

LCRA Clean Rivers Program Steering Committee meeting
Onion Creek Watershed
May 7, 2009
McKinney Falls State Park

The meeting began at 10 a.m. with introductions.

David Cowan gave an overview of LCRA and the Texas Clean Rivers Program, a water quality and public outreach program funded by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

David explained that the goal of the meeting was to determine if there was enough interest to form a stakeholders group in the Onion Creek watershed. And, if so, how Clean Rivers could provide support for the group. There was some discussion about other watershed-based stakeholder groups in Central Texas, including the Austin to Bastrop River Corridor and the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership.

After an overview of the geography of the Onion Creek watershed, the following presentations were made:

Mateo Scoggins and Chris Herrington with the City of Austin presented data from biological and chemical monitoring performed by the city between 1993 and 2008. Results from the study indicate that water quality in Onion Creek is good, but with changes associated with development, such as continuous wastewater effluent discharge, there is potential for water quality degradation.

Dr. Barbara Mahler with the U.S. Geological Survey made a presentation on the hydrology of the Onion Creek watershed, including Bear, Little Bear, Williamson and Slaughter creeks. Her discussion included a summary of USGS gage sites that monitor the flow and, in some cases, water chemistry. Dr. Mahler also described an ongoing USGS study funded by multiple agencies to determine the effects of storm water on water quality in Barton Springs. Parameters to be measured in the study include nutrients, bacteria and trace elements and emerging contaminants such as pharmaceuticals.

Dr. Brian Smith with the Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer Conservation District discussed the impact of Onion Creek on the aquifer. A study conducted in the 1970's indicated that 35-40% of the recharge to the Edwards Aquifer comes from Onion Creek due to sink holes and other large recharge features located in the Onion Creek watershed. Dr. Smith showed images of Antioch Cave, where a TCEQ-funded project to install a "flapper valve" was installed to keep pollutants from entering the aquifer during storm events.

After the presentations the group discussed possible future initiatives in the Onion Creek watershed. The following points were made:

- Any initiative should be stakeholder driven
- The primary mission of an Onion Creek watershed group should be protection of the Onion Creek Watershed, but recognizing the degree of interaction between surface water and groundwater, the group should work with appropriate agencies regarding aquifer protection
- Goals for the group should be clearly defined – goals suggested during the meeting included
 - ◆ Ensure adequate protection of surface water quality is in place
 - ◆ Overlapping jurisdictions are commonplace. Help identify responsible entities and communicate issues among them
 - ◆ Raise the level of awareness regarding water quality issues in the Onion Creek Watershed through outreach efforts
 - ◆ Encourage stewardship in the watershed by advocating for best management practices, easements and other protective efforts
 - ◆ Be proactive to avoid a total maximum daily load project
 - ◆ Help implement the regional water quality plan
 - ◆ Consolidate goals & recommendations of past plans and make data available through a web page
 - ◆ Communicate monitoring results and regulatory activities such as nutrient criteria
 - ◆ Learn from similar groups/activities in other watersheds