

Meeting Summary
Lower basin Steering Committee Meeting
Bay City Civic Center, Bay City, Texas
November 19, 2003

Purpose: To educate new Steering Committee members, provide program status to current members and receive input on implementation projects in the lower basin.

LCRA Water Resource Protection Manager Lisa Hatzenbuehler opened the meeting by thanking Steering Committee members for being involved. She stressed that though water quality in the in the Colorado River basin is good, they should continue to be vigilant in their efforts to protect the water resources of the Colorado River and its tributaries.

LCRA Clean Rivers Program Coordinator David Cowan briefed the group on the history of the program – including assessment of CRP fees and how the fees have changed since the program began in 1991. During the 04-05 contract period, LCRA is scheduled to receive \$845,000 from TCEQ, \$300,000 of which will go to the Upper Colorado River Authority (UCRA) and the Colorado River Municipal Water District (CRMWD) to achieve CRP objectives in the upper basin.

LCRA Water Quality Programs Supervisor Alicia Reinmund gave a presentation of the Clean Rivers Program budget as it compares to LCRA's water quality budget – pointing out that LCRA leverages its budget with CRP funds to get the most out of funding opportunities. Patricia Wise, TCEQ CRP Project Manager agreed that LCRA puts a tremendous amount of work and in-kind contributions into the Clean Rivers Program.

Discussion turned from budget to data collection when a SC Member asked what the CRP data was used for. The explanation – it is used to assess water quality. Every two years the TCEQ performs a statewide water quality assessment based on data collected throughout the state – 80% of those data are collected by CRP partners. This assessment identifies troubled or impaired waterbodies and places them on the Clean Water Act 303(d) list, where they are scheduled for action by the state. That action will be either a total maximum daily load project (TMDL) or a use attainability analysis (UAA). The 2004 303(d) will be made public by the TCEQ soon.

There are currently no TMDL's being performed in the lower Colorado River basin. There are, however, two ongoing UAAs in the lower basin. UAAs, which often preclude a TMDL project, are smaller scaled assessments of factors affecting use attainment. TCEQ is performing a UAA on Caney Creek, and TPWD is performing one on the Tres Palacios River. The Caney Creek project is investigating possible causes of low dissolved oxygen in the above tidal portion of the creek. TCEQ monitored six sites for two weeks during late summer 2003. Results from that UAA are expected in 2005.

The UAA being performed on the Tres Palacios River is also in response to low levels of dissolved oxygen. There is currently no generally accepted method for determining the health of tidal streams exists. Data from this and other coastal UAAs, will be used by TPWD and TCEQ develop a method of determining the health of tidally influenced streams. The 2-year UAA began in August 2002. Results from the study will be available when the project is complete.

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A request for ideas, projects, and proposals spawned a discussion of regional projects that have been submitted and approved by TCEQ. The two projects that were approved were Saltcedar Outreach and Coordinated Monitoring:

Saltcedar Project

Saltcedar is an invasive plant that has the potential to affect water quantity and water quality in regions where it invades. The plant consumes large amounts of water through evapotranspiration, and because of its physiology it precipitates salts that increase chlorides in soil and surface water. Since saltcedar has had a profound effect on O.H. Ivie Reservoir in the upper Colorado River basin, CRP funds were requested to coordinate an education outreach project with Texas Cooperative Extension.

The project will target landowners in nine counties in the Lake Buchanan watershed where limited numbers of the plant have been spotted. CRP funds will be used to educate landowners in identification and control of the plant, as well as the environmental impacts when saltcedar invades riparian areas. TCEQ has granted \$10,000.00 towards this project. Work is scheduled to begin immediately.

Coordinated Monitoring Project

In FY 2003, LCRA developed an Internet-based application to coordinate water quality monitoring activities. The prototype, which proved to be very effective, was tested by multiple agencies in the Colorado River basin. It has been so successful that TCEQ approved \$15,500 to expand the program statewide. The statewide program will be administered through LCRA, but it will provide an accurate account of water quality monitoring by TCEQ regional offices and CRP contractors throughout Texas.

Matagorda County Environmental Health Dept Director Ed Schulze updated the committee on the Tres Palacios Illegal Dumping Campaign. "NO DUMPING" signs with Crimestoppers tip line phone numbers have been installed at bridges and other dump sites in precincts 3 and 4. The Health Department has responded to one tip from the Crimestoppers tip line. There have been several investigations, but not enough evidence for prosecution.

Tres Palacios Illegal Dumping project initiated discussion about illegal dumping in other areas of the lower basin. It was generally agreed upon that illegal dumping is a problem that should be looked into. According to Ed Shulze, EPA is considering outlawing domestic outdoor burning; an action that may trigger an increase in illegal dumping. Ed stated that solid waste funding is allocated the same as water quality fees, with the largest generators get the biggest chunk of the fees. So much of the money generated from solid waste fees go to urban areas. However the cost to clean up illegal dumping is paid by the county. In Leonard Lamar's precinct, \$30,000 is spent annually to clean up illegal dumping.

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Steering Committee members asked if LCRA could help resolve the illegal dumping. In response, LCRA will look into forming a locally lead workgroup to investigate the problem and develop solutions to the problem.

LCRA Aquatic Scientist Jerry Guajardo gave an update on golden algae, an organism that was responsible for several major fish kills in Texas in 2003. The organism blooms most frequently in water with high chlorides and high pH. When it blooms, it releases toxins that affect fish and bivalves. Signs of a bloom may include presence of foam lake shores, fish with bleeding gills, blood in the fins and the water may take on a golden color.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is the state agency responsible for investigating and tracking fish kills. They blamed golden algae blooms for fish kills on E.V. Spence Reservoir and O.H. Ivie Reservoir in the upper basin in 2003. No golden algae have been identified in the lower Colorado River basin.

David Meesey with the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) presented information on the Governor's Seawater Desalination Project. The TWDB has \$1.5 million to perform a feasibility study of desalination on the Texas coast. Three potential sites have been identified for the pilot project; Freeport, Corpus Christi and Brownsville. If current plans are carried out, the desal plant would use membrane technology and reverse osmosis to provide fresh water for industrial and municipal uses. Discussion included the effect desalination would have on the aquatic life and how spoils from a desalination facility would be disposed.

Texas Cooperative Extension (TCE) Agent, Rick Jahns presented findings from a nonpoint source study performed on cropland in the Nueces River basin. The Odem Ranch Watershed study looked at pesticides and nutrients collected during seven stormwater events from 1996-1999. Event mean concentrations (EMC) were calculated for multiple parameters. The maximum event mean concentration values for runoff from the watershed during this study was less than the Texas State Water Quality Standards for the parameters studied. Discussion stemming from the presentation included the need for Texas farmers to experiment with no-til agriculture practices and the economic challenges facing Wharton County rice farmers. 41,000 acres of Rice was produced in 2003, in 2002 60,000 were produced. Rick suggested that rice farmers look into alternatives such as wheat or sugar cane.

Jena Golightly with Phillips Petroleum updated the Steering Committee on the status of a pending water quality permit for the Sweeney Refining facility. The draft permit is currently under review by TCEQ and is available for review at the local public library. The public can provide input on the permit to TCEQ until December 4, 2003. According to the draft permit Phillips Petroleum cannot meet selenium levels limits required to discharge into Linville Bayou. They are proposing to discharge effluent into the Brazos River basin. Phillips feels confident the permit will be approved and they have already

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begun construction of the 25 mile pipeline, which will carry the effluent to the discharge point. The pipeline is expected to be complete by March 2004.

It was noted that the relationship with Phillips Petroleum and the community has been very good and they desire to keep it that way. There have been no for public meetings on the permit, however a public meeting may be requested by the general public.

General discussion on illegal dumping and a Corps of Engineers dredging project took place until 2:30 PM when the meeting was adjourned.