**Tribal Water Quality: A Cherokee Nation Perspective**  
Cara Cowan Watts, Cherokee Nation Tribal Council

Under the U.S. Clean Water Act, States, Tribes and Territories can each create water quality standards to be approved by the EPA. For water planning and quality monitoring, Tribal Water Quality Standards (TWQS) have become increasingly important in protecting the quality of water for surrounding jurisdictions, not just tribal nations. Without federally approved TWQS in Oklahoma, a gap exists because state standards do not apply on tribal trust land leaving Indian country vulnerable to pollution. TWQS are a must to not only address the water quality gap but address the unique cultural needs of Oklahoma’s tribes.

Oklahoma has 37 Federally-recognized tribes with 35 of those tribes having a jurisdictional land base. Under the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA’s) ‘treatment same as a state’ (TAS) policy, Oklahoma tribes with a land-based jurisdiction should be able to create and implement their own water quality standards for their respective jurisdiction. Several tribal consortiums have developed over the past decade to share technical assistance between tribal nations since technical ability is a measure for TAS recognition.

To understand how tribal nations might implement tribal water quality standards and achieve TAS, a review of Cherokee Nation’s water quality monitoring, programs, grants, departments and staffing is shared. Some of the Cherokee Nation’s future needs for water quality data and research are identified.

For a tribal nation to achieve self-determination, self-sufficiency including technical infrastructure such as tribal water quality monitoring and implementation is required. For the Cherokee Nation, tribal water quality is a must to protect the tribal community and neighboring communities.