

**FACT SHEET: Poultry Litter and the Illinois River Watershed**

Over the last three decades the poultry population of the Illinois River Basin has increased to over 250 million birds. This increase has coincided with a significant decline in water quality in the river, its tributaries, and Lake Tenkiller.

With the June 1996 release of the Tenkiller Phase I Clean Lakes Report, which determined that over 76% of the nonpoint source phosphorus loading to Lake Tenkiller resulted from manures produced by confined animal operations, the State of Oklahoma recognized that stopping runoff from litter application fields would be the key to halting further impairment of Illinois River and Tenkiller water quality. Clean Lakes reports for Lakes Eucha and Wister showed very similar results. In response, the State established an Animal Waste & Water Quality Protection Task Force which recommended a prohibition on manure runoff to waters of the state, incentives to encourage alternative uses of litter, and support for the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture's litter marketing program. The Legislature followed suit in 1998 by enacting the majority of the Task Force's recommendations into law.

In the six years that followed, government officials worked with poultry growers to find alternative markets for surplus litter, particularly in eastern Oklahoma watersheds dominated by poultry production. Efforts to connect producers with excess litter and farmers with nutrient needs were severely hampered by a lack of funding to cover loading and hauling expenses. Poultry integrators maintained that they were not responsible for these costs, and the already struggling poultry growers could not bear the cost themselves.

In response, the State and Federal government began subsidizing litter hauling from nutrient threatened watersheds to areas where it could be properly utilized, beginning in 2004 with the State's \$5 per ton tax credit and the NRCS's manure transfer incentives. In 2005, Arkansas and Oklahoma created further incentives by establishing grant programs under section 319(h) that provided \$1.7 million for litter hauling in the Illinois River, Wister, and Eucha watersheds. These interim grant programs have moved 8% of the litter out of the Illinois River watershed. All told, the litter hauling subsidies represent a commitment of \$4.3 million, of which 88% is public funds and 12% private.

**Illinois River Watershed At-A-Glance :**

- number of poultry houses: 3,057<sup>1</sup>
- poultry litter generated annually: 542,948 tons<sup>2</sup>
- human population equivalent to poultry phosphorus production: 10.7 million people<sup>3</sup>
- actual human population of watershed municipalities in 2000: 195,314<sup>3</sup>
- litter generated annually in excess of estimated crop needs of land application sites: 418,070 tons (77% of annual production)<sup>4</sup>
- litter moved out since September 2005: 45,469 tons (8% of annual production)<sup>5</sup>

Estimates taken from the following sources:

<sup>1</sup> Office of the Secretary of the Environment, 2002. *Coordinated Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy for Oklahoma's Impaired Scenic Rivers*, 115 pp.

<sup>2</sup> Based upon litter and birds produced per house by type of operation from BMPs, Inc., 2004. *Poultry Litter Production for Illinois River Watershed*, 1 p.

<sup>3</sup> Oklahoma Water Resources Board, 2002. *Illinois River Basin Tour*, 22 pp.

<sup>4</sup> Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, & Forestry, 2006. *Strategy for Restoration and Protection of Scenic River Watersheds Through Nutrient Management of Agricultural Activities*, 6 pp.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Janet Wilkerson, Peterson Farms, to Rick Stubblefield, Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission, July 20, 2006

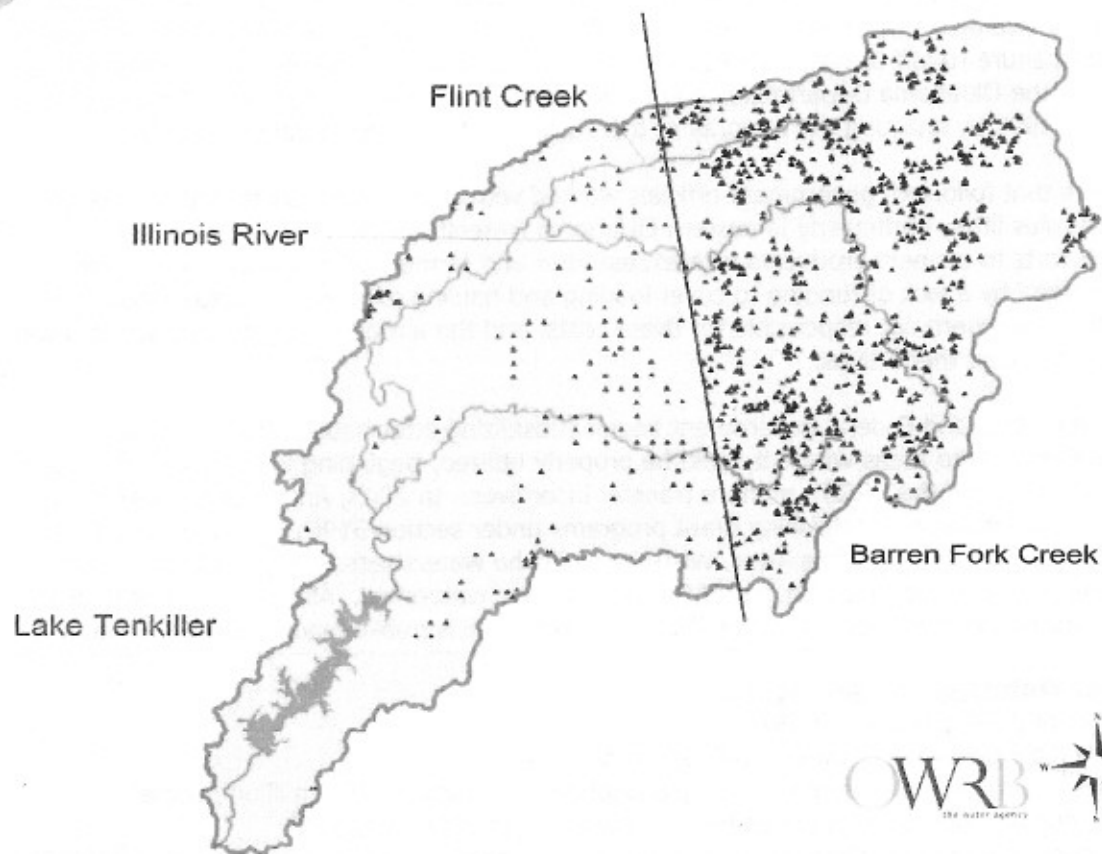


Figure 1. Poultry operations in the Illinois River watershed.