pennsylvania environmental council

Proposed Total Phosphorus TMDL for the Wissahickon Creek Watershed
Pennsylvania Environmental Council Statement

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RE: WISSAHICKON CREEK TMDL

The Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) offers the following comments on the Proposed Total Phosphorus (TP) TMDL for the Wissahickon Creek Watershed published by The US Environmental Protection Agency, Region III on May 20, 2015.

The Wissahickon Creek is one of the southeastern Pennsylvania's most recognizable and historic natural systems stretching from its origins in suburban Montgomery County and traveling over 24 miles through parts of 16 municipalities and northwestern Philadelphia to the Schuylkill River. Its tributaries and main stem have been impacted by high levels of development that has altered its hydrology and subsequently compromised the creek's ability to sustain and support aquatic life. Multiple Wissahickon stream segments have been identified as impaired due to nutrients and other nutrient related conditions. The draft Total Phosphorus TMDL or total maximum daily load for the Wissahickon Creek establishes waste load allocations and load allocations to reduce total phosphorus (TP) from both point and nonpoint sources to restore the aquatic life use impairment caused by excessive nutrient concentrations in the Wissahickon Creek Watershed.

PEC supports EPA's scientific–based approach to determine a TP endpoint for achieving the goal of an un-impaired creek. We recognize that the TP endpoint establishes a quantified goal to be attained by any pollutant load reduction strategy to be determined by watershed stakeholders.

However, we also agree with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) assessment that the pollution controls that would be required to meet this TP endpoint may require waste water treatment facilities to install expensive capital improvements and that the limits could be so stringent as to be unachievable, even with state-of-the-art waste water treatment technology. Additionally, we agree that the pollutants contributing to the Wissahickon impairment, nutrients and sediment, are interrelated in complex ways and would be best addressed by integrated strategies.

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PEC believes that the factors contributing to the Wissahickon Creek's impairments and the currently promulgated sediment and nutrient TMDLs suggest an opportunity to collaboratively explore and develop alternative strategies that can be supported and funded collectively to reach the common goal of an un-impaired stream system. This approach is supported by EPA's ***Long-Term Vision for Assessment, Restoration, and Protection under the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) Program*** **(December 2013), which** allows alternatives in addition to TMDLs, ..."*that incorporate adaptive management and are tailored to specific circumstances where such approaches are better suited to implement priority watershed or water actions that achieve the water quality goals of each state, including identifying and reducing non-point source pollution.*"

PEC supports the use of an alternative TMDL process which allows the Wissahickon creek permittees to come together as a community to design a shared, water quality improvement program. This program can be developed to incorporate a suite of improvements that address multiple impairments which come from various sources including both treated WWTP discharges, MS4 discharges and uncontrolled stormwater running off surfaces not served by MS4 systems. We strongly believe that this collaborative approach can and will advance the use of creative and equitable strategies for implementing, funding, monitoring and maintaining effective and long-lasting pollution control.

Sincerely,

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