



Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission

# River Currents

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## Illinois River Phosphorus Standard Debate

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When an Arkansas group recently announced it will seek funding for a new study to assess nutrient loading on the Illinois River, it added new fuel to the discussion that's been going on between stakeholders in Arkansas and Oklahoma for nearly thirty years. I was among those who committed many hours during the '80s and '90s to reviewing a number of scientific studies which were then used to develop a recommendation that eventually led to adoption of a numeric phosphorus standard for Oklahoma's scenic rivers. As such, I understand the concerns that are being expressed by some of our neighbors on both sides of the state line.

On several occasions, I found myself scorned or ignored at meetings for even suggesting the need for a phosphorus standard. But in those early days, as now, I have not allowed anyone to derail my efforts to pursue a phosphorus limit to protect our scenic rivers, and today I truly believe Arkansas and Oklahoma are making considerable headway in achieving the alternative 0.037mg/L phosphorus limit adopted by the Oklahoma Water Resources Board.

Some stakeholders have forgotten it was actually Northwest Arkansas officials who asked Oklahoma for a numeric threshold in the mid-1980s. It wasn't until 2000 that we as a state would respond to their request.

From my vantage, it appears some of us have lost sight of the successes we've achieved since 2000. It seems some can't begin to move forward on the issues because they are focused on Oklahoma's pending lawsuit against the poultry companies. And there are those in Arkansas who are contemplating legal actions related to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's development of two (2) scientifically-based TMDL models (one for the Illinois River and one for the Tenkiller Ferry Reservoir) and review of Oklahoma's 0.037mg/L phosphorus standard, the 2003 Statement of Joint Principles Agreement, expanding storm water prevention regulations, and other issues that exist between the two states.

I would add that we have failed to give credit where it is due. The majority of Northwest Arkansas-Northeast Oklahoma Municipalities and Businesses have, in recent years, committed over \$300 million toward abatement of point source pollutants. At the same time, production agriculture and the poultry industry have also stepped up by implementing non-point pollutant mitigation strategies, along with removing approximately 500,000 tons of poultry waste from the Illinois River Watershed.

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Young Riverfest attendants learn about the United States Geological Survey. Read the full story about the 2011 River Festival on pg. 3! Also check out our Wild Side feature on one of Oklahoma's most popular waterfowl species on pg. 4.



# OSRC Board and Agency News

## Year End Agency Business

The OSRC planned to hold elections for the Adair County, Cherokee County, and Delaware County Board Representative positions this December. However, only one qualified candidate from each county filed and were thereby declared the winners. Each position was filled by the incumbent who previously held the office: George R. "Rick" Stubblefield, John Larson, and Steven B. Randall.

These appointments, as well as other board and agency business, was discussed at the final OSRC business meeting of the year. The Oklahoma Conservation Commission's (OCC) Shannon Phillips made a presentation regarding a \$2 million federal award from the United States Environmental Protection Agency to be used for several stream channel restoration in the Illinois River and the Eucha/Spavinaw watersheds. Two of the twelve stream bank stabilization projects will focus on the Todd and Peavine public access areas.

A group of North Carolina contractors will be responsible for project construction work. Phillips stated that these contractors wanted to make these projects "a showcase for how stream bank stabilization should be done." The contractors will divide into six teams and have until September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012 to complete all twelve projects.

In the last issue of the newsletter, it was reported that the OCC would be funding water sampling throughout the rest of the fiscal year. It should be noted that this funding is the result of a federal award granted by the EPA which will be channeled through the OCC. It will be used to fund not only water sampling through fiscal year 11, but also for recreational restroom facilities. These facilities serve the public and reduce nutrient and bacteria loading in the Illinois.

OSRC Administrator Ed Fite also announced plans to open the Edmonson public access area for drive in use. The OSRC maintenance team has already begun working on the project.



## Lt. Stephanie Stephens Says Goodbye to the OSRC

Ranger Supervisor Stephanie Stephens has been a hardworking, committed member of the OSRC ranger department for nearly five years. This year, Stephens departed from the agency to pursue other positions.

In May of 2006, Stephens began working a seasonal ranger at the OSRC. After two years of excellent service, she became a permanent addition to the river ranger team.

Stephens was dedicated to protecting Oklahoma's scenic rivers and the public. She truly cared for the environment and the people in her jurisdiction, and always strove to serve them with integrity and respect.

The OSRC staff and commissioners, as well as the businesses along Highway 10, will greatly miss her presence as a river ranger. We wish her good luck with her new positions!

## Phosphorus Standard, cont. from pg. 1

Despite this ongoing dialogue between Oklahoma and Arkansas, prior to early November 2011 *not one* Arkansas official had suggested any number to counter the Oklahoma Water Resources Board's 0.037mg/L Phosphorus Standard.

I appreciate the fact that the Northwest Arkansas Council is pursuing funds to expand water monitoring strategies/analyses and generate subsequent reports. Simply, any information generated will help us all to better understand the impact and complexities of an ever-exploding urban sprawl and production agriculture activities of Northwest Arkansas on the physical, biological, and chemical characteristics of the Illinois River Watershed.

**"Like" our brand new fanpage on Facebook!**



The OSRC has launched an official Facebook page! Visit our homepage at [www.facebook.com/OKSRC](http://www.facebook.com/OKSRC) to see pictures, view regulations regarding parks, fees, camping, and floating, and receive updates about river conditions and upcoming events. You can also submit questions and your favorite river experiences - they might even end up in the next edition of the *River Currents*!

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# Spotlights in the River Basin

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## 4th Annual Illinois River Festival

The Illinois River Festival gives the OSRC the opportunity to raise awareness about river conservation and preservation, as well as to promote the community and culture of the Illinois River. This year, the Riverfest was held at War Eagle Resort and attracted nearly 400 visitors. Though this turnout was not as large as in previous years, the enthusiasm of both participants and attendants made the festival a success. Musician Kathy Tibbits, who performed, described it as the "best Riverfest yet."

The event was kicked off with a performance by Wes Combs and friends, followed by the conservation themed act of Marshall Mitchell, who performed thanks to the Illinois River Watershed Partnership. Husband and wife Dennis and Kathy Tibbits then took the stage. The day concluded with the talent of Joe Mack and local favorite Mark Sweeney.

While the music provided entertainment and great background, the main events of the festival took place inside the tent. Over 20 groups, organizations and vendors gathered to educate and interact with attendants. Booths provided information about the river, the environment, conservation, and their association. Vendors also provided custom products and food.

Several familiar organizations joined us this year, including the Oklahoma Highway Patrol's Marine Division, Tenkiller State Park, and the Solid Waste Institute. The Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah Band also returned.

First year participants included the Girl Scouts, Tahlequah Farmers Market, Tahlequah Recycling Inc, and Tahlequah Ballet Company, each of which had information about their group. Happy Hippies, a flea market specializing in tie-dye, sold some of their wares, as did Heaven Sent Food and Fiber, who brought a variety of wools and fabrics.

Three non-profit groups also attended, selling delicious food as fundraisers. The First United Methodist Church sold frito chili pies, conies, and popcorn, while the DD Etchieson church focused on delicious Indian Tacos. The Humane Society sold delectable homemade desserts and warm soup, a dish which perfectly suited the day's weather.

One of the highlights for the OSRC was being able to provide almost 150 kids with free, exclusive 2011 Riverfest shirts. These shirts were a hit among children and parents. The agency would not have been able to purchase them if not for the generous donations of the American Electrical Company and Save the Illinois River, Inc. Northeastern State University acted as another sponsor for this event, lending us their large event tent and the tables and chairs provided for booths and vendors.

We at the OSRC appreciate the sponsors, participants and attendants that made this great event possible. Be sure to check out the OSRC's official website and Facebook page for information regarding the next Riverfest!



Blue Thumb's enviroscape shows kids how natural occurrences and human actions affect the river.



Leann Bunn brought two snakes from Tenkiller State Park to teach attendants about wildlife.



Jim Loftin and Mark Sweeney are musical fixtures in Tahlequah and are influenced by the Illinois River.

# on the Wild Side....

## Duck, Duck, Shoot: Illinois River Duck Tales

The Illinois River basin provides an ideal home and wintering ground for ducks, one of the most popular waterfowl species among audubon enthusiasts, conservationists, and hunters alike.

The majority of Oklahoma's winter duck population are migrants from the Prairie Pothole Region. This region includes parts of North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Montana and Minnesota, and is often referred to as "the duck factory."

This region is one of the main focuses of several waterfowl conservation groups, including one of the largest organizations, Ducks Unlimited. DU has several Oklahoma chapters, which can be checked out at their website: [www.ducks.org](http://www.ducks.org).

Ducks who commonly waddle through Oklahoma include mallards, pintails, wigeons, and blue-winged teals. These dabbling ducks are often found in small or shallow ponds, feeding on aquatic plants.

Gadwalls and wood ducks can also be seen throughout the state. Male wood ducks are particularly eye-catching due to the iridescent green and purple on their heads.

As winter settles across the state, chilling and frosting the great outdoors, many ducks find their pond retreats freezing over. Ducks ousted from their homes by the ice flock to open waters not as susceptible to freezing.

The Illinois is a great place to watch and hunt for ducks. If you want to observe these waterfowl, head on down to a gravel bar at one of the OSRC's many public access areas, such as Todd, Peavine, or Round Hollow. Not only will you have the opportunity to view wonderful wildlife, you will also get to experience the river's serene winter beauty.

There are also several opportunities for duck hunters.

Many waterfowlers describe their first experience duck hunting as addictive. Those with the sickness have been anxiously awaiting the end of the split. Luckily the Illinois provides those with duck hunting fever with several places to scratch the built up waterfowl itch.

The Illinois River is subject to Zone 2 season dates, which end on January 29<sup>th</sup>. Other restrictions, such as daily limits, possession limits, and shooting hours, are the same throughout the state.

There are many tools at the river duck hunter's disposal. Boats enable waterfowlers to scout several miles of river. Keep in mind that until January 29<sup>th</sup>, hunters may operate boats of 25 horsepower or less.

For more information about duck hunting, pick up a 2011-2012 Oklahoma Waterfowl guide at the OSRC, or visit the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's website.



Above: a vibrant male wood duck. Below: male and female mallards. Photos courtesy of [www.birdsofok.net](http://www.birdsofok.net).



### Duck Hunters Checklist

If you are an Oklahoma resident wishing to hunt duck, you will need to purchase the following to keep your harvest legal!

- Hunting License
- Oklahoma HIP Permit
- Waterfowl License
- Federal Duck Stamp

**2011-2012 Hunting Dates:** The following are the remaining dates for the winter season.

**Deer (Archery):** to Jan 4<sup>th</sup>

**Pheasant:** to Jan 31<sup>st</sup>

**Quail:** to Feb 15<sup>th</sup>

**Rabbit:** to March 15<sup>th</sup>

**Squirrel:** to Jan 31<sup>st</sup>

**Waterfowl**

**Panhandle:** to Jan 4<sup>th</sup>

**Zone 1:** to Jan 22<sup>nd</sup>

**Zone 2:** to Jan 29<sup>th</sup>