

Press release from the Southern Environmental Law Center and Harpeth Conservancy  
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Contact: Eric Hilt, 615-622-1199, [ehilt@selctn.org](mailto:ehilt@selctn.org)

## **Conservation groups appeal state's decision to ignore 'sewer scum' in Middle Tennessee waterway**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Southern Environmental Law Center, on behalf of the Harpeth Conservancy, has [filed an appeal](#) of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation's [decision to do nothing](#) about a large bacteria and algae bloom caused by discharges of poorly treated sewage in Dickson County.

The appeal concerns the persistent presence of a bacteria and algae bloom in Trace Creek, directly below the outfall for the Water Authority of Dickson County's White Bluff Wastewater facility. The Tennessee Department of Health confirmed that a dominant organism in the bloom is *Sphaerotilus sp.*, a bacteria often called 'sewer scum' because of its ability to grow in the presence of poorly treated sewage. *Cladophora sp.*, a stringy type of "sewage-loving" algae that feeds on excessive nitrogen and phosphorus pollution from sewer plants, is also abundantly present.

The appearance of 'sewer scum' in Trace Creek is clear evidence that the Water Authority of Dickson County is not fully treating sewage before discharging it into the creek, and the bloom is an obvious violation of the facility's permit, which prohibits discharges that cause "visible scum." In November, SELC, on behalf of the Harpeth Conservancy, filed an official complaint about the bloom and sent color photographs of the sewage-loving bacteria and algae to TDEC.

In spite of visible evidence of obvious pollution, TDEC is choosing not to act. It is allowing the Water Authority of Dickson County to continue dumping improperly treated sewage into Trace Creek, a waterway that TDEC designated for recreational use.

[Link to images of sewer scum bloom on Trace Creek](#)

"It is shocking that TDEC officials would turn a blind eye toward visible pollution in Trace Creek," **SELC Senior Attorney George Nolan** said. "TDEC has a responsibility to protect our state's waterways and the people who enjoy them. By refusing to act, TDEC is ignoring that important responsibility."

"Trace Creek flows into the heart of the Narrows of the Harpeth River, which is an extremely popular destination for paddlers, tubers, and anglers from across the state," **Dorie Bolze, President and CEO of the Harpeth Conservancy**, said. "Tennesseans looking to enjoy the state's incredible rivers and streams shouldn't be forced to wonder whether poorly treated sewage is being dumped into the water upstream."

The extensive bloom of sewer scum on Trace Creek is indicative of larger development problems across Tennessee. As the state's population grows and more rural areas rapidly develop, smaller

sewage treatment plants can quickly become overwhelmed. In many cases, these overburdened facilities end up discharging undertreated sewage into creeks and streams.

The appeal asks the Tennessee Board of Water Quality, Oil & Gas to declare that the Water Authority of Dickson County is violating its permit and that TDEC's response is inadequate. It also asks the Board to order TDEC to modify the Water Authority of Dickson County's permit for the White Bluff Wastewater Facility to include specific numeric limits for the nitrogen and phosphorous pollution that is feeding the bloom of sewage-loving scum currently choking Trace Creek. Until this pollution is brought under control, the appeal requests that the Board impose a moratorium on new hookups to the White Bluff plant.

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The Southern Environmental Law Center is one of the nation's most powerful defenders of the environment, rooted in the South. With a long track record, SELC takes on the toughest environmental challenges in court, in government, and in our communities to protect our region's air, water, climate, wildlife, lands, and people. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the organization has a staff of more than 200, including 100 attorneys, and is headquartered in Charlottesville, Va., with offices in Asheville, Atlanta, Birmingham, Chapel Hill, Charleston, Nashville, Richmond, and Washington, D.C.  
[southernenvironment.org](http://southernenvironment.org)

Founded in 1999, Harpeth Conservancy's is a science-based non-profit conservation organization. Its mission is to restore and protect clean water and healthy ecosystems for rivers in Tennessee by employing scientific expertise and collaborative relationships to develop, promote, and support broad community stewardship and action. Harpeth Conservancy works with landowners, businesses, community, local, state, and federal decision-makers and members to foster solutions that reduce pollution and maintain healthy areas.

The rivers in Tennessee, including the Harpeth, are part of the unique freshwater river systems of the Southeast which contain some of the greatest variety of aquatic life in the world. Harpeth Conservancy has expertise in a range of disciplines including water quality science, environmental and conservation law and policy, sustainable land use planning, agricultural best management practices, volunteer and community engagement, and others.  
[www.harpethconservancy.org](http://www.harpethconservancy.org).