

LCRA Clean Rivers Program
Lower Basin Water Quality Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
Feb. 4, 2014
Wharton Civic Center
Wharton, Texas

The meeting began at 1 p.m. with 13 stakeholders present. LCRA Clean Rivers Program Coordinator David Cowan began the meeting by welcoming attendees. Each person present then introduced themselves and stated their affiliation.

Cowan began the first presentation by giving an overview of the Clean Rivers Program (CRP) in the Colorado River basin. He explained how the basin has been divided into four different stakeholder regions - Upper, Hill Country, Mid-Central and Lower - and how each region will have a Water Quality Advisory Committee. Each year there will be one meeting held in each of these regions.

Cowan stated that a \$67,894 reduction in LCRA's Clean Rivers Program budget for fiscal year 2014-2015 resulted in discontinuing 17 monitoring sites in the basin. Six of the discontinued sites were located in the lower basin region: on Cummins Creek, Fayette Reservoir, Caney Creek and the Tres Palacios River. Cowan then explained the status of water quality in the region. He said overall water quality is good, especially when compared to other large basins in the state. However, there are seven waterways in the region that have been listed as impaired by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Skull Creek, south of Columbus, and Buckners Creek, west of La Grange, are impaired for dissolved oxygen. The tidally influenced portions of the Colorado River, Tres Palacios River and Caney Creek are impaired for bacteria. The upper reach of Caney Creek has impairments for both bacteria and dissolved oxygen. And the main tributary to Caney Creek, Linnville Bayou, is also impaired for bacteria.

Todd Running, Water Resources Program Manager at the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC), was then introduced to speak about Clean Rivers Program monitoring efforts in the H-GAC region. H-GAC compiles data from several agencies that monitor more than 370 sites. An additional 92 sites are monitored by Texas Stream Team volunteers. Caney Creek and Linnville Bayou were historically monitored by LCRA, but in recent years H-GAC and TCEQ Regional Office staff took up water quality testing on these waterways. Running gave a general overview of water quality in the H-GAC monitoring area, saying approximately 50 percent of stream miles are impaired for bacteria, 24 percent of stream miles are impaired or have a concern regarding dissolved oxygen and 29 percent of stream miles have a nutrient concern. A committee called the Bacteria Implementation Group (BIG) formed in recent years to oversee the development and coordination of the Implementation Plan (I-Plan), which is a plan to remedy high levels of bacteria in waterways identified in Total Maximum Daily Load projects in the Houston region. Running also highlighted the [Water Resources Information Map](#) tool developed by H-GAC to conveniently view watersheds, land cover, monitoring stations, etc., on one interactive map. Running concluded his presentation by giving an update on the Caney Creek Recreational Use Attainability Analysis conducted in 2010.

Bryan Cook, LCRA Supervisor of Water Quality, was then introduced to provide information on how the drought has impacted water quality in the Colorado River basin. Cook began by showing how water flows into the Highland Lakes during 2011, 2012 and 2013 compare to the historical average. Year-end totals show 2013 was the second-lowest year of inflows into the Highland Lakes since the dams were built back in the 1940s. The last three years were the first-, second- and fifth-lowest yearly inflows in the region's history. Cook showed several pictures to demonstrate the effects of the drought throughout the basin. Higher nutrients and less flow in the river downstream of Austin also created an abundance of aquatic vegetation, dominated by the invasive plants hydrilla and water hyacinth. Lastly, Cook highlighted how the drought has impacted Matagorda Bay. He explained how critical flow levels are crucial for maintaining the low-salinity area near the mouth of the Colorado River, which provides habitat for oysters, crabs and other estuarine species. Cook presented graphs showing how flows released into the bay from upstream reservoirs helped decrease the salinity levels in the bay. The late-October flooding in the Austin area also provided much needed inflows into the bay system, bringing salinity levels back down to desirable levels.

The meeting concluded with an open discussion about illegal dumping. The group agreed it is a problem in the region. Many appliances are dumped because they must be drained of fluids before a landfill will accept them and proper disposal is too expensive. Cowan talked about a grant he administered in the early 2000s to combat illegal dumping. He explained that without a constant source of funding cleanups are difficult to organize. He suggested local county environmental departments might have the ability to help. Cowan then thanked all attendees and presenters for participation in the meeting, and the meeting concluded at approximately 3 p.m.