



April 10, 2017

Scott Thompson, Director
Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality:

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For nearly two decades, the State of Oklahoma has identified the Illinois River, Barren Fork, Flint Creek and Lake Tenkiller as water quality impaired. These important waters are or are fed by state designated Scenic Rivers and have been placed in the very highest priority category for protected waters and development of Total Daily Maximum Load (TMDL) determinations (See Addendum). These TMDL's are required to address the source of impairments caused by excess nutrients in general and phosphorus in particular. Oklahoma has completed numerous water quality studies on its own, at public expense, as precursors to creating TMDLs for the waters in this basin. The problem is, no TMDLs have been proposed.

A step in the right direction was taken when the United States EPA announced in late 2009 that they would take the lead in addressing this admittedly difficult problem that involves two states and several tribal nations. In their initial letter announcing the project, EPA pledged to develop a "scientifically robust model of the Illinois River watershed" within 12 to 18 months. Further, EPA stated that the effort was expected to lead to the development of one or more TMDLs and that "EPA will take the lead in developing such TMDL(s)".

It has now been almost a decade since that letter was written and it is increasingly troubling that progress on development of the necessary TMDLs seems to have stalled. The last public meeting to provide a project update was in November 2013 and there have been no postings on the project website since the modeling was declared complete in September 2015. Given that Oklahoma has been unable to complete and implement these TMDLs, and take this next important step to control the causes of impairment for these waters, it is vital that EPA complete all necessary TMDLs for the Illinois River and Lake Tenkiller without further delay.

We strongly urge the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and other state agencies and officials, to press EPA to complete the TMDL process as soon as possible and to override any attempts by political entities and affected special interest groups to delay or stop the TMDLs. Under the Clean Water Act, completion of TMDLs for impaired waters is not discretionary. EPA and the State are bound by the Act to complete this process.



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We believe the recent scientific study of scenic river phosphorus levels and algae growth by Baylor University clearly supports Oklahoma's 0.037 mg/L numerical phosphorus limit. EPA and all other entities involved in this issue must recognize this study and use it in support of meaningful TMDLs for the Illinois and Lake Tenkiller. Arkansas, by signing the agreement with Oklahoma, is deemed to have accepted this approved standard.

Members of our organizations worked for adoption of this important water quality rule for our finest streams and to protect Lake Tenkiller. We believe that after nearly two decades of debate, accommodating rule extensions and multiple, extensive studies, that it is finally time to enforce the 0.037 mg/L limit and hold point source and nonpoint source polluters accountable by adopting and enforcing TMDLs to address these problems.

We await your response and look forward to learning of your plans to get this project back on track and finally complete the restoration of these aquatic resource treasures which are so important to the people of Oklahoma.

This letter is being submitted on behalf of the Conservation Coalition of Oklahoma and the organizations reflected below.

Sincerely,

Ron Suttles

Board Chair

Conservation Coalition of Oklahoma

Save the Illinois River (STIR)

Oklahomans for Responsible Water Policy (ORWP)

Chairman

Greater Tenkiller Area Association

Trout Unlimited

Sierra Club - Oklahoma Chapter

CC: OWRB; OSE; EPA