and/or incomplete data and not all of the contributing elements are equally pertinent to wildlands. In addition, the overall rating is heavily influenced by one particular layer, the State and Tribal 305(b) reports (6x weighting factor). Nevertheless, this index is widely available and provides a much-needed comparative view across administrative boundaries.

Source: EPA website: http://www.epa.gov/iwi/1999sept/catalog.html. This indicator is based on the most recent IWI data release by the EPA (September 1999).

Comments: To date, there have been five releases of the IWI beginning in October 1997. New data layers are regularly introduced and there are currently four additional "candidate" layers being reviewed for possible inclusion.

Water Quality



EPA Index of Watershed Indicators
for areas with > 20% BLM Surface

- Better Water Quality
- Less Serious Water Quality
- More Serious Water Quality
- Data Sufficiency Threshold Not Met

Scale 1:12,000,000

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