

Message Information

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Subject Illinois River Watershed TMDL, Oklahoma

Message Body

Dear Administrator Jackson,

Please see Save the Illinois River, Inc.'s letter to you regarding the TMDL for the Illinois River watershed in Oklahoma and Arkansas.

Ed Brocksmitth
STIR Secretary-Treasurer

Copy Al Armendariz, Region 6 Administrator



STIR Board of Directors STIR EPA Letter on TMDL and Congress doc

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Save the Illinois River Inc.

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January 2, 2012

Administrator Lisa Jackson
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Jackson,

We are writing to you in regard to the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study for the Illinois River watershed in Oklahoma and Arkansas. This study by U.S. EPA is now underway with the cooperation of both states.

Save the Illinois River, Inc., (STIR) is a nonprofit, citizen's coalition chartered in Oklahoma for the protection and preservation of the Illinois River, its tributaries, and Tenkiller Lake. Founded in 1984, STIR has played an important part in the adoption of significant water quality regulations in Oklahoma. One of these protective regulations is an instream numeric limit (.037 mg/l) for phosphorus in legally designated Oklahoma Scenic Rivers.

STIR is very concerned that there may currently be an effort to steer the EPA's TMDL study in order to prolong and confuse its completion and implementation. Those responsible for this effort may also be targeting the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers phosphorus limit which has been approved by EPA, our Governor, and the Oklahoma Legislature.

Several members of the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representative from Oklahoma and Arkansas have written to you in a letter dated December 9, 2011 regarding these issues. STIR hopes that EPA will not take any actions that could delay the completion and implementation of the TMDL for the Illinois River watershed. We are under the impression that a separate TMDL for Tenkiller Lake may be in progress. We certainly hope so.

The fact that Arkansas lawmakers oppose Oklahoma's water quality standards for the Illinois River watershed is not a surprise. Northwest Arkansas politicians and developers have lobbied EPA, Congress, and Oklahoma agencies in an effort to weaken the .037 phosphorus limit due to become effective this July. However, the support now shown by Oklahoma's Senators and Congressmen for these opponents is a great source of disappointment to us. We must know who is polluting the Illinois River watershed and from where the pollution is coming. The EPA's TMDL, we sincerely hope, will answer these questions once and for all.

STIR is especially interested in knowing the impact of nonpoint source pollution in our watershed. USGS research shows that a very large amount of this pollution is caused by runoff from fields fertilized with poultry manure. In 2010, an estimated 419,000 tons of poultry waste was produced in the Illinois River watershed. Two counties in northwest Arkansas accounted for more than 82-percent of the waste according to reports from Oklahoma and Arkansas agencies.* It is estimated that 20-percent or less of this phosphorus-rich waste is being transported from the watershed.**

Excess phosphorus and bacteria from poultry waste have degraded the scenic Illinois River and are causing the eutrophication of Tenkiller Lake, one of the most beautiful lakes in our state. The poultry industry has created a legacy of phosphorus in our watershed that will continue to contaminate our waters for decades. That is why Oklahoma sued Arkansas poultry companies in 2005 accusing them of polluting the Illinois River watershed and seeking a moratorium on poultry waste land application. There is no verdict yet in that lawsuit.

STIR believes that the TMDL study of the Illinois River watershed, which should by all rights have been completed many years ago under the Clean Water Act, is essential in order to protect Tenkiller Lake and the Illinois River. STIR supports the need for adequate funding for the EPA TMDL study and we support the need to use the best available science for the study. However, we would be very concerned if the TMDL study completion and implementation are unnecessarily delayed because of dirty water advocates. We urge the EPA to include all available USGS Illinois River watershed water quality research in the TMDL study.

Please know that in this time of Congressional attacks on the Clean Water Act and on EPA's enforcement authority, Save the Illinois River, Inc. stands with the EPA in its effort to protect our nation's water resources. Allegations that clean water regulations may adversely impact our region's economic development are unsubstantiated and, in fact, are opposite to STIR's belief that clean water is good for business and for our quality of life.

STIR would appreciate receiving copies of any EPA response to the December 9, 2011 letter signed by Senators Inhofe and Coburn, and by Congressman Boren.

Sincerely,

Denise Deason-Toyne
President, Save the Illinois River, Inc.

*Arkansas Natural Resource Commission and Oklahoma Department of Agriculture state reports for the year 2010.

**Oklahoma, State of v. Tyson Foods, Inc. et al

“Clean Water is Northeastern Oklahoma’s Future”
