

LCRA Clean Rivers Program
Mid-Central Basin Water Quality Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
April 21, 2016
LCRA Redbud Center
Austin, Texas

David Cowan, LCRA Clean Rivers Program (CRP) coordinator, welcomed 23 attendees to the CRP Water Quality Advisory Committee meeting on Thursday, April 21, 2016 at 1:30 p.m.

Cowan introduced Bryan Cook, LCRA Water Quality Protection manager, who presented an overview of the LCRA 2015 Water Management Plan (WMP). Cook explained the history of the water management plan and gave an overview of the changes that were incorporated into the 2015 WMP, focusing primarily on environmental flow criteria. The WMP is updated periodically as warranted by changing conditions and updated science.

LCRA Colorado River Watch Network volunteer monitor Roger Kew asked about new changes and/or triggers included in the newly approved WMP. Mary Ann Neely with the City of Austin (COA) Environmental Board asked how the WMP requirements have changed over time and how recreational opportunities in the Highland Lakes are balanced with habitat needs in the Colorado River below Austin. She also asked if the new off-channel reservoir in the lower basin will impact habitat requirements. Cook explained that the plan takes into consideration inflows, storage, instream flows and drought levels, and changing conditions and so is more responsive in determining how to manage interruptible demands.

Lisa Benton, LCRA Water Quality coordinator, gave a presentation on multi-agency efforts to locate freshwater mussels in Texas, with emphasis on candidate species for potential federal listing with the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Craig Smith, vice-president of the Board of Directors of the Barton Springs-Edwards Aquifer Conservation District (BSEACD), asked about the status of invasive zebra mussels in the Colorado River basin and the difference between native and non-native mussels. Benton responded that no zebra mussels have been found in the Colorado basin, and explained that native freshwater mussels burrow into the sediments and are beneficial, whereas invasive zebra mussels attach to the substrate and can cause significant damage to the ecosystem and any infrastructure in the water. Brent Lyles, executive director of the Colorado River Alliance, asked if listing candidate species would change the WMP and asked if there are research efforts to identify other plant or animal species in the basin. Benton responded that she does not believe a listing would prompt an update to the WMP; however, LCRA is interested in studying the relationship between mussel habitat availability at current WMP flow regimes.

Liz Johnston of the COA Watershed Protection Department stated that COA staff has not found candidate mussels in areas where they have surveyed in Austin waterways and asked if mussels had been found in other tributaries. Benton explained that Texas fatmuckets have been found in Onion Creek near State Highway 71. Lonnie Moore, president of Protect Lake Travis Association, asked if pollutants are detrimental to mussels to which Benton responded that ammonia and copper are particularly harmful.

Open topic roundtable discussion continued with conversations about mussel habitat; applied research on pollutants and flow tolerances; the need for law makers to consider connectivity of surface and groundwater when creating habitat protection rules; feasibility of desalination of groundwater by

BSEACD at the Texas Disposal Systems site in Creedmoor; the potential use of groundwater to provide freshwater flows near the mouth of the Colorado River; and direct potable re-use of effluent as a water conservation method. A short break was taken after the roundtable discussions concluded.

Cowan reconvened the group at 3:07 and introduced Chris Herrington, Water Resource Evaluation Section manager at the COA Watershed Protection Department. Herrington gave a presentation about the ongoing regional stakeholder process to address land application and beneficial re-use of treated wastewater effluent. He explained how the current rules for water reuse could be modified to minimize impacts of surface water discharges in ecologically sensitive areas such as aquifer recharge zones. On March 14, 2016, COA submitted a rule making petition to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) that offers flexible permitting options to municipalities and other dischargers. More information can be found at the [COA website](#).

Faith Hambleton, project manager for the TCEQ Nonpoint Source (NPS) Management Program, gave a presentation on various watershed plans and projects available to address and mitigate nonpoint source pollution. Mary Ann Neely asked if watershed protection plans can be used to enhance waterbodies on the Clean Water Act 303(d) List instead of using a total maximum daily load (TMDL) project. Hambleton replied that the implementation plans can apply to 303(d) listed water bodies; however, they must be considered on a case-by-case basis. Megan Henson with the TCEQ NPS program stated that TCEQ is developing a document that will clarify appropriate use of TMDLs and watershed protection plans.

Announcements and Upcoming Events - David Cowan announced that the South Llano River 700 Springs Ranch tour originally scheduled for April 16 was cancelled due to rainy weather but would likely be rescheduled soon. He also told participants about the Kent Butler Summit in Wimberly and a Hill Country Conservancy fundraiser at Guero's Taco Bar on April 22nd. Bryan Cook announced floodgate operations were beginning at Tom Miller Dam at 4 p.m. due to heavy rainfall and inflows to the Highland Lakes. Floodgate operations were being scheduled for Mansfield Dam. Brent Lyles mentioned there is a Colorado River Alliance bus tour planned for November at the Lane City reservoir site and asked if there would be anything to see. Cook said there could be limitations based on construction safety issues, but offered to help work something out if possible. Lisa Benton asked attendees to respond to an email survey about the meeting to improve future committee meetings.

The meeting concluded at 4:09 p.m.