



MUSCONETCONG River Management Council

August 20, 2021

Ms. Kimberly Cenno, Bureau Chief
Bureau of Environmental Analysis, Restoration and Standards
Division of Water Monitoring and Standards
401 E. State Street
PO Box 401
Trenton, NJ 08625

RE: Request for Comments on the Proposed 2018/2020 303(d) List of Water Quality Limited Waters Pursuant to Section 303(d) of the Federal Clean Water Act, the New Jersey Water Quality Planning Act and the New Jersey Water Quality Management Planning Rule; draft Integrated Report 2018/2020

Dear Ms. Cenno,

As you may know portions of the Musconetcong River are a federally designated Wild and Scenic River. Part of the designation process required the formation of the Musconetcong River Management Council (MRMC). The aim of the Council is to implement the River Management Plan (RMP), developed as a required step in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Study. The Council is made up of representatives from the 14 municipalities in the Wild and Scenic River segments, 4 counties and 3 NGOs (Musconetcong Watershed Association, Trout Unlimited, NJRCD, and North Jersey Resource Conservation & Development).

Our comments focus on the issues faced by the Musconetcong watershed, and water quality issues in the Upper Delaware Region. The MRMC acknowledges that the 2018/2020 Integrated Report is the result of the hard work by many NJDEP staff and partners, and provides regular information about the state's water quality. The Clean Water Act's Integrated Report process is a critical tool to understanding the health of our waterways and identifying restoration needs. We thank the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (the Department) for its commitment to the health and protection of New Jersey's waterbodies and safe and accessible recreation for all, as well as the opportunity to comment on the Report.

Report design and structure should make clear which documents are available for public comment. In a watershed that is topographically complex like the Musconetcong, showing water quality impairments and use attainment is very helpful. We appreciate the Department introducing interactive GIS mapping into the Integrated Report. However, the Department should clarify which webpages, documents and linked reports were part of the Integrated Report, and open for public comment, and identify whether linked documents, such as the "DEP Long Term Trend Report," and the "New Jersey Nonpoint Source Management Program Plan 2020 – 2025," are part of the public comment. As these documents, and potentially all of the linked webpages to the report, may available for public comment, and may be of concern to municipal

and county officials in our watershed, as well as our NGO advisors, the MRMC feels that a 60-day extension is warranted. Perhaps the Department would consider publishing a print/PDF Integrated Report, along with the interactive map and website, as way to clarify which documents are open for public comment.

Trends analyses needed to support local restoration priorities for community health relating to recreational activities. It is heartening to observe that some water quality trends at the state level, such as phosphorus and nitrogen are decreasing. It is critical that the public understands water quality at various levels so that they can understand NJDEP priorities. Stakeholders look to the Department to indicate restoration goals and priorities, and opportunities for engagement.

At the regional level of the Delaware River region, that are some differences from the state-wide trends. While the separate webpage for the Delaware River Region is helpful at understanding that there is some non-attainment for primary contact, there is insufficient data for secondary contact (82% insufficient in this region compared to 53% in the state). It is clear from the data that the levels of bacterial contamination are a serious concern in the very areas that are designated for recreational uses. It is imperative that there is sufficient data for segments that support recreational activities such as tubing, swimming, boating, and fishing. These activities are promoted regionally and are important for the regional economy.

The Musconetcong River is one of the most valued waterways in New Jersey for fishing and boating (Secondary Contact Recreation), but also people still enjoy swimming and tubing in the river (Primary Contact Recreation). A trends analysis is also needed for the watershed and sub-watershed levels, such as at the HUC 14 level. This would be of the most benefit to the Council, and would assist our members, including municipal and county partners, with identifying and prioritizing water quality improvement projects. The Council encourages the Department to additionally conduct trends analysis at the watershed, or sub-watershed, level.

TMDL Development & Restoration Priorities. Locally, the MRMC supports river restoration activities to support the health and safety of our recreational community. As such, we are pleased that the Department identified several priority waters for restoration in the Upper Delaware region.¹¹ Many of these waterbodies are prime trout fishing waters stocked by the Department and where significant land areas have been preserved to provide public fishing and recreational access. However, the department did not recommend these impaired waters for TMDL development. The Department should follow-through and develop TMDLs for all of the parameters listed, for all of the medium and high priority restoration waterbodies.

In addition, to protect human health, and prevent degradation of the recreational fishery, MWA recommends the following TMDLs be developed:

- Bacteria (E. coli) TMDLs for Lubbers Run (HUC02040105150040, HUC02040105150050), Mine Brook (HUC02040105150090), and Wills Brook to Lake Hopatcong (HUC02040105150030).
- Temperature TMDLs for Cranberry Lake/Jefferson Lake (HUC02040105150060), Musconetcong River from Hances Brook to Trout Brook (HUC02040105160010), Lake Hopatcong (HUC02040105150020), Lubbers Run (HUC02040105150040,

HUC02040105150050), Mine Brook (HUC02040105150090), Weldon Brook/Beaver Brook (HUC02040105150010), and Wills Brook to Lake Hopatcong (HUC02040105150030).

- pH TMDLs for Musconetcong River Wills Bk to Lk Hopatcong (HUC02040105150030), Musconetcong R Trout Bk to Saxton Falls (HUC02040105150100), Musconetcong River Changewater to Hances Bk (HUC02040105160020), Musconetcong River Saxton Falls to Waterloo (HUC02040105150080)

It is clear that the Department should afford Wild and Scenic the same level of monitoring and attention as it does New Jersey's beaches. For the 2018/2020 Report, we encourage the Department to highlight trends that inform local managers, advocates and the recreational community who are focused on improving water quality for all recreational waters.

We appreciate the work of the Department to regularly assess and monitor our state's water quality. If the Council may be of any assistance, please contact us.

Regards,



Charlie Fineran
Chairman, Musconetcong River Management Council