LCRA Clean Rivers Program
Hill Country Water Quality Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
Nov. 21, 2013
Brady National Bank
Brady, Texas

The meeting began shortly after 2 p.m. with 15 members present. Steve Dyer, LCRA's Governmental Affairs representative, and Rob Lindsey, chair of the LCRA Upper Basin Regional Council, welcomed the group. The meeting was held in conjunction with the LCRA Upper Basin Regional Council meeting.

David Cowan, LCRA Clean Rivers Program (CRP) coordinator, began the program by providing an update of the Colorado River Basin CRP budget and planned activities for 2014-2015. There is a $67,894 reduction in the fiscal year 2014-2015 budget, which resulted in discontinuing 17 monitoring sites in the basin. Four of the discontinued sites were located in the Hill Country region and were part of the Routine Biological Monitoring Program. Of the 58 sites currently monitored by LCRA in the basin, 29 are in the Hill Country region. Maps were provided to show attendees where the sites are located.

Cowan said overall water quality is good, but Clear Creek, Brady Creek and the San Saba River are impaired based on data collected by LCRA and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Cowan explained why these are considered impaired and a discussion began about the potential sources of the bacteria impairment in the San Saba River. Del Sears asked if any sampling had been conducted at Mill Creek, a tributary of the San Saba River. Cowan said there had been no monitoring on the Mill Creek tributary. Steve Dyer mentioned the Jordan Cattle Yard in San Saba as a possible source of bacteria, but said runoff controls had been put in place by the yard's owners in recent years to reduce bacteria loading. He said data should be showing improvement. Cowan said more monitoring would need to be done to verify potential sources. He also explained the prospect of a Watershed Protection Plan on the San Saba River and said funding from the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board may be available.

Cowan concluded this portion of the program by presenting the impacts of the drought on water quality. He displayed numerous pictures of rivers and lakes in the upper Colorado River basin with little or no water flow, increased algae growth, exposed lake shorelines and reservoirs reduced to puddles. Water quality data collected since the drought began several years ago indicates increased chloride levels, decreased transparency, and decreased biological diversity in waterways where water flow has reduced or ceased. The fish and macroinvertebrates, however, have shown resilience and have rebounded relatively well since flows have returned in most areas.

Lisa Benton, LCRA Water Quality coordinator, then took the floor to present information about freshwater mussels. She began by explaining the biology of the organisms and their role in the aquatic ecosystem. She also described the life cycle of the mussels and how they depend upon specific host fish in order to maintain their populations. Benton said Central Texas is home to the Texas Fawnsfoot, the

Texas Fatmucket, the Smooth Pimpleback, and the Texas Pimpleback. All four are considered "threatened" by the state of Texas and are candidates to be listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act. Benton also mentioned the False Spike, which was thought to be extinct until 2011, when a researcher found a recently dead specimen in the San Saba River. She shared a map of the critical mussel habitats in the Hill Country region, pointing out waterways the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has declared "Mussel Sanctuaries." These are areas where important populations of rare mussels are located, given extra protections and routinely monitored.

Cowan concluded the program by updating attendees on the status of zebra mussels in Texas. Their recent discovery in Lake Belton has increased the threat of their spread into the Highland Lakes, he said.

Following miscellaneous Regional Council business and updates, the meeting ended at approximately 4 p.m.