



Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission

River Currents

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Ed's Tidbits

by Ed Fite, Administrator

Certainly, this summer has been anything other than what we normally expect here in Oklahoma. Usually, by the end of June, the rains are no more, with the river levels falling and much of the vegetation going dormant until fall. Yet, the summer of 2008 will be remembered in the years to come, for its mild temperatures and abundant rainfall to date. Here it is late July, and the vegetation resembles that of late May.

Since early spring, atypical rainfall has kept the Illinois River and its tributaries likened to a "yo-yo", with fluctuating water levels/flows. Nonetheless, it hasn't kept you from travelling over to enjoy our state's scenic rivers. I'm thinking the extraordinary rainfall will ensure optimal floating conditions throughout the remaining days of this summer which will make the 2008 recreational season one of the best.

For those of you having to be worried with seeking out the user fee wristband before launching out on your float trips, take note that this summer will be the last one where the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission charges floaters a user fee. Since 1984, floaters have been required to pay user fees to float the river and its tributaries. The change came about in the recently concluded Second Session of the 51st Oklahoma Legislature when Senator Jim Wilson, Tahlequah, successfully sought passage of Senate Bill 1381. Provisions of Senate Bill 1381 terminate the \$1.00 User Fee charged to floaters, effective on January 1, 2009.

In lieu of the user fee, Senate Bill 1381 replaced that lost revenue by increasing the licensing amount charged commercial flotation device operations from the present \$5.00

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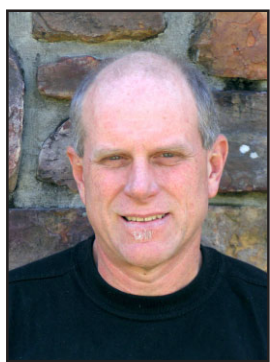
The Illinois River on a hot July afternoon, looking upstream from Flat Rock.



OSRC Board News

Election of new OSRC Board Officers

At the April 15th Regular Business meeting, the OSRC Board of Commissioners elected new officers. Gerald Hilsher of Tulsa was elected as the Chairman, Steve Randall of Fidler's Bend area was elected as the Vice-Chair and Jeanne Hayes of Tulsa was re-elected to the position of Secretary/Treasurer.



sition when absent, I hope also to provide leadership and vision to the OSRC in the current year.

An undeniable fact from our recent success with riparian conservation leases is the great value of private funds gifted to OSRC. These funds, when matched with government program funds, multiply greatly to benefit water quality through nutrient uptake in riparian zones, stream bank stabilization, and aesthetic enhancement.

Even funds directed to specific projects not qualified for government matching funds have had multiplied effect when the landowner has agreed to use the lease payment funds to conserve many other acres of Illinois River frontage property they own.

I will strive for continuation and broadening of this

Chairman, Gerald Hilsher

As the incoming Chair of the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission, I, like my colleagues who dedicate so much time and energy to matters concerning the Illinois River, want to make a difference. My thought on how to make a difference, is to see a continued educational effort addressing concerns related to how individual users, commercial outfitters, agricultural neighbors, businesses, and municipalities can help us preserve the natural resources that have been placed in our care. Perhaps, through education, public awareness, and public opinion, we can create a better plan for renewing this resource and preventing further harm.

It is clear to anyone that has a history on the Illinois River and Lake Tenkiller, that they have changed for the worst. No one who visited the River or Lake Tenkiller in the 1970's or early '80's can deny the impacts they see today on the water. I have to think that no one intended that water quality should degrade, it was just the effect of people, farmers and ranchers, businesses,

and municipalities doing what people and businesses do, without a thought of the potential affect on the water. It is the law of unintended consequences taking hold on our streams, rivers, and lakes that requires that we take a closer look at how our lives, our work, our environmental footprint affects those around us.

It is my goal that our Commission will renew its effort to make the Illinois River Watershed a priority for all of those who live, work, or recreate in the area; that we can promote education, environmental awareness, and sustainable agricultural practices to prevent further damage; and that we can help those who fail to recognize what the

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Vice-Chairman, Steve Randall

I am pleased and honored to serve the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission as Vice-Chairman for 2008.

While my position primarily serves to compliment and "fill in" for the Chairman's position

successful effort.

Recent extreme high water has exposed the need for greater emphasis on stream bank stabilization projects and planning. I am certain new and continued private funding would be well-used to match other existing programs to serve the purpose of reducing sediment loading through well-planned stream bank stabilization projects.

The Commercial Float Operators permitting process remains unwieldy even with passage of new legislation and I hope to bring some new ideas to the table for discussion by all concerned, including a standardized occupational licensing system.

I still remain concerned that other valuable outstanding streams and rivers in the state are not included within the jurisdiction of OSRC. I will seek to engage stakeholders of those watersheds about their issues and concerns, creating a forum for their voices.

The Scenic Rivers and streams of Oklahoma deserve my best efforts in my capacity as OSRC Commissioner representing Delaware County and all citizens of Oklahoma through my office Vice-Chairman.

OSRC Agency News

New permanent employee



by Mike Moore,
Ranger Supervisor

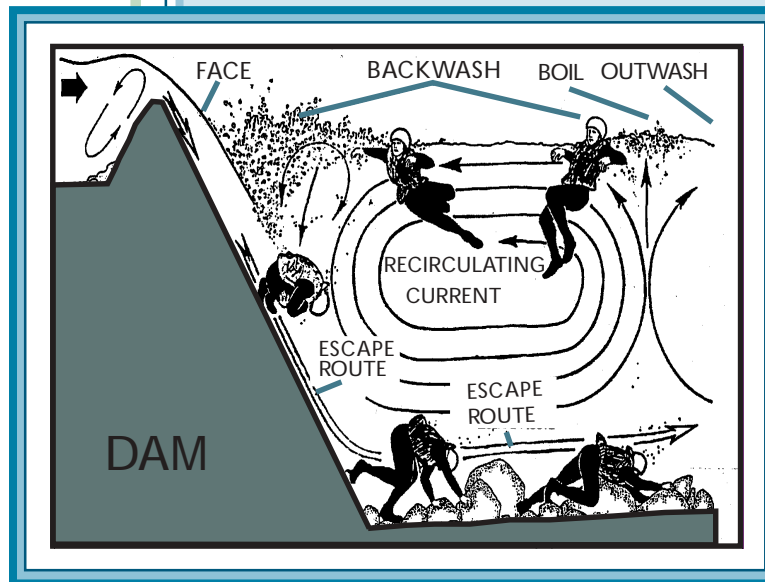
Ranger Stephanie Stephens was hired as a full-time OSRC Ranger on March 16, 2008. Before this, Ranger Stephens was employed as a full-time Deputy Sheriff with

the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) and as a part-time Ranger for the OSRC. She has an impressive background in Law Enforcement and Emergency Medical Services. Ranger Stephens earned her full-time CLEET (Counsel on Law Enforcement Education and Training) certification on February 29, 2008, while working for the CCSO. Her past experience includes working as a Dispatcher and EMT for Tahlequah EMS, Law Enforcement Dispatcher, Reserve and full-time Deputy Sheriff, and Seasonal and full-time Ranger for the OSRC. She also holds several certifications such as: Swift Water Rescue Technician, Use of Force, Intoxilyzer Operator, NARK II Progressive System of Drug Identification, and First Aid and CPR. Exceptionally notable is her ability to work hand-in-hand with various civilian and law enforcement personnel employed with this agency. Rangers Stephens was chosen from a list of qualified and capable applicants because of her professionalism and can-do attitude which she had demonstrated many times while working as a Seasonal Ranger. Since accepting the full-time position, she has established herself as one of the most dedicated and proficient officers available. Whatever task Ranger Stephens is assigned, she tackles with energetic enthusiasm to ensure that it is accomplished in the most expeditious, correct and safe manner possible. Ranger Stephens is and will continue to be an asset to this agency and the community in which she serves.

Summer Safety

Every summer hundreds of thousands of visitors flock to the Illinois River area to enjoy the recreational opportunities. Unfortunately, with this dramatic influx of people comes an increase in water-related accidents. This summer has been even more dangerous than the average summer season because of the excessive rainfall and flooding early in the season. Four drownings have occurred on the Illinois River this summer, which is well above average. The facts below explain some of the major dangers associated with recreation in natural bodies of water, as well as with the flooding of these waters. Being aware of these risks can help ensure that you remain safe on and around the water.

- Dams have been a tremendous danger this year, causing one drowning and two near-drownings. The current of water flowing over a dam can easily wash a person over it, and trap them in the current illustrated in the diagram below.
- 1 foot of water moving 3 mi/hr can displace 1,500 lbs., so just 2 feet of water can float most vehicles. If that speed is doubled to 6 mi/hr, 1 foot of moving water can float a 3,000 lb object.
- Once inch or more of water will cause a tire's tread to lose the connection with the road surface, causing a car to hydroplane.



Dangerous dams:

Although jumping from dams can seem like fun, it is extremely dangerous. The diagram to the left shows how the current of water flows over a dam, and how to escape if caught in it.

- Water moving 3 mi/hr will exert 17 lbs of pressure on the knees. If the speed doubles to 6 mi/hr, the pressure is quadrupled to 64 lbs. This is easily enough power to knock a person off their feet.
- Wearing life jackets saves lives. The common factor among all the drownings this year was that none of the victims were wearing life jackets.

Events in the Basin

When it Rains, it Pours: Flooding on the Illinois

by Ed Fite, CFM (Certified Floodplain Manager), Administrator, OSRC

While the rains this spring and summer have been very welcomed by most of us, they have also had far-reaching ramifications - specifically, the flooding episode of mid-March 2008, where the Illinois River was recorded at its sixth-highest recorded flood level (cresting at Tahlequah at 22.23 feet).

Since January 1, 2008, the Illinois River Basin has received more than 42 inches of rainfall. That amounts to almost 16 inches more than what is considered normal, and it appears we'll receive even more this month, pushing overall totals even higher. And it is especially important to note these recent rains follow a consecutive four-year drought period (2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007) where Illinois River Basin rainfall/water flows were recorded as barely equaling or being below the average mean since record-keeping began some 75 +/- years ago.

Many of you have asked since the flooding episode: *Why has all the streambank erosion and gravel bar damage occurred?* In particular, you observe that past years' flood events have not had the same impact. Well, to answer the question, it comes down to a draw between "Us" and "Mother Nature".

During the last 25 years, the Illinois River Basin

has undergone major changes to accommodate land use and development. Many of the streams and tributaries have been straightened, diverted and widened, adversely impacting stream morphology along with other impacts that have greatly damaged its natural functioning riparian characteristics.

While these changes in land use have been well-intended, we're now learning that once a functioning riparian area has been impacted by important vegetation being removed or stream reaches being straightened, adverse results occur. To add insult to injury, there are many individuals who have now developed on lands located within the floodplain area prone to flooding

and/or erosion.

We have changed the landscape from what was historically known as a well-vegetated river basin, to one where approximately 60% of the upland vegetation has now been removed to accommodate many types of impervious surfaces. Those new streets, homes, businesses, airports, newly-developed short-growth grass pastureland areas and other development has led to increased stormwater runoff. Before the 60% upland vegetation conversion, those plants and trees contained therein had the ability to store, recharge groundwater, and slowly release most major rainfall events back to the environment.



The Illinois River from Sparrowhawk Mtn., during the March flood, extending well beyond its banks into the fields.

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A bus partially submerged at Eagle Bluff Resort



Peavine Public Access Area under water



War Eagle cabins



Hanging Rock Camp

Did you know that one acre of land that is well-vegetated has the ability to capture, store, recharge groundwater, and slowly release up to 300,000 gallons of rainfall annually? Yet, with the recent demographic growth and enormous land use changes within the Illinois River Basin, most of the rainfall now hits an impervious surface and quickly runs off into a stream or tributary as stormwater.

Unchecked stormwater runoff carries sediment, nutrients, grease, oil and other pollutants to our streams. The energy of stormwater runoff is most often very devastating to our streams and rivers.

Most folks don't realize that water doesn't like to move more than 3-6 miles per hour. When water flows at greater speeds, it tends to build up friction from ambient conditions which influences it to meander to abate its energy. This is why most streams and rivers are renowned for their meanders, curves, runs, riffles and pools. Simply, water in a stream will not (naturally) flow in a straight line for more than 5 to 8 stream widths long (if a stream is 100 feet wide, it tends not to flow in a straight line for more than 500-800 feet before making a curve(s), run, riffle or pool).

Also, another factor influencing erosion this spring was the fact that the soils in streambank areas were fully saturated and did not have the ability to soak up additional moisture to mitigate some of the river's energy during the flooding episode. Thus, as the flood events came and went, so did the streambank area and gravel bars.

Simply, the perfect storm occurred within the Illinois River Basin this spring. The enormous amount of impervious surfaces, combined with lack of vegetation and atypical rainfall amounts, made the flood episode of Spring 2008 appear to be much more severe than that of a very similar event in October 1986 (the last time the river flooded to a crest of 22.7 feet at Tahlequah, with 99,000 cubic feet/second flow).

In conclusion, we must ensure that our actions within the Illinois River Basin are not in keeping with the past 25 years. If so, the flood episodes will only become more intense and more damaging.

The National Flood Insurance Program

by Gavin Brady, CFM, Oklahoma Water Resources Board
NFIP State Coordinator

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) was created by HUD in 1968 after it became too costly for the private sector to provide flood insurance. By 1972, only 100,000 flood insurance policies were written when Hurricane Agnes hit the East coast. The Federal Government had to cover most of the cost since so few had flood insurance. The Feds realized the NFIP needed a boost and, through the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973, mandated that any federally-backed mortgage would be required to carry flood insurance. Policies rose from 100,000 in 1972 to over 2,000,000 policies in 1979...the year FEMA took the program over.

I've heard that the March flooding along the Illinois caused damage to several structures, roads and many sandbars within the watershed. Please remember that citizens who live within communities participating in the NFIP can purchase flood insurance. Those currently participating in

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Spotlights in the River Basin

Gravel bar restoration at Peavine

When March's flood finally receded from the banks (and fields) of the Illinois, it took more than the 20 extra feet of water with it. The flood also relocated many tons of gravel. The OSRC maintains 13 different Public Access Areas along the Illinois River and its tributaries, all of which have provided a terrific place for visitors to spend time fishing, swimming and enjoying the river. The force of this flood, however, damaged the gravel bars at 8 of those 13 areas. Stunkard

ing higher floods than that in March. Peavine was not only a great place for visitors to recreate, it was also one of the key launch areas for several of the major canoe operators. When faced with the prospect of having no place to set their guests out on float trips, several of the canoe operators met with the OSRC to discuss possible options. The solution that was reached was to rebuild the gravel bar in a joint OSRC/canoe operator effort.

Archie Peyton's canoe operation - Peyton's Place -



Entry to Peavine gravel bar, post-flood and after the rebuilding



Looking up-river from Peavine, post-flood and after the rebuilding



and Peavine Public Access Areas were the most damaged, having both of their gravel bars completely washed away. These were two of the OSRC's largest gravel bars with approximately 6,000 tons of gravel stretching 450 plus feet. Round Hollow Public Access Area's gravel bar fared better and actually had a net gain of gravel after its bar was partially washed away and then rebuilt as more gravel washed down to it.

Prior to March's flood, the gravel bar at Peavine had been enjoyed by visitors to the river for at least 80 years, surviv-

ing higher floods than that in March. Peavine was not only a great place for visitors to recreate, it was also one of the key launch areas for several of the major canoe operators. When faced with the prospect of having no place to set their guests out on float trips, several of the canoe operators met with the OSRC to discuss possible options. The solution that was reached was to rebuild the gravel bar in a joint OSRC/canoe operator effort. Archie Peyton's canoe operation - Peyton's Place - was another place that gained gravel in the flood, and he generously donated nearly 2,000 tons of gravel, or 280 dump truck loads, to the effort. Other canoe operations like Diamondhead Resort, Eagle Bluff Resort, and War Eagle Resort, cooperated by contributing diesel for the transport of the gravel. Through this collective effort and the hard work of the OSRC's maintenance team, Peavine's gravel bar was restored to nearly the size it was prior to the flood and was ready for another busy summer season.

Notes from the Basin



Poultry Industry Efforts

by Jackie Cunningham, Director of Community Relations,
Poultry Community Council

Editor's note:

In the OSRC's last issue of "River Currents", we published an article by Oklahoma's Attorney General that spoke about the pending lawsuit against the poultry industry by the State of Oklahoma. The poultry industry subsequently approached the OSRC for the opportunity to share with our readers some of the efforts they've made to improve water quality. Below is a response written by Jackie Cunningham, a spokesperson of the Poultry industry's representative organization - the Poultry Community Council.

Wanting clean water for our state's rivers is not too much to ask. In light of recent reports, everyone should be focused on improving water quality across Oklahoma.

The poultry industry certainly is. We have continuously informed the public of our state laws, science-based facts and real-life practices.

The efforts to stop the long standing and heavily-regulated practice of using poultry litter instead of chemicals as a fertilizer and soil conditioner will ultimately benefit no one. And the cost of halting the use of litter will sacrifice the livelihoods of a number of hard-working Oklahoma farmers and ranchers.

In Oklahoma, there are no laws limiting the use of commercial chemical fertilizers, which contain many of the same nutrients as poultry litter. Farmers who choose to use the less expensive and comparably beneficial poultry litter must adhere to strict regulations by state law. These laws clearly say that by following their state-approved nutrient management plans, the users of poultry litter benefit the land while controlling the risk of harm to the state's waters.

Progress is being made. Last year, the \$20.6 million Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program was developed. This agreement between the State of Oklahoma and the U.S. Department of Agriculture was designed to create vegetative "buffer" zones along scenic rivers, thus helping nutrients stay in the soil and out of the water.

The poultry industry has continued efforts to improve

water quality. Several poultry companies in our region pledged more than \$1 million to the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission. That money was used to attract federal funding for the implementation of these "buffer" zones along our rivers, which helps protect the water from runoff and erosion.



Another program underway in our region is coordinated by BMPs, Inc., a nonprofit started by the poultry industry to coordinate the buying, selling and transportation of poultry litter. This program connects owners of nutrient-poor farms in areas outside the Illinois River Watershed with poultry farmers who have poultry litter to sell. The demand for litter is so great that BMPs has difficulty with supply.

These programs use a combination of ingenuity and common sense to arrive at an old-fashioned concept for protecting our environment - land conservation practices. We have mentioned just a few of the innovative things that researchers, farmers and businesses are doing to resolve this issue.

We support ideas with common sense and consideration - for both the water quality and the people who need poultry litter for successful farming and ranching in Oklahoma.

Our belief that agriculture and environmentalism can and should peacefully co-exist has been demonstrated by our support for nutrient management laws and conservation programs. We all want cleaner water, but not at the expense of driving production agriculture out of Oklahoma. Let's just make sure the decisions we make are the right ones.

on the **W**ild Side....

Northern River Otters

by Julianne Hoagland, Wildlife Biologist, OK Dept. of Transportation

The Northern River Otter is found throughout North America in a wide variety of aquatic habitats. Ideal habitat includes year-round open water, forested riparian areas, and a plentiful food supply. Otters need clear water to be able to see their prey while hunting. Beaver activity is beneficial for otters since beavers increase habitats for otters and their prey species. Beaver dams also create deep pools and slow currents so that sediment can settle out of the water. River otters, however, are sensitive to pollution, and they will often disappear from polluted areas.

Individual otters can have large territories. A single otter can range over fifty miles in

Oklahoma, thereby increasing river otter habitat. Today, river otters are found throughout much of eastern Oklahoma.

The river otter is well-adapted to aquatic life. It has a streamlined, muscular body with short, powerful legs, webbed toes and a long, muscular tail. Their fur is dense and traps air bubbles, which insulates the otter from the cold water. River otter nostrils close underwater which, combined with their protected fur, allows them to spend long periods of time underwater. Otters are powerful swimmers, but can also travel quickly on land. A river otter can remain submerged for several min-



Photo courtesy of Jenny Kubeck.

▲ (c) 2000 Jenny Kubeck



Photo courtesy of Ann Houser - www.blurosegallery.com ▲

one season, and a male may travel up to ten miles in one day. As a result, they are rarely abundant at a given location. Their densities vary depending upon the quality of the habitat, abundance of food, and the time of year. In Oklahoma, records from the early 19th century show otters were present in the large river systems statewide. By the 20th century, river otter populations had been reduced by unregulated harvest, agriculture and deforestation practices which increased sedimentation in streams and lakes, and secondary poisoning of their food supply from pesticides. The development of reservoirs and flood control impoundments increased the amount of permanent surface acres of water and shoreline within

utes and can dive to a depth of 55 feet, swimming as far as 1/4 mile underwater. On land, they will often propel themselves in a rapid belly slide on snow or ice or down river banks into the water.

River otters are carnivores, eating fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, crustaceans, mollusks, and other invertebrates. Crayfish are a particular favorite during the summertime. In the winter the bulk of their diet is fish. A pair of river otters may work together to drive a school of fish into an inlet, where they can be easily caught. Some fishermen believe that otters will deplete the numbers of game fish avail-

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Chairman, cont'd from pg. 2

stamp of their footprint does to this river that we love. I am reminded of a quote from J.R.R. Tolkien's 'Lord of the Rings':

"It must often be so when things are in danger, someone has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them."

Many of us will have to give up outdated ways of doing things and become more aware of how our actions impact our environment. I would like to see our Commission at the forefront of this educational endeavor.

NFIP, cont'd from pg. 5

Cherokee County are Tahlequah, Hulbert and unincorporated Cherokee County. In Adair County are Stilwell, Watts, Westville and unincorporated Adair County. Participation in the NFIP is strictly voluntary and not all communities participate. Those that choose to are required to permit any development in the Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA) or areas that are shown to be located in zone A of a Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM). The main goal of the NFIP is to provide low-cost flood insurance while helping to protect lives and property from flooding. To find the designated Floodplain Administrator in your community go to www.owrb.ok.gov and look for floodplain management. To learn more about flood insurance go to www.floodsmart.gov.

New chapter of OK Sustainability Network coming to Tahlequah

The mission statement of the OK Sustainability Network is: "to connect and educate the people of Oklahoma concerning the many aspects of sustainability. OSN is a catalyst and a resource for the improvement of Oklahoma's economy, ecology and equity." OSN accomplishes this goal through a wide variety of projects ranging from recycling to buying local campaigns. To join the new Tahlequah chapter of OSN, contact Ben Berry at (918) 931-2219 or email him at banjo0421@yahoo.com.

Otters, cont'd from pg. 8

able to them. But, otters mainly hunt slow-moving rough fish (fish species that anglers are not interested in catching).

Otters are very playful. A lone river otter will often amuse itself by rolling about, sliding, diving, or "body surfing" along on a rapid current. In family groups, otters will chase, slide, swim, jump, and wrestle together. They can be highly curious animals and have been known to watch trout anglers from the opposite bank. They generally hunt at night or at dawn and dusk, but may hunt during the day where they are not disturbed by human activity.

While sociable most of the year, during the breeding season males may fight. Reproduction in this species is complicated. River otters exhibit what is called delayed implantation. This is where pregnancy is delayed for several months after mating. As a result, otter pups are born nearly a year later. River otters construct dens in the burrows of other animals, or in natural hollows, such as under a log or in river banks. They often use beaver or muskrat dens, and will sometimes kill these other species to take over their lodges. The pups are weaned at four months, and the young disperse in the fall or winter before the arrival of the next litter.

The best way to find out if otters are present in an area is to find suitable otter habitat and look for the signs they leave behind, such as scats, tracks, slides, and dens. Since otters live in and around the water, they often leave their tracks in the muddy shores of a water body. This is another good way to tell if otters inhabit an area. Otter tracks are easy to identify since they have five toes on each foot and their feet are webbed.

Ed's Tidbits, cont'd from pg. 1

annual fee per license to \$35.00. Also contained in the legislation is language directing the Oklahoma Tax Commission to discontinue their audits of commercial flotation device operations, formerly required at least once every three years.

Another milestone occurred July 1st when new OSRC Rules and Regulations became fully effective. The OSRC had undertaken that rulemaking effort back in fall of 2007. The goal was to make OSRC Rules and Regulations clear and concise, and to conform to the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Act, the Oklahoma Administrative Procedures Act and other applicable Oklahoma Law.

As a result of the rulemaking, OSRC eliminated redundancy and confusion, streamlined procedures, and improved our efficiency in order to better preserve the scenic rivers in their natural state. In short, the OSRC Rules and Regulations were reduced by almost 50%.

In another matter of great importance, the OSRC and other area emergency agencies have responded to a number of lifesaving incidents this summer. Several of those incidents resulted in the loss of life by drowning. An observed common denominator in all of the incidents that we responded to was that none of the victims were wearing a life jacket.

Please let me emphasize that I always wear a life jacket every time that I float, swim or boat in the Illinois River, other streams and lakes.

Whether the river is running at normal levels or is much higher, it's important to recognize that the river is made up of water running down gradient. When water moves down gradient, it is powerful, relentless and predictable.

Always boat and swim smart from the start by wearing a life jacket, and never boat or swim alone. Always use the buddy system. Wishing you a safe and fun summer.

To learn more about Senate Bill 1381, visit the Oklahoma Government website, www.gov.ok.gov, click on senate bills/legislation, and go to SB1381. For more information on OSRC Rules and Regulations or to obtain river information (maps, services provided, floating conditions, etc.), go to the OSRC website homepage at www.oklahomascenicrivers.net.