



Audubon ARKANSAS

September 6, 2018

Water Quality Planning Branch
Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality
Office of Water Quality
5301 Northshore Drive
North Little Rock, AR 72118

4500 Springer Blvd.
Little Rock, AR 72206
Tel: 501-244-2229
Fax: 501-244-2231
ar.audubon.org

Dear ADEQ,

Audubon Arkansas is the lead of the Friends of Fourche Creek, a coalition of organizations and individuals working to restore and revitalize Little Rock's main waterway. We have been working to address the threats facing Fourche Creek for the past 17 years. As an organization with a vested interest in Fourche Creek's water quality we have concerns about the status of Fourche Creek on the Final/Draft 2018 303(d) list of impaired waterbodies in Arkansas.

Fourche Creek is once again listed as impaired but is considered to be a Category 5 low priority. This year only Reach 24 is listed as impaired. This reach reflects the water quality of the upper Fourche Creek watershed to the confluence of Rock Creek and Fourche Creek. For the first time since the 2008 303(d) list, Reach 22, which includes the lower part of the Fourche Creek watershed, was not listed as impaired. We believe that the Fourche Creek water quality data should be reexamined and Fourche Creek potentially assigned a higher priority. The reasons for this request are the following:

1. Until the 2016 303(d) list, Reach 22, from the confluence of Rock Creek and Fourche Creek to the Arkansas River, has been listed as impaired for not meeting the designated use for aquatic life/fisheries. In the 2016 303(d) list, no designated uses were listed as impaired and the 2018 303(d) list Reach 22 was not listed as impaired. Unless there are data to support delisting, Reach 22 should be listed as impaired.
2. In the 2008 303(d) list, Reach 24 and 22 were listed as impaired because the designated uses of primary contact and aquatic life were not met. In addition, the priority ranking for aquatic life in Reach 22 was high (Category 5a). It is our understanding that a Category 5a in 2008 warranted a TMDL. A TMDL should be set and aquatic life should still be listed as not supported.
3. The source of contaminants has been identified as unknown and/or surface erosion. Urban runoff should be listed as a source of contaminants. Much of the Fourche Creek watershed is in the City of Little Rock and the amount of trash in the Creek is astonishing. From 2014 to 2017, Audubon Arkansas has hosted two or more Fourche Creek cleanups per year. Approximately 34 tons of trash have been removed by volunteers. In addition, hundreds of tires have been removed. Many more tons of trash and tires have been removed by the Arkansas Canoe Club and Keep Little Rock Beautiful.
4. Primary and secondary contact uses should be listed as not being supported because of pathogenic indicator bacteria. Fecal contamination is another source of pollution in the creek because sewer lines pass through the area to wastewater treatment plants. During major flood events the sewer main lids pop and there is raw sewage released directly into the creek. The Arkansas Canoe Club has photos to prove this, and Little Rock Wastewater Authority acknowledges this is an issue it is working to prevent.

Sewer line overflows are a concern for secondary contact (kayak and canoeing) recreation. In the 2008 303(d) list, primary contact recreations was designated as impair because of pathogenic indicator bacteria. Data collected by the Friends of Fourche Creek in 2016 show that *E. coli* counts continue to spike after storm events.

Because of the differences in the various assessments from 2008 to 2018 Audubon recommends that Fourche Creek's low priority be reexamined.

Fourche Creek is a high priority to Audubon, the Friends of Fourche Creek, and residents and visitors of Little Rock as an important natural and recreational resource. The City of Little Rock and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission built a boat ramp at Benny Craig Park. The section of the creek that runs through Fourche Bottoms has been designated an Arkansas Urban Water Trail by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. Audubon cares about the water quality of Fourche Creek, and wants to see it improved, but first ADEQ needs to conduct an accurate assessment for the 2018 303(d) list. Fourche Creek is a high priority for Audubon and should be for ADEQ and ANRC as well so state resources can be directed to help us monitor clean up this important urban waterway. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan M. Scheiman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and "M".

Dan Scheiman, Ph.D.

Bird Conservation Director, Audubon Arkansas

Chair, Friends of Fourche Creek