

Clean Rivers Program Steering Committee Meeting Notes
October 14, 2008
Matagorda Bay Nature Center

Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Clean Rivers Program (CRP) Steering Committee Meeting convened at 9:40 am on October 14, 2008 at the Matagorda Nature Park in Matagorda, Texas. David Cowan, the LCRA Clean Rivers Program Coordinator welcomed the group, reviewed the agenda and began stakeholder introductions. Mr. Cowan introduced the speakers which appeared in the order listed below.

Update from the Environmental Flows Stakeholder Workgroup - Presented by Haskell Simon

Mr. Simon began his presentation with a history of flows on the lower Colorado River into Matagorda Bay. He summarized floods, construction, log jams and other events that have contributed to water quality in the river over the past 100 years. Mr. Simon detailed many studies that have been conducted in an effort to determine how much fresh water is required to maintain the health of Matagorda Bay.

He also described the newly formed Environmental Flows Advisory Workgroup (EFAW), a nine-member panel composed of elected and appointed officials from state government. The workgroup, which was created by the 80th Texas Legislature, is charged with holding public hearings and studying policy implications to balance the demands on water resources of the state. Mr. Simon explained that the EFAW will appoint stakeholders from each river basin and bay system to provide local input into the process.

The stakeholder groups will be made up of individuals interested in water quality issues, water associations, environmental organizations, government entities and agricultural industry. He encouraged steering committee members to consider nominating themselves or others to serve on the EFAW stakeholder group. More information about the EFAW can be found at

http://www.tceq.state.tx.us/permitting/water_supply/water_rights/eflows/group.html

Monitoring Matagorda Bay – Presented by Bryan Cook, LCRA

Mr. Cook gave an overview of LCRA's monitoring activities in Matagorda Bay, including eight continuous monitoring stations that collect temperature and salinity on an hourly basis. Mr. Cook discussed freshwater inflow into the bay system and illustrated how long-term salinity and temperature trends. He discussed how water quality in the Bay changes based on freshwater inflow and the weather.

Mr. Cook gave an overview of the LCRA/SAWS Water Project (LSWP) Bay Health Studies with a focus on the biological monitoring component of the study. Mr. Cook

presented maps, photos and data regarding oyster mapping and sampling efforts near the Colorado River delta and the importance of oysters as an indicator of bay health. The presentation ended with a discussion of the marsh sampling effort which includes the collection of juvenile shrimp, crabs and finfish with an emphasis on the importance of the marsh habitat for a healthy Matagorda Bay. More information about the Matagorda Bay Health Studies can be found at

http://www.lcra.org/lswp/about/study/matagorda_bay.html

2008 Water Quality Inventory and the 303(d) List – Presented by Robin Cypher, TCEQ

Ms. Cypher described the 2008 Texas Water Quality Inventory and 303 (d) List, a biannual assessment performed by TCEQ that reports on water quality conditions in state waters. The report is based on statewide monitoring performed by TCEQ and Clean Rivers Program partners and is submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency for approval.

After her presentation Ms. Cypher was asked whose responsibility it was to regulate and ensure that water quality is returned to compliance with standards. Ms. Cypher indicated it is the responsibility of TCEQ and the stakeholders in areas where Texas Surface Water Quality Standards are not met. The 2008 Water Quality Inventory and 303(d) List can be viewed at

<http://www.tceq.state.tx.us/compliance/monitoring/water/quality/data/08twqi/twqi08.html>

2008 Colorado River Basin Highlights Report - Presented by David Cowan, LCRA

Mr. Cowan described the 2008 Basin Highlights Report, the annual water quality report produced by LCRA. He explained LCRA's approach for the 2008 report was to focus on the twenty water bodies that do not meet Texas Surface Water Quality Standards and to look deeper into the issue to determine what may be creating the water quality problems.

Mr. Cowan explained that he interviewed citizens that lived in the watersheds, reviewed wastewater permits and self reporting data and used Google Earth to investigate land use in the area surrounding the water body. Mr. Cowan showed aerial images of Caney Creek, which is known to have elevated levels of bacteria. The images included water monitoring sites, subdivisions, farm land and other uses in the area. Based on the information provided, a discussion followed about potential causes of water quality issues in this area.

Mr. Cowan asked Steering Committee members to provide their input on where LCRA's Clean Rivers Program should focus resources in the lower basin. He explained that the 2008 Water Quality Inventory identified Caney Creek, Colorado River and Tres Palacios Creek as not meeting Texas Surface Water Quality Standards. The group participated in the prioritization exercise by indicating which one of the three water body they felt needed to be addressed the most. Steering Committee member indicated that the Tres Palacios River above tidal was their priority, followed closely by the above-tidal portion of Caney Creek.

Caney Creek Update – Presented by Carter Miska, Caney Creek Conservation Foundation

Mr. Miska described the mission and priorities of the Caney Creek Foundation. He updated the committee on projects being conducted by the foundation, which include a park, watershed cleanups and research. Caney Creek Park, located in Wharton, will include hike and bike trails, a greenbelt area, fishing area, habitat protection and restoration and construction of a nature center.

The first Caney Creek watershed cleanup was held earlier this year. Participating communities included Wharton, Bolin, Pledger and Van Vleck. The clean up was funded through a grant from the Gulf of Mexico Foundation.

Another on-going project is the Caney Creek Research Site in Pledger, Texas. The site will include habitat protection and restoration, species protection and controlling and eliminating invasive and non-native species.

Future plans include obtaining funding and partners for more projects in the watershed; target areas in the tidal portions of the Caney Creek watershed and developing a public outreach program.

Water Quality Issues in Texas – Presented by Richard Eyster, Texas Department of Agriculture

Mr. Eyster began his presentation with a slide show of floods, fires, deserts and the changing Texas landscape. He talked briefly about sampling for pesticides in surface waters and stated that, with the exception of some legacy pesticides and isolated groundwater contamination, pesticides are currently not a problem in surface water in Texas.

Mr. Eyster continued his presentation with a discussion on the rural and urban landscapes and their use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers. He stressed the need to select the right chemical for the job at hand, follow directions and leave buffer strips and other best management practices (BMPs) along creeks when applying these products. He detailed various BMPs including conservation tillage, contoured buffer strips, filter strips, and constructed wetlands.

Mr. Eyster continued his presentation by talking about bacteria in Texas' waters. He stated that bacteria is used to protect contact recreation uses and that over 200 stream segments in the state do not meet Texas Surface Water Quality Standards because of elevated levels of bacteria. He listed potential sources of bacteria contamination including point and nonpoint sources. He also summarized the current TCEQ proposal for adopting less stringent standards for water bodies not used for contact recreation.

Mr. Eyster continued his presentation with a discussion on the impact of feral hogs and the feral hog program.

Proposed Tiered Bacteria limits – Presented by Patricia Wise, TCEQ

Ms. Wise began her presentation with a brief overview of the 2000 Texas Surface Water Quality Standards with a focus on bacteria standards. She explained that bacteria standards were developed to protect contact recreation in water bodies. But many water bodies that have been identified for not meeting that standard are small, intermittent streams that may not be used for contact recreation.

Ms. Wise described how the Surface Water Quality Standards Advisory Workgroup (SWQSAW), a group composed of water associations, agricultural interests, engineering firms, environmental organizations, consumer groups and government entities, met several times in the last few years to develop a holistic approach to bacteria standards. She said the workgroup has proposed a tiered approach, offering more stringent standards to water bodies that are known to support recreation such as swimming.

The proposed standards have resulted in a number of comments from stakeholders. TCEQ is currently addressing the comments. Additional information on the advisory work group and the proposed standards can be found at http://www.tceq.state.tx.us/permitting/water_quality/stakeholders/swqsawg.html

OSSF Challenges in Matagorda County – Presented by Ruben Gonzales, Matagorda County Environmental Health Department

Mr. Gonzales said Matagorda County has been working to improve their processes for managing on-site sewage facilities. He spoke of the challenges in ensuring compliance with state and county rules in older subdivisions where people cannot afford to pay to update their septic systems.

Mr. Gonzales said that improvements have been made in some of the rural areas because some subdivisions with old or no septic systems have come under the service of new municipal utility districts (MUDs), which provide sewage service. He also stated that houses with septic systems within city limits are required to switch from conventional on-site sewage facility systems to aerobic systems.

Mr. Gonzales finished his presentation by talking about the county's new requirement for a minimum lot size for the installation of on-site sewage facilities and a coordinated permitting effort that requires a septic system application prior to receiving a building permit.

Closing

Mr. Cowan thanked Steering Committee members for the participation and asked them to fill out a meeting evaluation sheet. The meeting was adjourned at 1:20 PM.

Attending:

Leon Cranek, Public
Lorraine Cranek, Public
Robin Cypher, TCEQ
Robbie Davis, USDA-NRCS
Stephen Deiss, USDA-NRCS
Winston Denton, TPWD – Coastal Fisheries
Matagorda County Commissioner George Deshotels
Richard Eyster, Texas Department of Agriculture
James Gann, Public
Ruben Gonzales, Matagorda County Environmental Health Dept.
Brian Koch, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board
Carter Miska, City of Wharton
John O’Connell, Sea Grant
Ed Polasek, Public
Mrs. Ed Polasek, Public
Brad Ramsey, City of El Campo
Roberta Ripke, Communities Foundation of Texas
Haskell Simon, Region K Water Planning
Muriel Tipps, Sargent Chamber of Commerce
Patricia Wise, TCEQ
Willie Younger, TAMU Sea Grant

Donna Clendennen, LCRA
Bryan Cook, LCRA
David Cowan, LCRA