

MAY - 8 2013

Mr. Ed Fite
Administrator
State of Oklahoma
Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission
15971 N. Highway 10
P.O. Box 292
Tahlequah, Oklahoma 74465-0292

Dear Mr. Fite:

Thank you for your April 23, 2013, letter to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 regarding the EPA's ongoing efforts to develop a Total Maximum Daily Load for the Illinois River Watershed in Arkansas and Oklahoma, and specifically encouraging EPA to avoid any actions potentially suspending its ongoing efforts.

As you are aware, the degradation of the water quality of the Illinois River, its tributaries, and the water-bodies into which they flow remains a critical concern to Arkansas, Oklahoma, Tribes, and the EPA. In your letter you referenced the 2003 Arkansas-Oklahoma Statement of Joint Principles and Actions Agreement and a three-year extension of the 2003 agreement which was recently signed by state government officials in both Arkansas and Oklahoma. A key component of the so called "Second Statement of Joint Principles and Actions" is a joint three-year stressor-response study of water quality in the Illinois River Watershed. The EPA's understanding is that the primary purpose of this joint study is "*to determine the total phosphorus threshold response level.*" The result of this study will be used as a basis to reaffirm or revise the current Oklahoma phosphorus water quality standard (i.e., 0.037 mg/L) for scenic rivers.

As we recently have indicated to municipal and industrial stakeholder groups in northwest Arkansas, continuing the EPA's current model development work in the Illinois Basin is vital to the shared goal of improved water quality in the Illinois River and its upstream tributaries in northwest Arkansas. A copy of one such communication is enclosed for your information. Given the time and resources already required to achieve the current level of model development, the EPA also believes completion of the modeling efforts and development of any TMDL(s) is likely to be a lengthy process. Therefore, the EPA believes it is important to continue moving forward with its ongoing modeling and TMDL work.

We appreciate your concerns, and we remain fully committed to continuing to complete our model for the entire Illinois River Watershed (including Lake Tenkiller). If you have further questions, please contact me at (214) 665-7101 or Claudia Hosch, Associate Director for NPDES Permits and TMDLs, at (214) 665-7170.

Sincerely yours,

Original Signed By William K. Honker

William K. Honker, P.E.
Director, Water Quality Protection Division

Enclosure
