

# EPA Raises Questions About Dripping Springs Wastewater

## Opinions differ on Onion Creek water standards

By [Michael King](#), [Fri., Dec. 16, 2016](#), The Austin Chronicle

<http://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2016-12-16/epa-raises-questions-about-dripping-springs-wastewater/>



Effects of excess nutrients from treated wastewater (courtesy of City of Austin Watershed Protection)

**Onion Creek** may yet dodge the bullet – more precisely, the **treated wastewater discharge** requested by the city of **Dripping Springs** as an alternative to the current practice of spraying the effluent on land, where it is less likely to pollute nearby creeks. The **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency** has written to the **Texas Commission on Environmental Quality** (which is considering the draft permit), requesting more information and suggesting that the TCEQ's water quality standards are inadequate to protect the creek. ("You Don't Miss Your Water ... 'Til It Turns Green," Nov. 7)

In a Dec. 1 letter to the TCEQ, Richard Wooster of the EPA Dallas office says "it is not clear how this permit conforms to the guidelines and requirements established by the **Clean Water Act** (CWA) and the NPDES [National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System]." Wooster notes that Onion Creek is designated under federal regulations as "high-quality water," which "must be maintained and protected" unless the state can demonstrate necessary "economic or social development." Although the TCEQ has made a preliminary determination that the wastewater discharge (as much as 995,000 gallons daily) will not result in "significant degradation of water quality." Wooster says the documentation doesn't clarify how the agency came to that conclusion, and appears to doubt it: "The effluent limits proposed in the draft permit would contribute more than 450 pounds of phosphorus" annually (the current Onion Creek amount is 1 pound per year) and an "even more significant" increase in nitrogen, both contaminants that can severely degrade water quality, especially by increasing the growth of algae.

In brief, Wooster requests additional information demonstrating that granting the permit will not result in degrading Onion Creek water quality. He also notes that the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** is still reviewing the potential effects on endangered species, and that may result in additional questions. **Protect Our Water**, the community organization opposing the discharge permit, says "This is a rare move for EPA and signifies real problems with the draft permit." For more info, including the EPA letter and other documents, visit [www.protectourwaternow.org](http://www.protectourwaternow.org).