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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,
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***OWRB Asks Landowners to
Watch for Staff in Field***

Field crews from the Oklahoma Water Resources Board will visit rivers and streams throughout western Oklahoma over the next several months as part of the final phase of a statewide water quality assessment effort. To ensure the safety of OWRB employees, Water Quality Division Chief Derek Smithee asks landowners to be aware that staff will be visiting rivers and streams in the area.

Smithee explains that the agency's water quality specialists will be conducting biological assessments (bioassessments) of state surface waters, part of a statewide effort that involves the collection of biological samples and evaluation of individual stream characteristics. "We want citizens in western Oklahoma, especially involved landowners, to know that our staff are out in the field as well as the nature of their business there," he says.

Biological assessments are crucial tools for measuring the health of water bodies and protecting aquatic life, he explains. "Biological assessments evaluate the condition of a water body using surveys and other direct measurements of aquatic life—aquatic vegetation and algae, fish, insects, and other organisms. Resulting data are used by the OWRB and other state environmental agencies to develop criteria that are used to define the desired biological condition of a water body as well as establish narrative and numerical standards that are integral to the maintenance and restoration of water quality."

The Water Board's ongoing bioassessment effort will conclude next year in western Oklahoma, including the Panhandle region.

"Typically, Board crews will access targeted streams near highway bridge crossings. In most cases, assessments and collection of biological and water samples will be conducted on the immediate banks and in the water within 300 yards of the road," Smithee says. At all times, he adds, Board field staff are required to wear clothing (e.g., shirts and/or hats) and carry appropriate credentials identifying them as agency personnel. OWRB vehicles also include the agency's seal or logo on each side.

Should landowners or other citizens encounter staff in the field, Smithee encourages them to request proper identification and query them on their activities. For any reason, should a landowner wish to deny staff access to his or her property, staff will promptly leave the premises.

"As public servants, we must be responsive to citizen wants and needs, especially to those who provide access to the waters for which the Water Board is statutorily responsible" Smithee emphasizes. "Our staff know that they are expected to treat citizens, as well as their lands and

waters, with proper respect.”

Smithee adds that the OWRB is always looking for prime sampling locations. He encourages landowners to contact the agency or staff in the field should their land contain an accessible site that is inundated or wet during the spring season for possible inclusion in future sampling efforts.

For more information on the OWRB's bioassessment program or to submit a potential future sampling site, contact Derek Smithee at 405-530-8800.

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