

Meeting Summary
Lower Basin Steering Committee
Bay City Civic Center, Bay City, Texas
March 1, 2005

Welcome and Introductions – Lisa Hatzenbuehler, LCRA Water Resource Protection

Ms. Hatzenbuehler opened the meeting by introducing County Commissioners James Gibson and Percy Carroll and Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) staff.

Clean Rivers Program Introduction and State of the Basin – David Cowan, CRP Coordinator

Mr. Cowan gave a brief overview of the program history and funding. He discussed the 303(d) list – the list of water bodies that do not meet State Standards. The 2004 list includes Caney Creek and the Tres Palacios River; two water bodies in the lower Colorado River basin that have been identified as not meeting standards for bacteria and dissolved oxygen.

Comments/Questions: None

State of the Bay – John Wedig

Mr. Wedig gave information on LCRA's Bay Monitoring Program, including background, history, and special studies in progress including the Freshwater Inflow Needs Study and the San Antonio Water System environmental studies. He also gave an update on proposed US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) activities in the area.

Comments/Questions: Numerous comments and questions followed regarding USACE activities regarding potential changes to Parker's Cut, Mitchell's Cut, and Southwest Cut. Discussion included positive and negative impacts from closing the cuts, subsidence of East Bay, health of marshes and delta formation.

Desalinization Activities in Texas – David Meeseey, Texas Water Development Board

Mr. Meeseey discussed three pilot desalination studies initiated by Governor Perry including findings and recommendations. He explained current desalination technology, where it is used today, and funding considerations.

Comments/Questions: Questions and discussion included disposal of desalination waste products, cost factors, and conservations measures.

Tidal Stream UAA - Winston Denton, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Mr. Denton discussed a Use Attainability Analysis (UAA) being performed by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). The study, which was funded by Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, looked at several coastal streams that do not meet their standard for aquatic life use – historical data show that the waterbodies routinely have less than 5 mg/L dissolved oxygen. Mr. Denton described the monitoring that took place on Cow Bayou, Tres Palacios and Garcitas Creek in 2004 as part of the study. A report and recommendations are expected late in 2005.

Comments/Questions: None

Caney Creek UAA – Patricia Wise, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

Ms. Wise discussed a Use Attainability Analysis being performed on Caney Creek by Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Similar to the tidal creeks mentioned above, the Caney Creek UAA will identify causes of low dissolved oxygen in the above tidal portion of Caney Creek. The state will then make a determination as to whether the current standard is appropriate or if it needs to be downgraded from high to intermediate or if a Total Maximum Daily Load study should be performed.

Comments/Questions: Questions and discussion included differences between standards for tidal and non-tidal portions of water bodies, influence of land use on water quality, and flood control for Caney Creek. The suggestion was made to perform a comparative study between Caney Creek and Peyton or Live Oak Creek to evaluate the impact of different land uses on water quality.

Tres Palacios Illegal Dumping Campaign – Ed Schulze, Matagorda County Environmental Health Department

Mr. Schulze discussed illegal dumping issues in Matagorda County and current grant-funded efforts to combat the problem including education, public outreach and enforcement activities. He also introduced Richard Gonzales with the Gulf of Mexico Foundation and described the cleanup efforts Mr. Gonzales has spearheaded in partnership with local school districts.

Comments/Questions: Discussions included costs associated with illegal dumping and community cleanups, including availability of collection facilities. Members also discussed the use of waste concrete for riprap.

Upper Colorado River Salinity Study/ Wastewater/land Application Permits in the Lower Basin – Alicia Reinmund, LCRA

Ms. Reinmund presented information on a project in the upper Colorado River basin to identify and plug abandoned oil wells. Abandoned, unplugged oil wells are a source of chlorides and nitrates that contaminate surface waters in the Concho and upper Colorado River basins. The Colorado River Municipal Water District worked with TCEQ and University of Texas' Bureau of Economic Geology to survey large areas of land for chloride seeps using aerial electromagnetic (AEM) technology – the AEM survey will be used to locate abandoned wells that can then be prioritized for plugging.

Ms. Reinmund also gave an update on wastewater discharge permit applications submitted to TCEQ from the Colorado River basin in 2004. Twenty six applications were reviewed by LCRA. Of those 26, 13 were noted by LCRA as being concerns for groundwater or surface waters.

Comments/Questions: Discussions centered around sludge application to lands adjacent to rivers and streams. Several Steering Committee members indicated they were unaware that it was legal to dispose of sewage sludge by spreading it onto land.

Ms. Reinmund closed by saying that volunteer water quality monitors are needed in the area for the Colorado River Watch Network.

Meeting Adjourned 2:30pm

Attendees

Brad Ramsey, City of El Campo
Muriel Tipps, Sargent Area Chamber of Commerce
Dennis A. Mueck, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
Harold Graf, Wharton County Soil and Water Conservation District
Willie Younger, Texas A & M Marine Advisory Service
Jim Gann, Matagorda County Drainage District #1
Robin Cypher, TCEQ Surface Water Quality Monitoring
Patricia Wise, TCEQ Clean Rivers Program
Leon Cranek, Public
James Gibson, Matagorda County Commissioner
Ed Schulze, Matagorda County Environmental Health Department
David Meesey, Texas Water Development Board
Percy Carroll, Matagorda County Commissioner
Richard Gonzales, Gulf of Mexico Foundation
Billie Clays, Sargent Area Chamber of Commerce
Haskell Simon, Public/SB1
Mary C. Smith, Soil and Water Conservation District
Stephen Deiss, USDA Natural Resource Conservation District
Aaron Wendt, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board
David Cowan, LCRA
Kathleen Ligon, LCRA
Alicia Reinmund, LCRA
Lisa Hatzenbuehler, LCRA
John Wedig, LCRA
Betsy Terrel, LCRA