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NEWS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release: March 14, 2003**

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## **State Hearings Offer Opportunity to Public to Protect High Quality Waters in Tennessee**

*Highly Valued Rivers in West Tennessee - including the Hatchie, Loosehatchie, and Wolf Rivers – will Benefit from Proposed Rules*

On March 17 and 18, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation will hold public hearings in Jackson and Memphis respectively to reevaluate and update the state's clean water standards. Also, for the first time, new policies regarding the protection of the state's higher quality waters will also be considered. Every three years, the State of Tennessee holds public hearings to review and update its water quality standards. These standards establish the basic levels of protection required for Tennessee's rivers, lakes, and streams. They determine which waters must be cleaned up, how much they must be cleaned up, and which higher quality waters need protection.

"West Tennessee is constantly bombarded by proposals for new development. Every time the state permits new water pollution, there is an overall decline in water quality," said Danielle Droitsch, Executive Director of TCWN. "These state rules are absolutely imperative to protecting the priceless beauty our clean streams have to offer," she said.

Significantly, the state's proposal includes new requirements for the protection of higher quality waters. These regulations, known as "antidegradation" policies, provide a framework for keeping the state's clean waters clean. Specifically, the proposed antidegradation policies will require that permits to degrade water be scrutinized more than in the past for their economic and social necessity. According to the state's proposal, new or expanded water pollution permits allowing degradation of higher quality waters will only be permitted in limited circumstances. The new policies also require water pollution permit applicants to evaluate "non-discharge" alternatives to polluting such as land-application, recycling of wastewater, and in the case of development, avoiding impacts to streams. Antidegradation is one of the major requirements of the Clean Water Act and is a part of the state's water quality standards. However, historically, it has not been adequately described or implemented through Tennessee's regulations and policies.

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“Higher quality waters, like Harris Creek, are vital to the communities of West Tennessee. Unfortunately, many of our water resources are threatened by increasing development and sprawl, said Evelyn Keele, Director of Friends of Harris Creek. “It is imperative that these regulations adequately protect our waters from any further degradation,” she said.

One of the primary issues that will face the state following the adoption of the new antidegradation rules is how to define “higher quality” waters. The Tennessee Clean Water Network contends that the rules should apply to all waters that are currently NOT on the impaired waters list. According to Tennessee’s 2002 305(b) Water Quality Report, 69.7 percent – or two-thirds – of our state’s waters meet all water quality standards.

“These new standards, along with continuing monitoring, inspections, and appropriate timely enforcement actions, should help bring that number closer to 100 percent. It is results, not process, that makes for improvement,” said James H. Baker, Tennessee Clean Water Network Board Member who lives in Memphis.

Other significant issues that will be considered by the state’s proposal include:

- Nutrient Pollution in Lakes and Rivers
- The Most Significant Source of Pollution in Tennessee: Siltation
- Bacteria levels in streams and lakes

Water quality criteria are established to describe the chemical, physical, and biological conditions necessary to achieve and protect each designated use. These criteria set limits for pollutants, such as toxic substances and coliform, and set appropriate levels for dissolved oxygen, temperature, pH, turbidity, and other properties critical to protecting human and aquatic life. Water quality criteria are directly linked to the permitting of activities that may impair a water, such as industrial discharges, construction, and wastewater treatment. Setting appropriate water quality criteria is necessary to protect waters from excess sediment, nutrients, bacteria, or other contaminants.

“Water quality standards establish the baseline for how the state conducts regular business involving the discharge of pollution in to our waters. Unless these standards are right, protecting and restoring our rivers, lakes, and streams will be a very difficult, if not impossible, task,” said Droitsch.

Hearings will be held in Jackson on March 17 at 2:00 pm and 7:00 pm at the Jackson Environmental Assistance Center, 362 Carriage House Drive. Hearings will be held in Memphis on March 18 at 2:00 pm and 6:30 pm at the Memphis Environmental Assistance Center, Suite E645, Perimeter Park, 2510 Mount Moriah Road.

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*The Tennessee Clean Water Network is a statewide organization dedicated solely to protecting, restoring, and enhancing Tennessee’s waters and the communities that depend on them. [www.tcwn.org](http://www.tcwn.org)*