Dr. Nick Tew
State Geologist – GSA
P.O. Box 869999
Tuscaloosa, AL 35486-6999

Dear Dr. Tew:

Thank you for your service as the chair of the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group (AWAWG).  Your work on this is critical because **Alabama cannot wait any longer for a sustainable water plan.**

The current statewide drought emergency is shining a bright spotlight on the fact that no department in the state is looking out for our rivers and streams to ensure our water ecosystems and the lives that depend on them are protected during times of stress.

**I support your efforts to develop the strongest plan possible to defend our rivers.**

**WHAT IS AT STAKE?**

Our rivers are drying up.  While most of our rivers are adapted to drought conditions, the increasing stress from human impacts, such as development and overuse, as well as more frequent and severe drought conditions from a changing climate is causing damage that may not be easily reversed.

According to the Office of Water Resources and the State Climatologist, our rivers, streams and groundwater are at historic lows -- worse conditions than the drought of 2007 -- even though we have more total inches of rain in 2016 than in 2007.  Viewing the drought monitor, early indications of this crisis were present as far back as May and June of this year, but without a sustainable water plan, no actions were taken to avert the crisis.

When our rivers and groundwater supplies are damaged, our ability to supply water for drinking, farming, fishing, and even electricity will be compromised.  Loss of mussels and fish makes it more difficult for rivers and streams to naturally clean themselves, making water treatment cost more.  Decreased flow in our rivers causes increased concentrations of toxic pollution that leads to public health concerns and more increased costs.

**WHAT CAN A SUSTAINABLE WATER PLAN DO FOR OUR RIVERS AND STREAMS?**

A state sustainable water plan would require a specific state agency or entity to manage water use and protect stream flows at all times so that we are better prepared for times of water shortage, such as this drought.

Right now, there is no permit required for water withdrawals in Alabama.  There is no state agency that is looking at the big picture of balancing water use with the protection of the amount of water in our rivers.  We have seen it firsthand in this current drought.  The Governor declared a state of emergency but the only action he taken at the state level has been a ban on outdoor burning.  We can ban fire to protect our forest, but we have no mechanism for restricting water use in order to protect rivers.

A water plan would establish proper authorities and put the rules in place for managing water in times of shortage.  A water plan will also establish that protecting the water in our streams must be a priority in order to sustain our water supplies for future generations.

Many think of groundwater as being endless and we continue to pull this precious resource with abandon.  Our groundwater is important in supplying water to many streams.  It can take many years for nature to recharge these important aquifers.  Our sustainable water plan must include not only monitoring water withdrawals, but also a plan for ensuring our groundwater aquifers are kept at sustainable levels and enabled to properly recharge.

**HOW DO WE GET A SUSTAINABLE WATER PLAN?**

Dr Tew, we know that the AWAWG is finalizing its report to the governor that is supposed to recommend a sustainable water plan for Alabama.  This report is the 3rd report over the past four years leading us closer to a water plan.  We cannot wait any longer.  This report must be a strong recommendation to the governor that lays out a sustainable water plan for Alabama.  The plan must establish the appropriate state authority to regulate water use and to protect the water in our rivers from overuse and mismanagement.  This is very important to me and my community, and it is critical to the protection of our rivers.

**Thank you for your work to Defend Rivers.**

Sincerely,