

Toy, Ashley

From: Berlin, Lenka
Sent: Wednesday, June 24, 2015 10:35 AM
To: MacKnight, Evelyn; Richardson, William; Toy, Ashley
Cc: Berlin, Lenka
Subject: FW: TMDL for the Wissahickon Creek Watershed

From: [REDACTED] [mailto:[REDACTED]]
Sent: Wednesday, June 24, 2015 9:29 AM
To: Berlin, Lenka
Subject: TMDL for the Wissahickon Creek Watershed

Comments submitted to EPA

RE: Proposed Total Phosphorus **TMDL for the Wissahickon Creek Watershed**

From [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Ambler, PA 19002; [REDACTED]

Date June 24, 2015

Ms. Lenka Berlin, US EPA REGION III, 3WP30, 1650 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103 Berlin.lenka@epa.gov

First, I applaud the EPA for this careful stance of setting standards with the expectation of RESTORING an urbanized impaired water-way. I truly, fully support every effort to restore and protect our surface and source waters.

Second, I have lived in the Wissahickon Valley Watershed since 1998, and have been an activist for the environment through my role as President of the (former) Alliance for a Sustainable Future, and former Chair of the Environmental Advisory Council for Ambler Borough. I sponsored Natural Step seminars, Earth Charter Summits, and conducted a Voluntary Minimal Lawn Chemicals Campaign for 2 years with Growing Greener grants. I have led award-winning community tree-planting events, a 100 Rain Gardens of Ambler campaign, as well as a forested restoration of a riparian buffer along Rose Valley Creek, a tributary to the Wissahickon. I also served as a member of the BoRit CAG committee. I have studied, listened, attended events, written about and rallied public participation in caring for this watershed's water and land resources as my "act locally" call to work on intergenerational justice for "Family Earth".

Third, my comments are based on what I gleaned from the recent public hearing on June 10, 2015. The EPA presenter, Evelyn MacKnight, was superb. These comments are off the top of my head, not my most perfect submission, but still what I can submit with the time that I can devote to this issue.

1. - A goal of "fishable and swimmable" is laudable. There is no time like the present to start fixing any situation or launching a bold intention. On the other hand: There are many instances where conditions cannot be returned to their original state. To name a few: We cannot turn this country back to the native Americans who lived here

before our European colonization. We cannot rid our lawns of lesser celandine, nor completely remove Japanese Knotweed from all our streams and highways. As a culture or as a regulatory agency, are we going to stop ALL future impervious surfacing until we can figure out the systems to hold onto the rain water so that it recharges the aquifers, rather than scouring, eroding, carrying sediment and pollutants, and generating flooding? Bottom line: Is this TMDL the BEST opportunity facing us to make sure the future generations in this watershed have the basic need of fresh water? If it is, then I support it.

I believe the carrying capacity of an area is “Water In and Water Out” or the ability to receive, and use the water that comes to the watershed from the sky, and the ability of the source waters to supply the full health needs of its residents, both human and nonhuman. As soon as either side of the “Water In-Water Out” formula cannot serve the residents, then the carrying capacity of the land has been reached and no new development, and no population growth should be allowed until better “water in” technologies can support more “water out.”

2. - I believe that DRBC has allowed an unsustainable amount of water to be withdrawn from the ground in the Wissahickon Valley Watershed for residential, recreational, and commercial use. Far too much water is both wasted (using more than needed and not recycled) and allowed to be return polluted. I understand that EPA has no regulatory function with regards to ground water withdrawal. Still, what makes the standards in the Wissahickon so virtually unattainable is due to the lack of ground water to replenish the surface waters that run in the summer time. Achieving the desired environmental goals must include working both sides of “Water out” (DRBC) and “water in” – including developing systems to treat and manage rain water as a potable resource. I think that any water withdrawn for commercial enterprises should be highly taxed and not be a free resource which steals from the water wealth of a region in order to make profits that do not benefit the inhabitants of that region equally. I realize that some of these water withdrawals may have been set up before the DRBC was formulated in 1961 and to some extent may have been grandfathered in.
3. - I am further disappointed to note a government reluctance to ban, denounce, discredit, or use its regulatory power to reduce the negative impacts that are directly attributable to commercial interests. I perceive these commercial interests as a “point source” where regulation could make the MOST difference to the health of the environment, instead of this back-end chasing municipalities and property owners for problems that are not as directly in their control. It is detestable that commercial interests – translated as economic well-being – are allowed to make the world less healthy and safe to live in. I am referring specifically here to companies that market or apply as services, fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides, and also the companies that are breeding GMO pesticide resistant plants. Aggressive and misleading marketing that builds consumer desire for a product is our capitalistic model. The marketing fails to include or mention the costs to nature in its pricing or its advertising, even though these are counter to best environmental practices, and ought to be the purview of the EPA.

Back to the TMDLs:

4. - I think EPA has invented a strategy for getting municipalities to work together, to pool their legal, engineering and technical resources to address the standards on a watershed wide basis. This is a very good thing. I think something better will be the evolving outcome than if this standard were not hanging over their heads. I hope this proves to be an innovating strategy.
5. - I do not challenge the scientific lines of evidence that pointed to the .04 target as “protective and defensible”. An injustice is understandably felt today by all parties who are expected to reach a target for which there is no evidence that it is possible – sort of like a 3-minute mile. The strict standard seems necessary to

rectify a situation that developed due to earlier generations and governments ignoring, being distracted, or allowing the problem to become so bad - before this moment now of drawing a line in the sand. It is not our fault, but we must be the ones to make it right before it is untenable for the future ones.

6. - Has as much scientific effort been directed at identifying some natural means of harvesting/removing the algae when it accumulates?
7. - I expect EPA will consider all reasonable approaches and appeals for phased accomplishment toward the goal; even to the point of accepting a different standard of discharge after it has been proven to be the “no pass point”, when incremental moves toward the goal engender exponential costs. I appreciate that there is a process to seek variances or extensions.
8. - The Process for enforcing this set standard is one of the most vague aspects of this TMDL. Perhaps, EPA is hoping that municipalities and WWTPs will rally to an extent that enforcement can be delayed, or softened. If the process is vague, it may allow municipalities to focus on how to meet the standards instead of rallying troops to fight the enforcement. I hope there are a great variety of creative “alternative plans” submitted by municipalities and WWTPs.
9. - Could there be a Waste Water authority administered by Montgomery County, and could it receive state funding, or federal funding to support early implementers in order to distribute the costs more fairly? A Solid Waste Disposal authority was established to support the feasible operation of a new Trash to Steam plant over a decade ago. A similar authority to support and oversee wastewater treatment, or a Watershed Authority to deal more locally with water up (from the ground) and water down (discharged and stormwater issues.)
10. Lastly, meeting this standard will assuredly impose undesirably high costs on the people who live here through taxes. That is not a reason to not do it. People and municipalities will squawk. It appears to be a principle of human culture, that only when things cost a lot do humans tend to treat them as a precious commodity, to respect and protect them, to conserve and be mindful in how they are utilized. In general, this area of the state of Pennsylvania has a high enough household income median that we should be proud to invest in being a state of the art location that has restored a natural resource to its fullest capacity. It would make this vicinity even more desirable as a place to live. I would hope that this does not begin to act as a factor in further separation between the wealthy and the poor, and result in an elite community for those who can afford higher taxes pushing out poor who now live here. There needs to be some tax relief for people below a certain poverty standard.



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