CHAPTER 3

WATER QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF THE NOLICHUCKY RIVER WATERSHED.

3.1 Background

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3.1. BACKGROUND. Section 305(b) of The Clean Water Act requires states to report the status of water quality every two years. Historically, Tennessee's methodologies, protocols, frequencies and locations of monitoring varied depending upon whether sites were ambient, ecoregion, or intensive survey. Alternatively, in areas where no direct sampling data existed, water quality may have been assessed by evaluation or by the knowledge and experience of the area by professional staff.

In 1996, Tennessee began the watershed approach to water quality protection. In the Watershed Approach, resources—both human and fiscal—are better used by assessing water quality more intensively on a watershed-by-watershed basis. In this approach, water quality is assessed in year three of the watershed cycle, following one to two years of data collection. More information about the Watershed Approach may be found in Chapter 1 and at http://www.state.tn.us/environment/wpc/watershed/

The assessment information is used in the 305(b) Report (The Status of Water Quality in Tennessee) and the 303(d) list as required by the Clean Water Act.

The 305(b) Report documents the condition of the State's waters. Its function is to provide information used for water quality based decisions, evaluate progress, and measure success.

Tennessee uses the 305(b) Report to meet four goals (from 2006 305(b) Report):

1. Describe the water quality assessment process.

2. Categorize waters in the State by placing them in the assessment categories suggested by federal guidance.

3. Identify waterbodies that pose eminent human-health risks due to elevated bacteria levels or contamination of fish.

4. Provide detailed information on each watershed.

EPA aggregates the state use support information into a national assessment of the nation's water quality. This aggregated use support information can be viewed at EPA's "Surf Your Watershed" site at http://cfpub.epa.gov/surf/locate/index.cfm.

The 303(d) list is a compilation of the waters of Tennessee that fail to support some or all of their classified uses. The 303(d) list does not include streams determined to be fully supporting designated uses nor streams the Division of Water Pollution Control cannot assess due to lack of water quality information. Also absent are streams where a control strategy is already in the process of being implemented.

Once a stream is placed on the 303(d) list, it is considered a priority for water quality improvement efforts. These efforts not only include traditional regulatory approaches such as permit issuance, but also include efforts to control pollution sources that have historically been exempted from regulations, such as certain agricultural and forestry activities. If a stream is on the 303(d) list, the Division of Water Pollution Control cannot use its regulatory authority to allow additional sources of the same pollutant(s) for which it is listed.

States are required to develop Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for 303(d)-listed waterbodies. The TMDL process establishes the maximum amount of a pollutant that a waterbody can assimilate without exceeding water quality standards and allocates this load among all contributing pollutant sources. The purpose of the TMDL is to establish water quality objectives required to reduce pollution from both point and nonpoint sources and to restore and maintain the quality of water resources.

The current 303(d) List is available on the TDEC homepage at:
http://tennessee.gov/environment/wpc/publications/303d2006.pdf

and information about Tennessee's TMDL program may be found at:
http://www.state.tn.us/environment/wpc/tmdl/.

This chapter provides a summary of water quality in the Nolichucky River Watershed, summarizes data collection and assessment results, and describes impaired waters.

3.2. DATA COLLECTION. The figures and table below represent data collected in the last 5-year cycle (July 1, 2000 through June 30, 2005). Water quality data are from one of four site types: (1) Ambient sites, (2) Ecoregion sites, (3) Watershed Screening sites, or (4) Tier Evaluation sites.

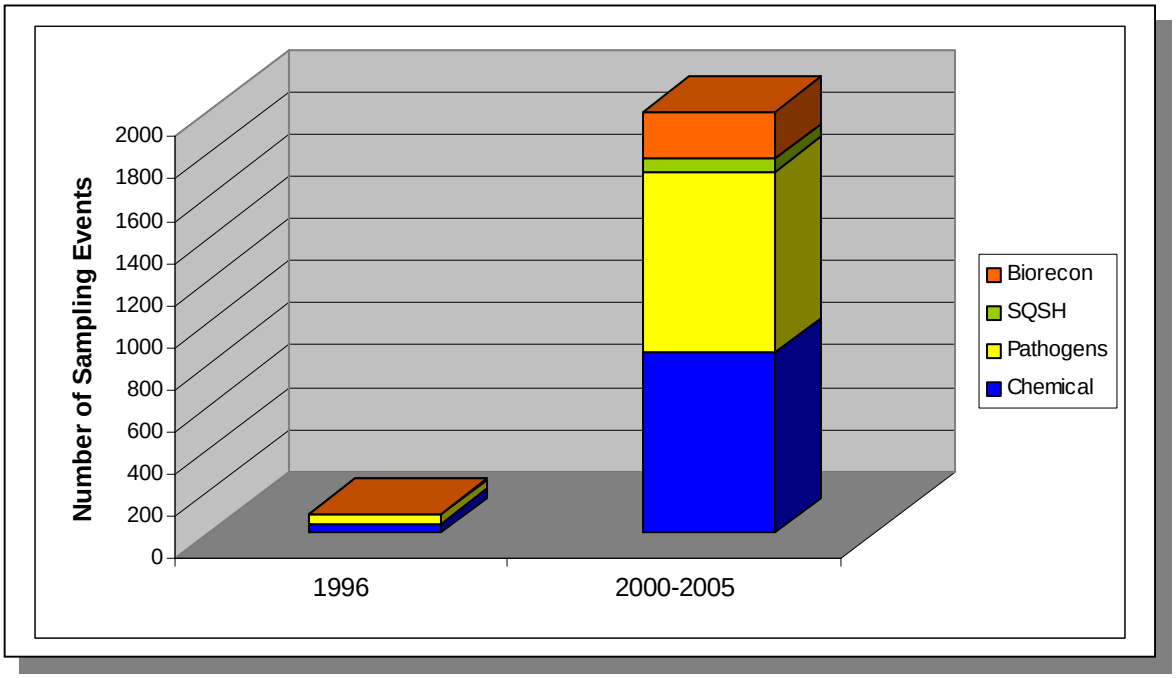

Figure 3-1. Number of Sampling Events Using the Traditional Approach (1996) and Watershed Approach (July 1, 2000 through June 30, 2005) in the Nolichucky River Watershed.

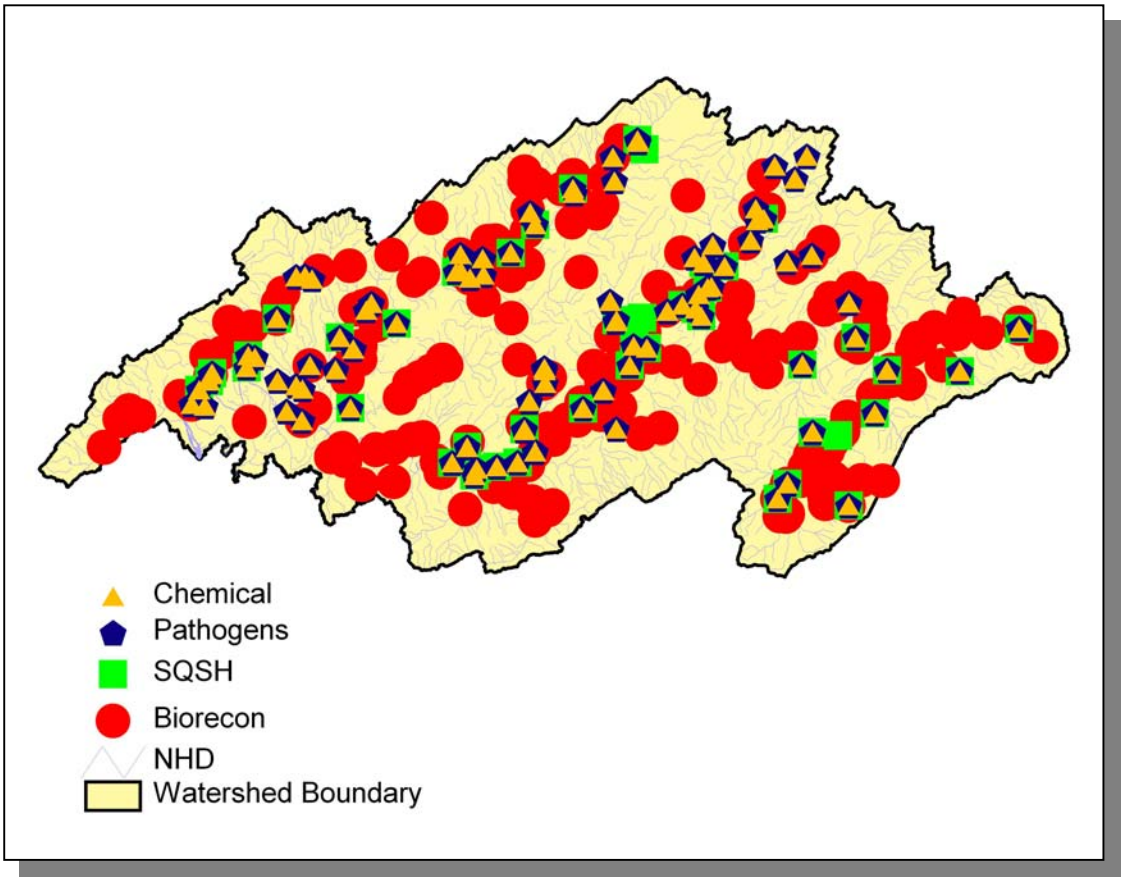

Figure 3-2. Location of Monitoring Sites in the Nolichucky River Watershed (July 1, 2000 through June 30, 2005). *Pathogens include E. coli and fecal coliform; NHD, National Hydrography Dataset of Streams; SQSH, Semi-Quantitative Single Habitat Assessment.*

	1996	**2000-2005**
Chemical	40	856
Pathogens	40	856
SQSH	8	60
Biorecon	0	227
Total	**88**	**1999**

Table 3-1. Number of Sampling Events in the Nolichucky River Watershed in the last 5-Year Cycle (July 1, 2000 through June 30, 2005).

3.2.A. Ambient Monitoring Sites. These fixed-station chemical monitoring sites are sampled quarterly or monthly by the Environmental Field Office-Knoxville and Environmental Field Office-Johnson City staff (this is in addition to samples collected by water and wastewater treatment plant operators and MS4 permittees). Samples are analyzed by the Tennessee Department of Health, Division of Environmental Laboratory Services. Ambient monitoring data are used to assess water quality in major bodies of water where there are NPDES facilities and to identify trends in water quality. Water quality parameters traditionally measured at ambient sites in the Nolichucky River Watershed are provided in Appendix IV.

Data from ambient monitoring stations are entered into the STORET (Storage and Retrieval) system administered by EPA.

3.2.B. Ecoregion Sites. Ecoregions are relatively homogeneous areas of similar geography, topography, climate and soils that support similar plants and animals. The delineation phase of the Tennessee Ecoregion Project was completed in 1997 when the ecoregions and subecoregions were mapped and summarized (EPA/600/R-97/022). There are eight Level III Ecoregions and twenty-five Level IV subecoregions in Tennessee (see Chapter 2 for more details). The Nolichucky River Watershed lies within 2 Level III ecoregions (Blue Ridge Mountains and Ridge and Valley) and contains 8 subecoregions (Level IV):

- Southern Igneous Ridges and Mountains (66d)
- Southern Sedimentary Ridges (66e**)**
- Limestone Valleys and Coves (66f)
- Southern Metasedimentary Mountains (66g)
- Southern Limestone/Dolomite Valleys and Low Rolling Hills (67f)
- Southern Shale Valleys (67g)
- Southern Sandstone Ridges (67h)
- Southern Dissected Ridges and Knobs (67i)

Ecoregion reference sites are chemically monitored using methodology outlined in the Division's Chemical Standard Operating Procedure (Standard Operating Procedure for Modified Clean Technique Sampling Protocol). Macroinvertebrate samples are collected in spring and fall. These biological sample collections follow methodology outlined in the Tennessee Biological Standard Operating Procedures Manual. Volume 1: Macroinvertebrates and EPA's Revision to Rapid Bioassessment Protocols for use in Streams and Rivers.

Ecoregion stations are scheduled to be monitored during the watershed sampling time period.

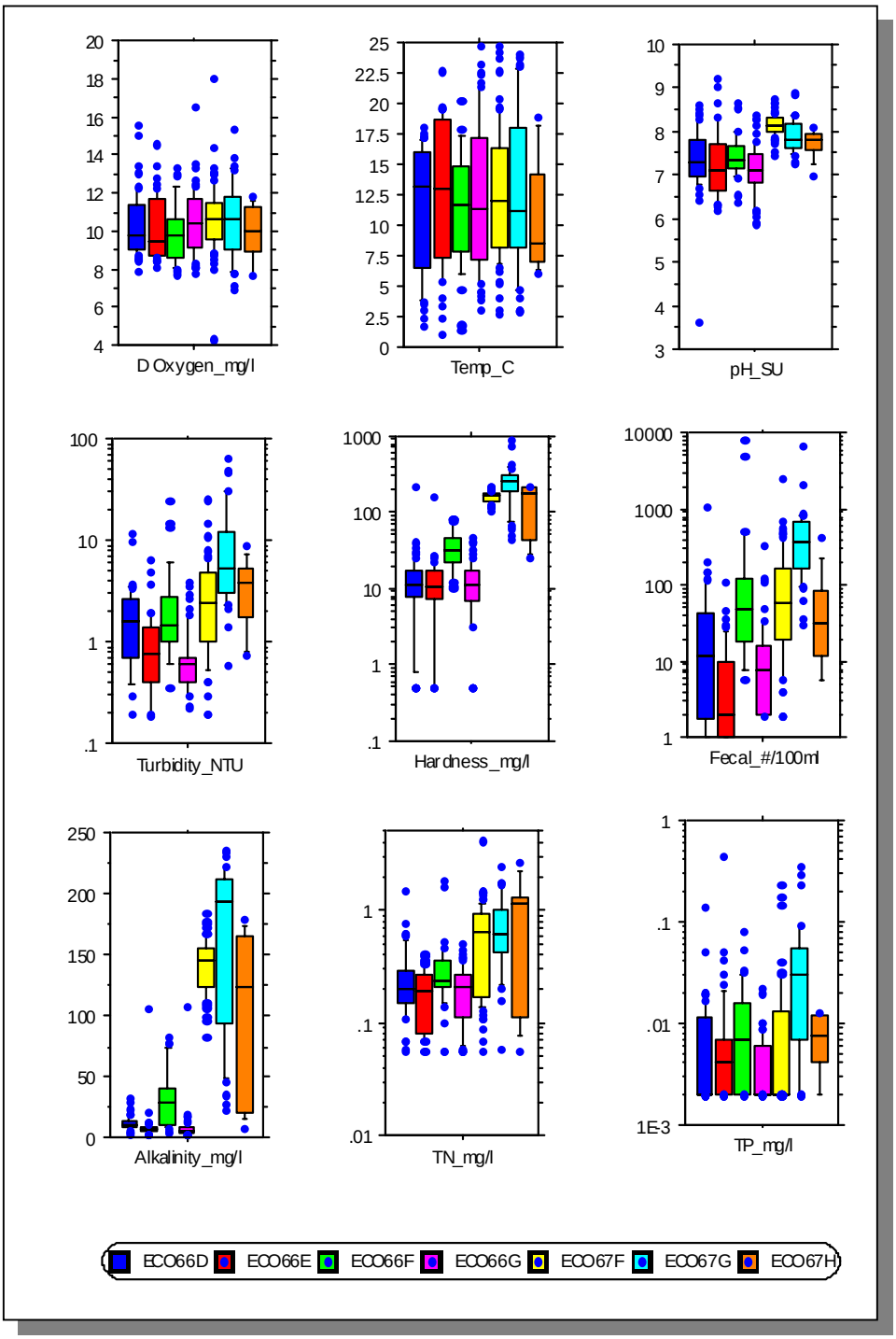

Figure 3-3. Select Chemical Data Collected in the Nolichucky River Watershed Ecoregion Sites. *Boxes and bars illustrate 10th, 25th, median, 75th, and 90th percentiles. Extreme values are also shown as dots. Fecal, fecal coliform bacteria; TN, Total Nitrogen; TP, Total Phosphorus.*

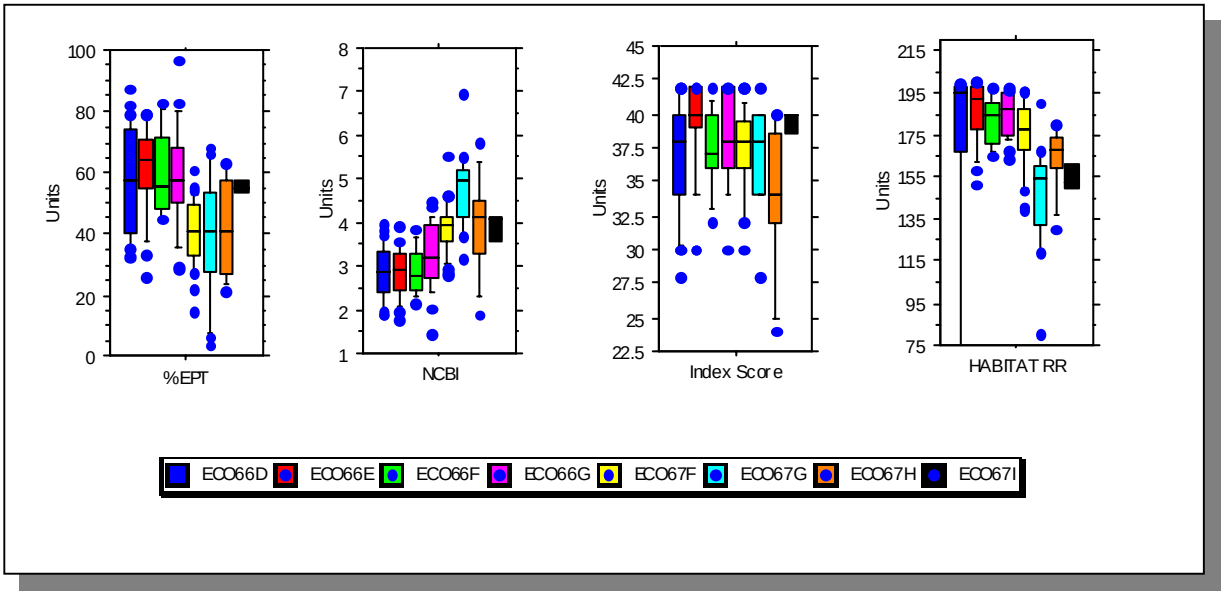

Figure 3-4. Benthic Macroinvertebrate and Habitat Scores for the Nolichucky River Watershed Ecoregion Sites. *Boxes and bars illustrate 10th, 25th, median, 75th, and 90th percentiles. Extreme values are also shown as dots. NCBI, North Carolina Biotic Index. Index Score and Habitat Riffle/Run scoring system are described in TDEC's Quality System Standard Operating Procedure for Macroinvertebrate Surveys (2002).*

3.2.C. Watershed Screening Sites. Activities that take place at watershed sites are benthic macroinvertebrate stream surveys, physical habitat determinations and/or chemical monitoring. Following review of existing data, watershed sites are selected in Year 1 of the watershed approach when preliminary monitoring strategies are developed. Additional sites may be added in Year 2 when additional monitoring strategies are implemented.

A Biological Reconnaissance (BioRecon) is used as a screening tool to describe the condition of water quality, in general, by determining the absence or presence of clean water indicator organisms, such as EPT (Ephemeroptera [mayfly], Plecoptera [stonefly], Trichoptera [caddisfly]). Factors and resources used for selecting BioRecon sites are:

- The current 303(d) list,
- HUC-12 maps (every HUC-12 is considered for a BioRecon)
- Land Use/Land Cover maps
- Topographic maps
- Locations of NPDES facilities
- Sites of recent ARAP activities.

An intensive multiple or single habitat assessment involves the regular monitoring of a station over a fixed period of time. Intensive surveys (Rapid Bioassessment Protocols) are performed when BioRecon results warrant it.

3.2.D. Special Surveys. These investigations are performed when needed and include:

- ARAP in-stream investigation
- Time-of-travel dye study
- Sediment oxygen demand study
- Lake eutrophication study

3.3. STATUS OF WATER QUALITY. Use support determinations, which can be classified as monitored or evaluated, are based on:

- Data less than 5 years old (monitored)
- Data more than 5 years old (evaluated)
- Knowledge and experience of the area by technical staff (evaluated)
- Complaint investigation (monitored, if samples are collected)
- Other readily available Agencies' data (monitored)
- Readily available Volunteer Monitoring data (monitored, if certain quality assurance standards are met)

All readily available data are considered, including data from TDEC Environmental Field Offices, Tennessee Department of Health (Aquatic Biology Section of Laboratory Services), Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, National Park Service, Tennessee Valley Authority, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Forest Service, universities and colleges, the regulated community, and the private sector.

Waterbodies are assessed by comparing monitored water conditions to water quality standards for the stream, river, or reservoir's designated uses. Data that meet quality control standards and collection techniques are used to generate assessments. After use support is determined, waterbodies are placed in one of the following five categories recommended by EPA.

Use Support Categories: (from 2006 305(b) Report)

Category 1 waters are **fully supporting** of all designated uses. These streams, rivers, and reservoirs have been monitored and meet the most stringent water quality criteria for all designated uses for which they are classified. The biological integrity of Category 1 waters is comparable with reference streams in the same subecoregion and pathogen concentrations are at acceptable levels.

Category 2 waters are **fully supporting** of some designated uses, but have not been assessed for all uses. In many cases, these waterbodies have been monitored and are fully supporting of fish and aquatic life, but have not been assessed for recreational use.

Category 3 waters are **not assessed** due to insufficient or outdated data.

Category 4 waters are **impaired**, but a TMDL is not required. Category 4 has been further subdivided into three subcategories.

Category 4a impaired waters that have already had all necessary TMDLs approved by EPA.

Category 4b impaired waters do not require TMDL development since "other pollution control requirements required by local, State or Federal authority are expected to address all

water-quality pollutants" (EPA, 2003). An example of a 4b stream might be where a discharge point will be moved in the near future to another waterbody with more assimilative capacity.

Category 4c impaired waters in which the impacts are not caused by a pollutant (e.g., certain habitat or flow alterations).

Category 5 waters have been monitored and found to not meet one or more water quality standards. These waters have been identified as **not supporting** their designated uses. Category 5 waterbodies are moderately to highly impaired by pollution and need to have TMDLs developed for the known impairments. These waters are included in the 303(d) List of impaired waters in Tennessee.

Category Assessment	Stream Miles	Reservoir Acres
Total	1,920.0	383
Assessed	1,462.3	383
Category 1	107.0	0
Category 2	535.1	0
Category 3	457.7	0
Category 4	0.0	0
Category 5	820.2	383

Table 3.2. Use Support Categories (Stream miles and/or Reservoir Acres) in the Nolichucky River Watershed.

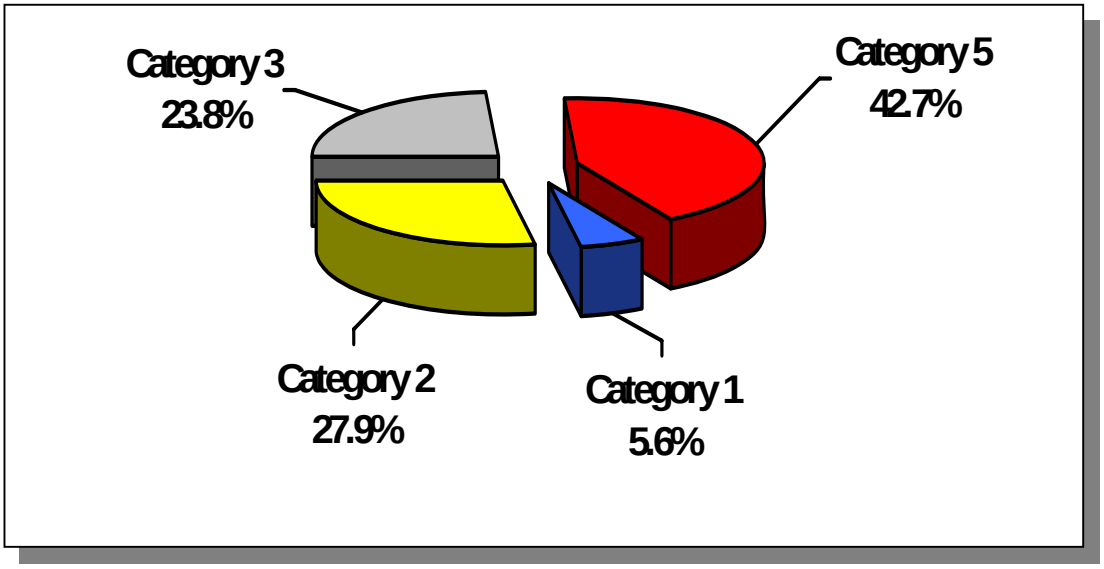

Figure 3-5. Water Quality Assessment of Streams in the Nolichucky River Watershed. *Assessment data are based on the 2006 Water Quality Assessment of 1,920.0 stream miles in the watershed.*

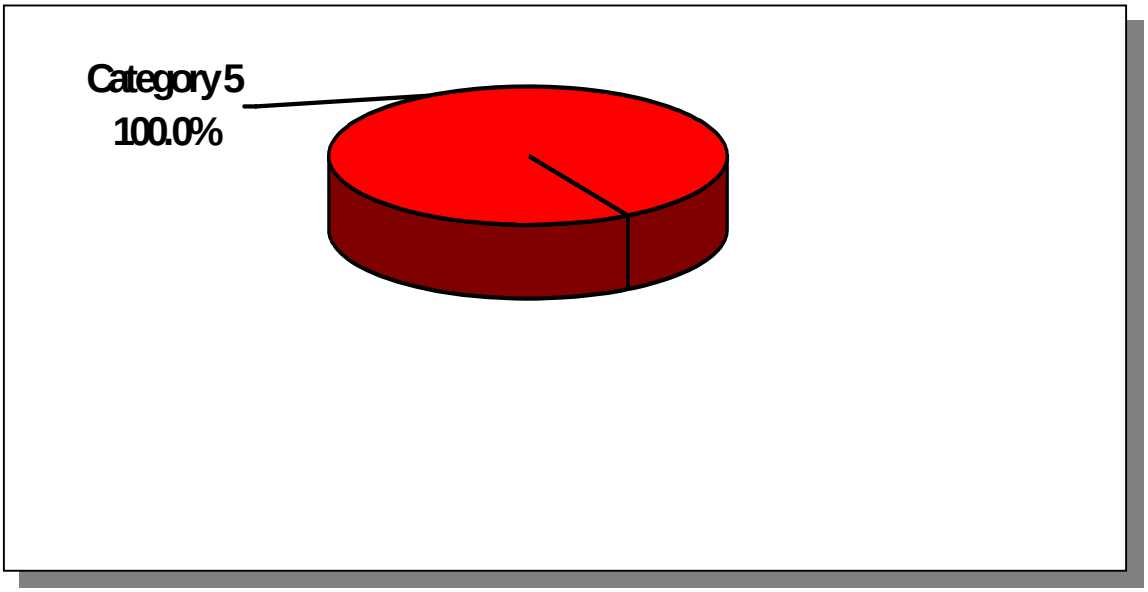

Figure 3-6. Water Quality Assessment of Lakes in the Nolichucky River Watershed. *Assessment data are based on the 2006 Water Quality Assessment of 383 lake acres in the watershed.*

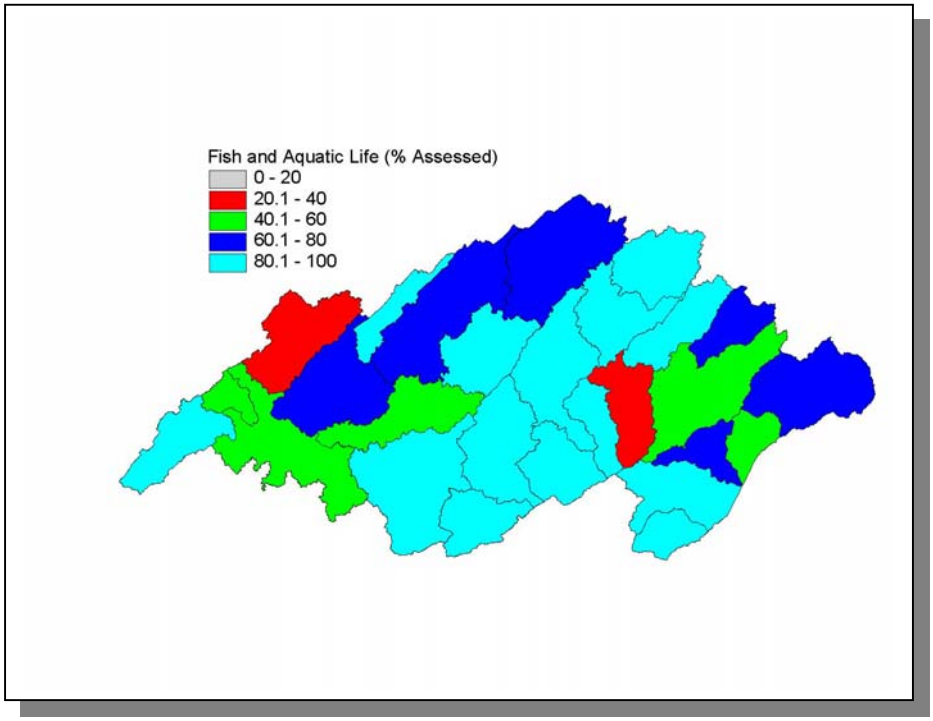

Figure 3-7. Percentage of Stream Miles Assessed for Support of Fish and Aquatic Life Designated Use in HUC-12 Subwatersheds.

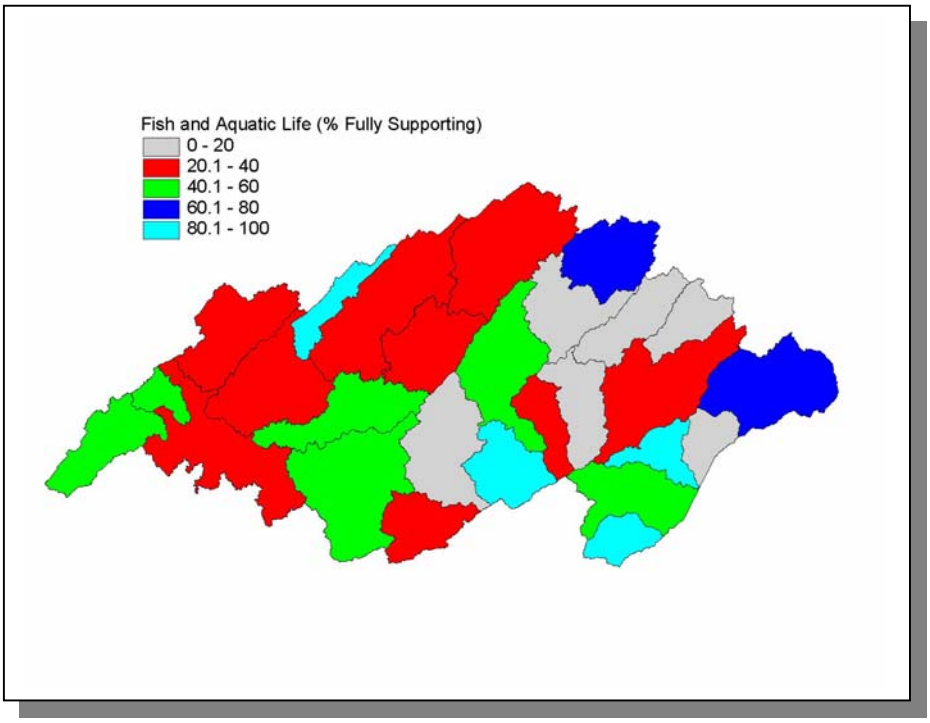

Figure 3-8. Percentage of Stream Miles Fully Supporting for Fish and Aquatic Life Designated Use in HUC-12 Subwatersheds.

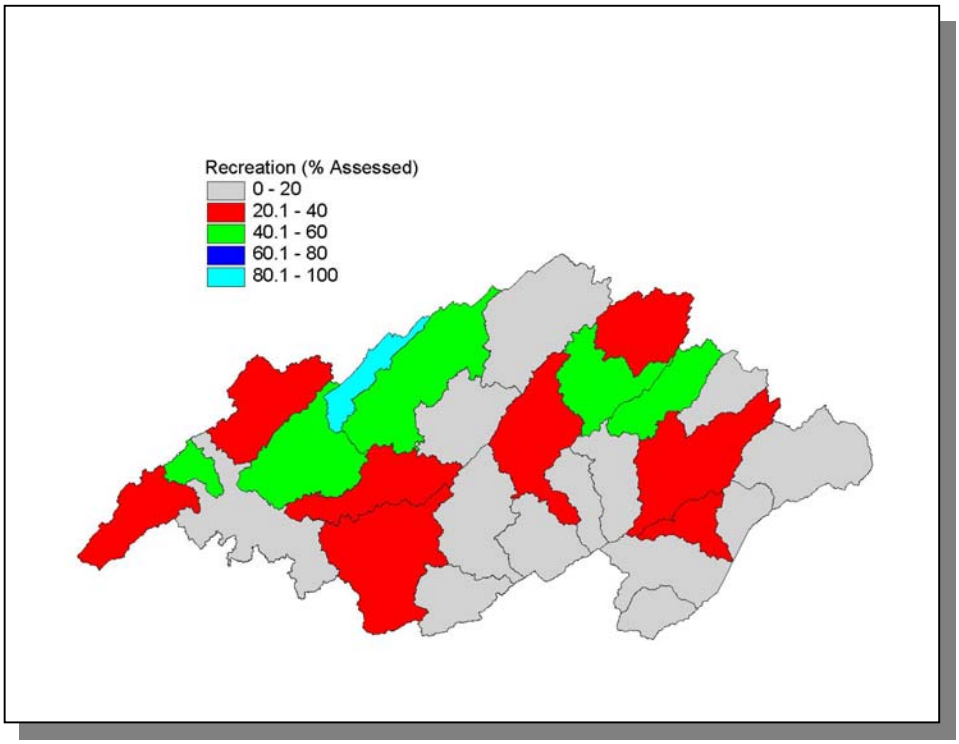

Figure 3-9. Percentage of Stream Miles Assessed for Support of Recreation Designated Use in HUC-12 Subwatersheds.

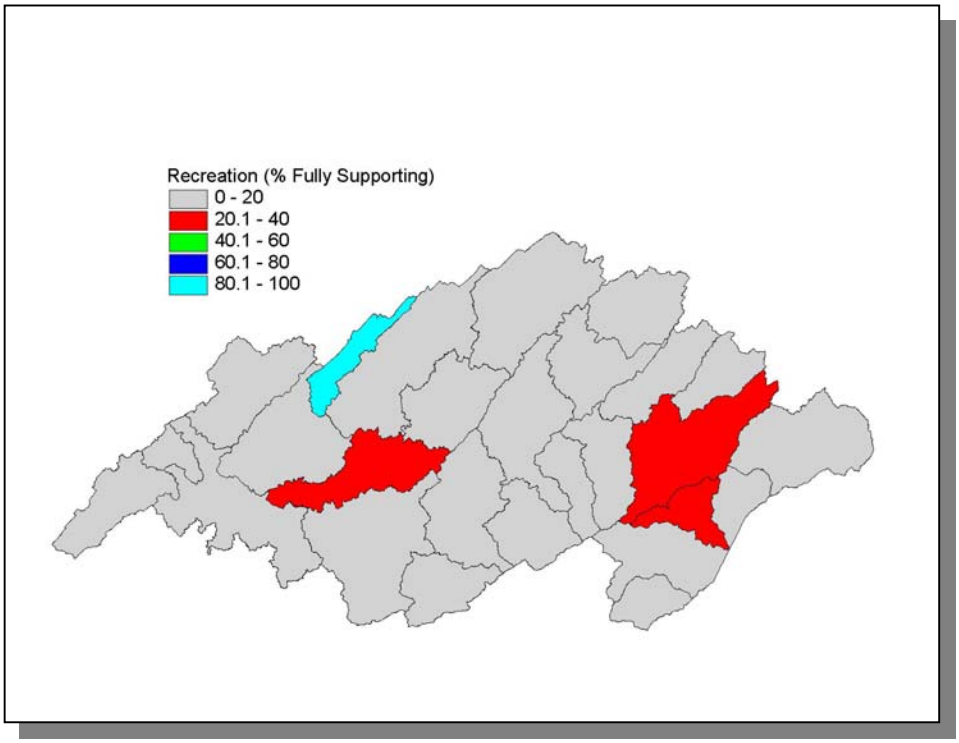

Figure 3-10. Percentage of Stream Miles Fully Supporting for Recreation Designated Use in HUC-12 Subwatersheds.

3.3.A. Assessment Summary.

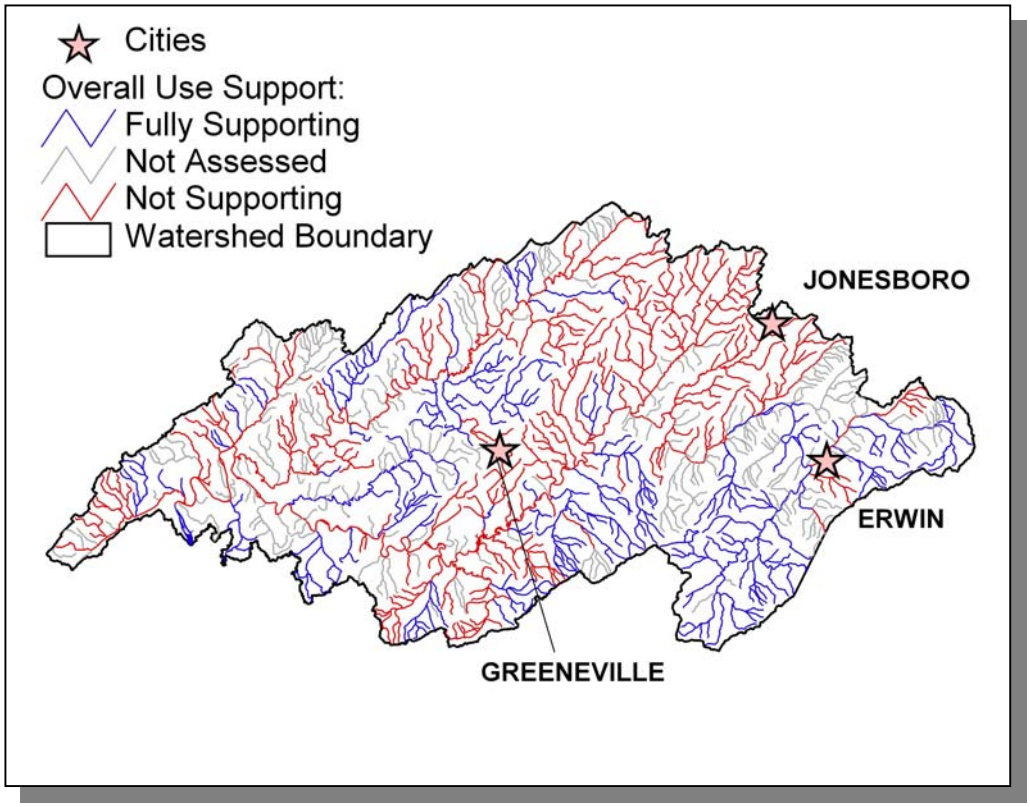

Figure 3-11. Overall Use Support Attainment in the Nolichucky River Watershed. *Assessment data are based on the 2006 Water Quality Assessment. Water Quality Standards are described at http://www.state.tn.us/sos/rules/1200/1200-04/1200-04.htm. Locations of Erwin, Greenville, and Jonesboro are shown for reference. More information is provided in Appendix III.*

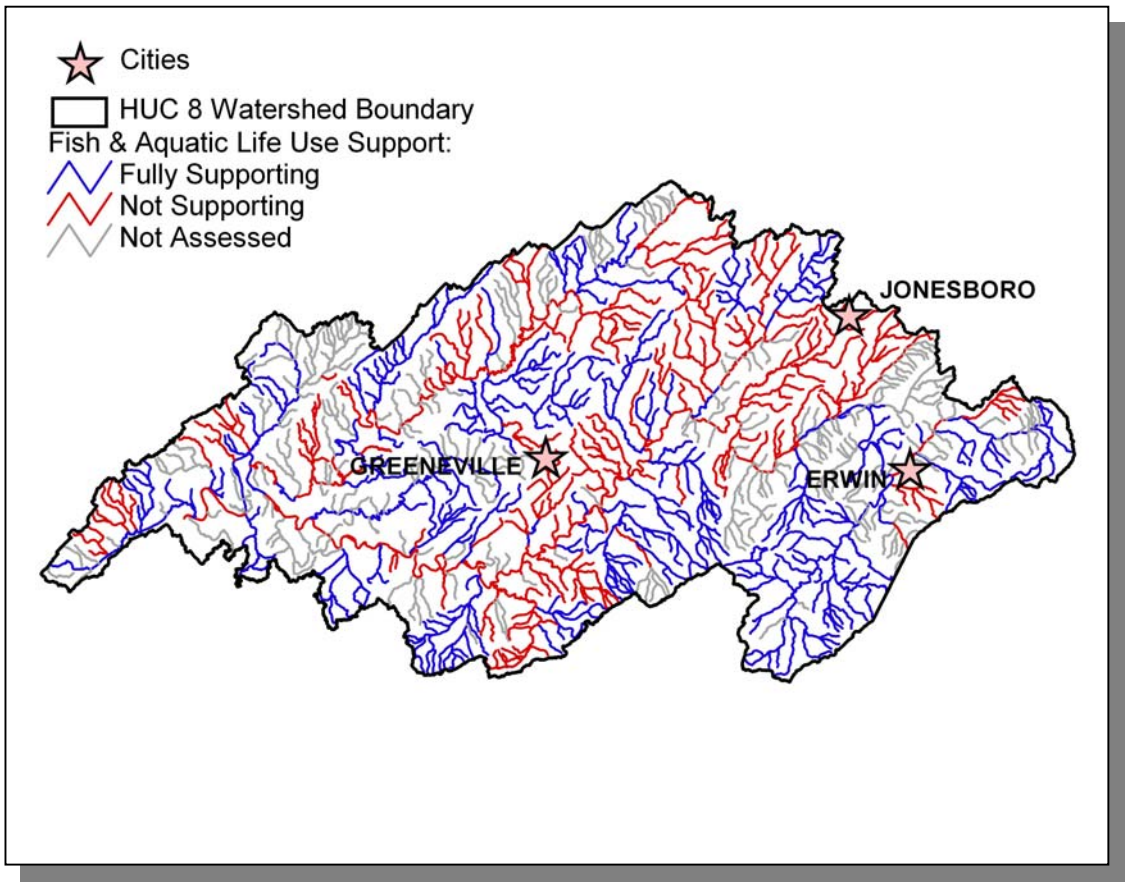

Figure 3-12. Fish and Aquatic Life Use Support Attainment in the Nolichucky River Watershed. *Assessment data are based on the 2006 Water Quality Assessment. Water Quality Standards are described at http://www.state.tn.us/sos/rules/1200/1200-04/1200-04.htm. Locations of Erwin, Greenville, and Jonesboro are shown for reference. More information is provided in Appendix III.*

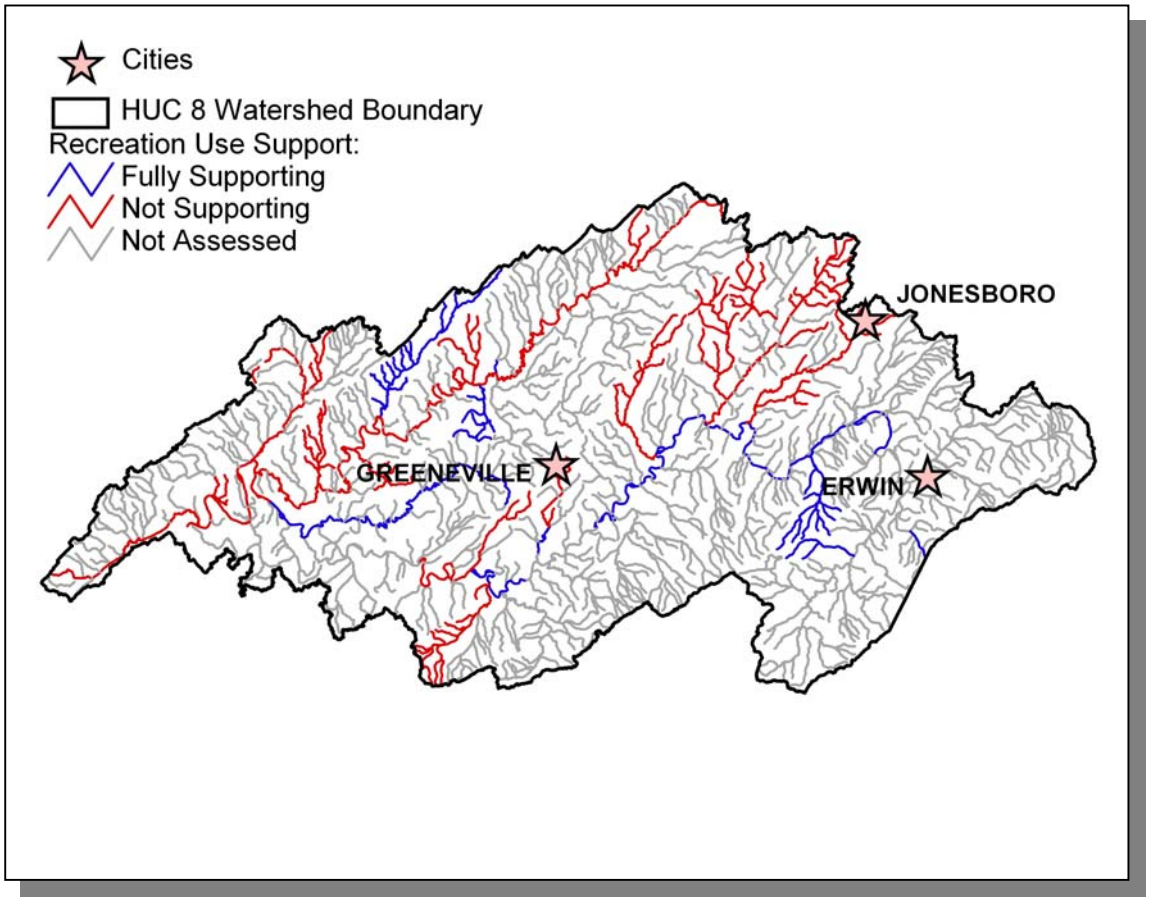

Figure 3-13. Recreation Use Support Attainment in the Nolichucky River Watershed. *Assessment data are based on the 2006 Water Quality Assessment. Water Quality Standards are described at http://www.state.tn.us/sos/rules/1200/1200-04/1200-04.htm. Locations of Erwin, Greenville, and Jonesboro are shown for reference. More information is provided in Appendix III.*

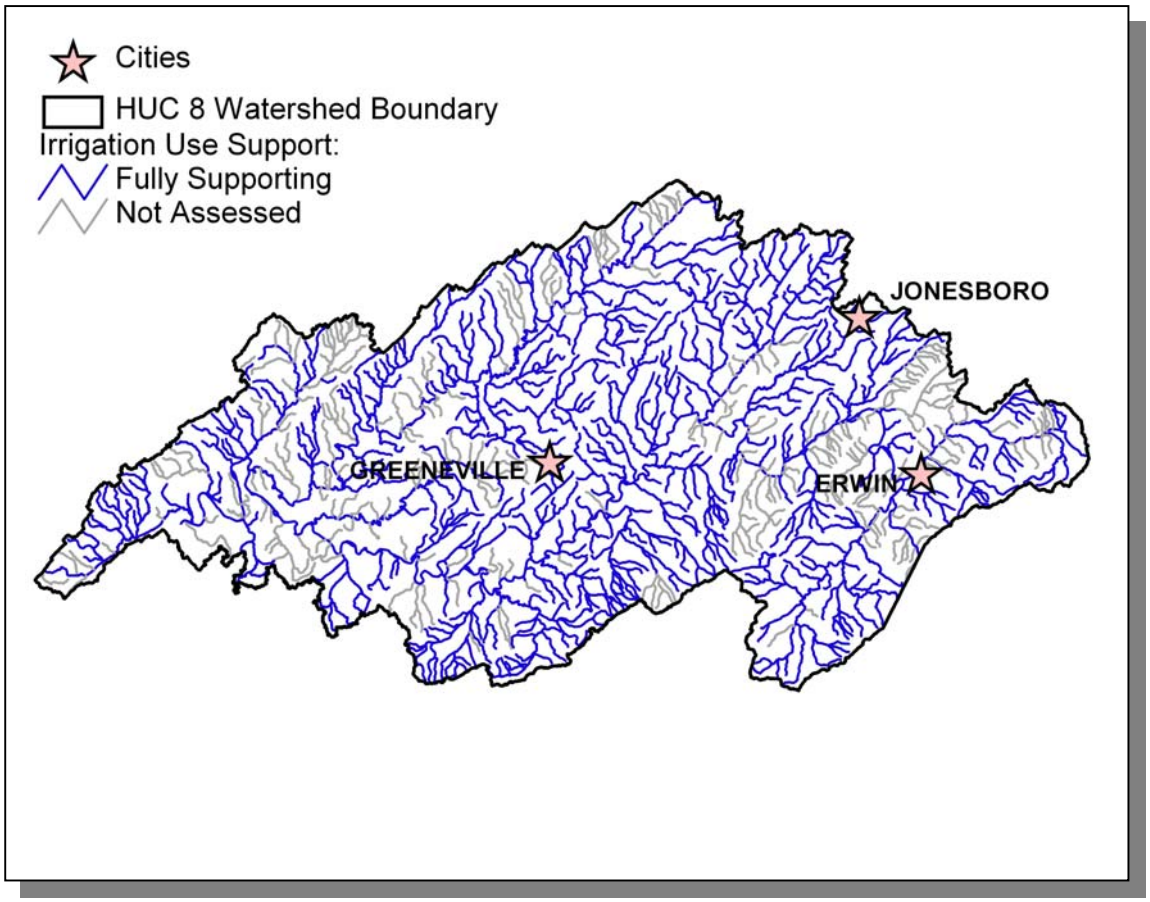

Figure 3-14. Irrigation Use Support Attainment in the Nolichucky River Watershed. *Assessment data are based on the 2006 Water Quality Assessment. Water Quality Standards are described at http://www.state.tn.us/sos/rules/1200/1200-04/1200-04.htm. Locations of Erwin, Greenville, and Jonesboro are shown for reference. More information is provided in Appendix III.*

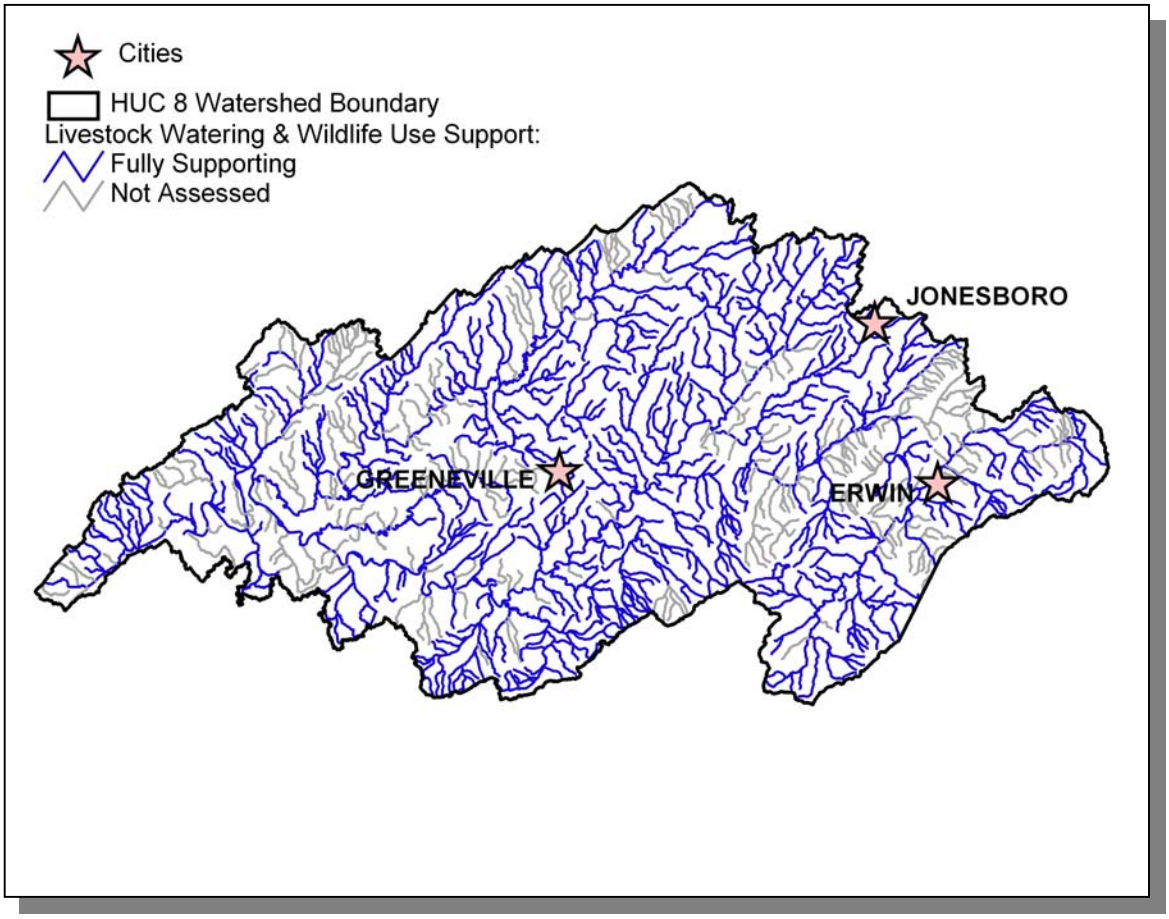

Figure 3-15. Livestock Watering and Wildlife Use Support Attainment in the Nolichucky River Watershed. *Assessment data are based on the 2006 Water Quality Assessment. Water Quality Standards are described at http://www.state.tn.us/sos/rules/1200/1200-04/1200-04.htm. Locations of Erwin, Greenville, and Jonesboro are shown for reference. More information is provided in Appendix III.*

3.3.B. Use Impairment Summary.

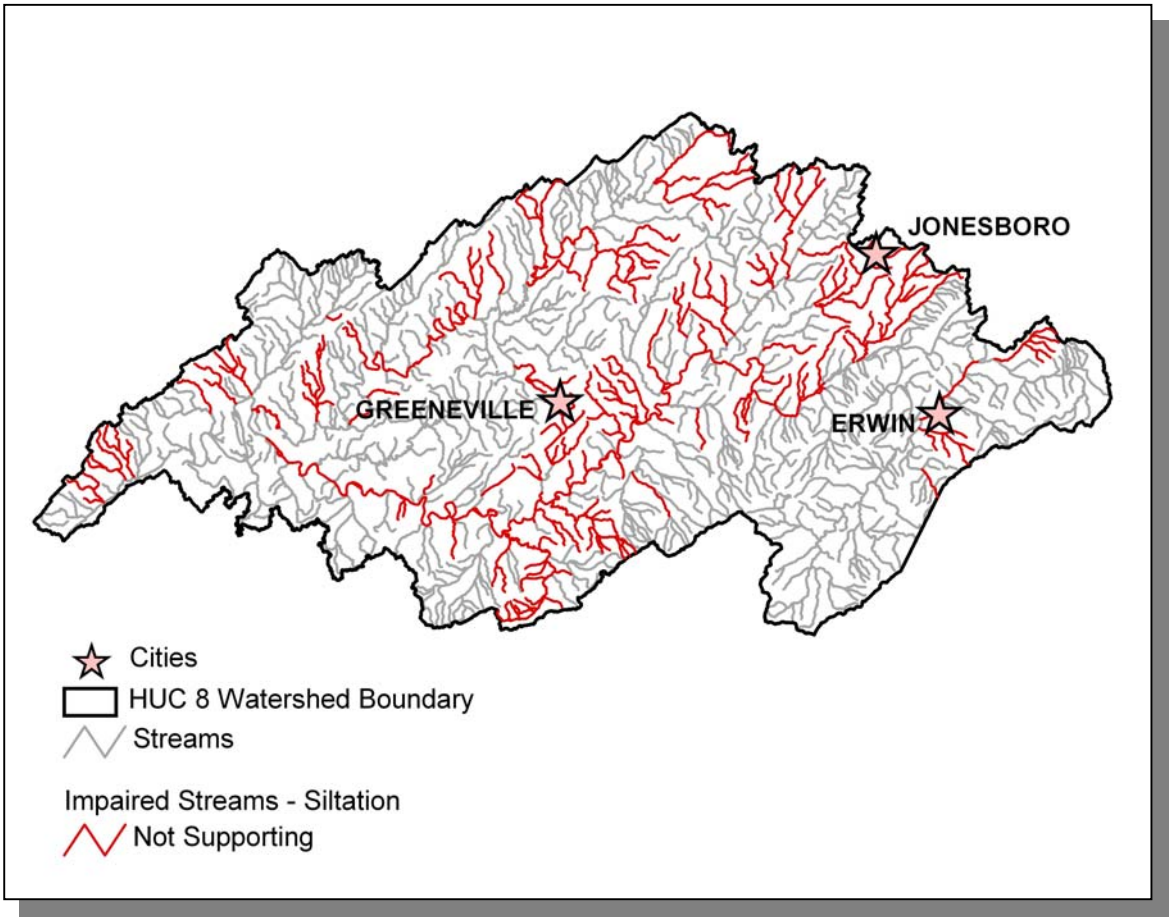

Figure 3-16. Impaired Streams Due to Siltation in the Nolichucky River Watershed. *Assessment data are based on the 2006 Water Quality Assessment. Locations of Erwin, Greenville, and Jonesboro are shown for reference. More information is provided in Appendix III.*

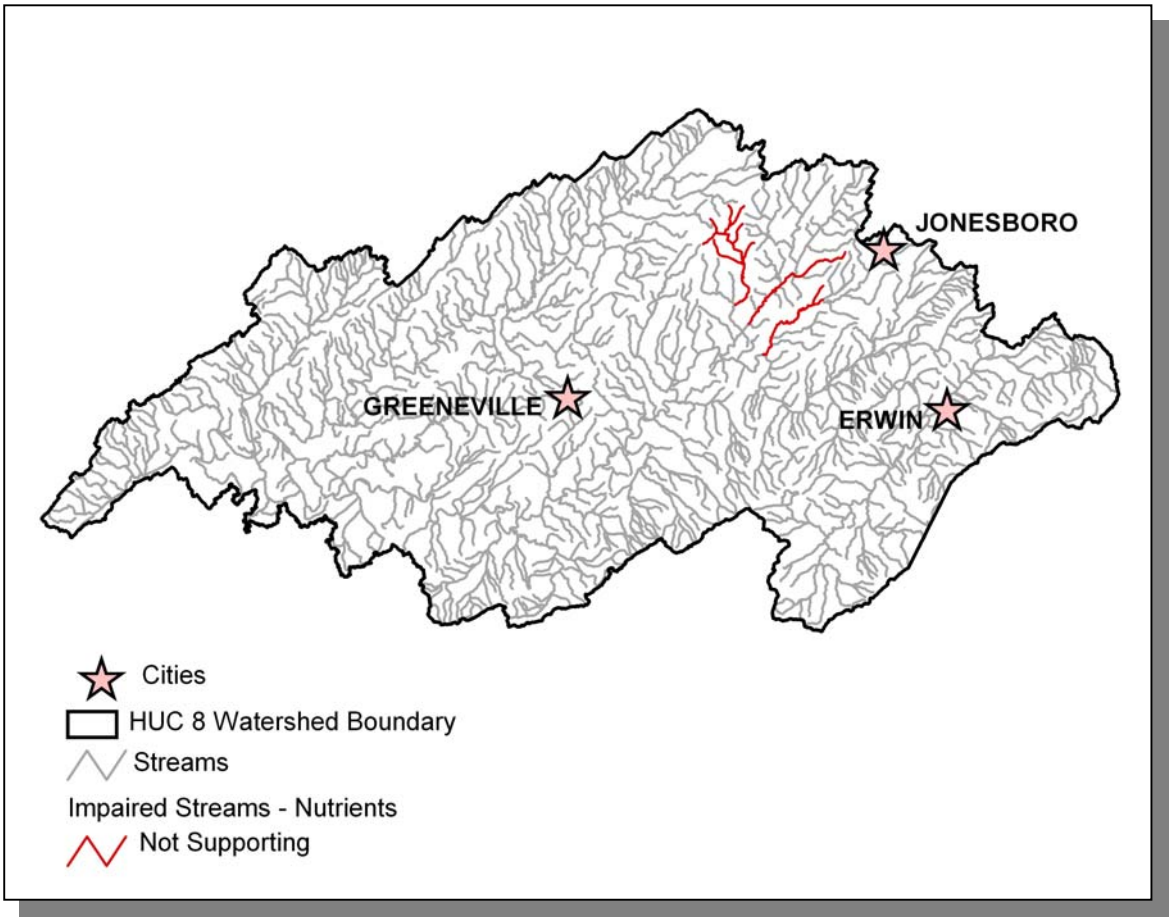

Figure 3-17. Impaired Streams Due to Nutrients in the Nolichucky River Watershed. *Assessment data are based on the 2006 Water Quality Assessment. Locations of Erwin, Greenville, and Jonesboro are shown for reference. More information is provided in Appendix III.*

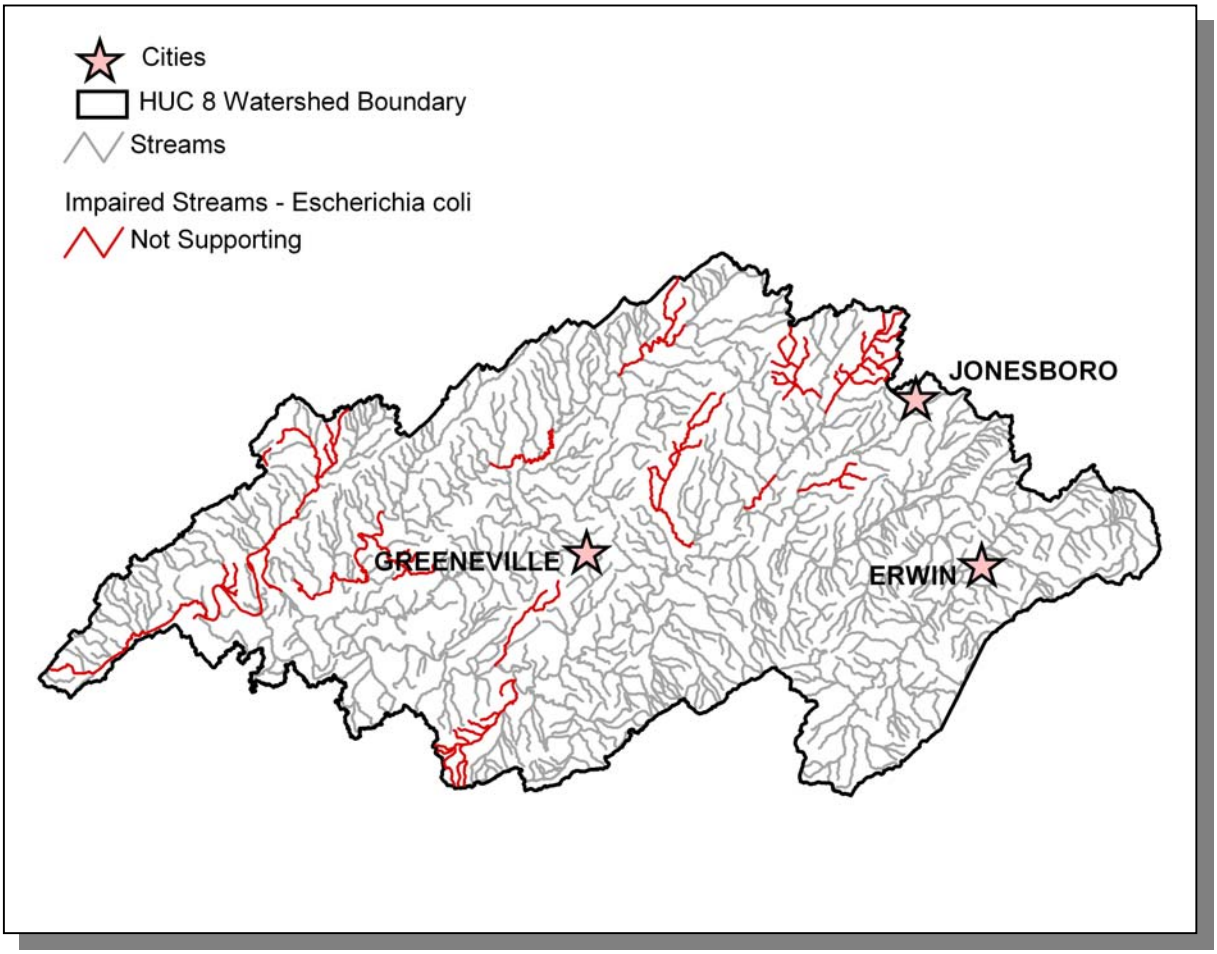

Figure 3-18. Impaired Streams Due to Other Escherichia coli in the Nolichucky River Watershed. *Assessment data are based on the 2006 Water Quality Assessment. Locations of Erwin, Greenville, and Jonesboro are shown for reference. More information is provided in Appendix III.*

The listing of impaired waters that do not support designated uses (the 303(d) list) is traditionally submitted to EPA every two years. A copy of the most recent 303(d) list may be downloaded from:
http://tennessee.gov/environment/wpc/publications/303d2006.pdf

Since the year 2002, the 303(d) list is compiled by using EPA's ADB (Assessment Database) software developed by RTI (Research Triangle Institute). The ADB allows for a more detailed segmentation of waterbodies. While this results in a more accurate description of the status of water quality, it makes it difficult when comparing water quality assessments with and without using this tool. A more meaningful comparison will be between assessments completed in Year 3 of each succeeding five-year cycle.

The ADB was used to create maps that illustrate water quality. These maps may be viewed on TDEC's homepage at http://gis2.memphis.edu/wpc.