

LCRA Clean Rivers Program
Hill Country Water Quality Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
Oct. 29, 2015
Welcome Center & Legacy Plaza
Goldthwaite, Texas

LCRA Governmental Affairs Representative Steve Dyer and Goldthwaite City Manager Rob Lindsey welcomed the group to Legacy Plaza. Twenty-five people attended. Lindsey introduced Jan Fischer with Legacy Plaza and Allie Biedenharn and Aditi Busgeeth, two representatives from the nonprofit organization Texan by Nature. After a delicious lunch Lindsey provided, Dyer called the meeting to order at 1:45 p.m. Fischer kicked off the meeting by describing how Legacy Plaza came into being and the City of Goldthwaite's vision for the future, including the addition of a Native American Cultural Center. Lead Designer Tab Ledbetter led the group on a walking tour of the plaza grounds. The outside grounds include a simulation of the Colorado River and interpretive descriptions of the river basin's natural habitats and Native American history.

After the tour, LCRA water quality coordinator Lisa Benton led a hands-on water quality monitoring activity. Attendees were assigned to groups where they performed tests using water from the simulated Colorado River. Participants learned how to monitor for dissolved oxygen, pH, nitrate-nitrogen and *E. coli* bacteria. The groups discussed the results and the importance of monitoring water quality for these parameters.

The group reconvened indoors for a discussion led by David Cowan, coordinator of the LCRA Clean Rivers Program. Cowan gave a brief update of program activities in the Hill Country region. Staff from LCRA, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the Upper Colorado River Authority monitor 20 sites in the Hill Country region.

Samples collected from the San Saba River at Highway 16 routinely contain high levels of *E. coli*, and the river is on the TCEQ 303(d) List of impaired waters. A small-scale study performed by LCRA in 2014 showed high bacteria levels at five sites in the river downstream of Highway 190.

Cowan explained how stakeholder involvement in a Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) would address bacteria impairment in the San Saba River. A WPP would likely involve collecting additional bacteria data from the San Saba River, conducting bacteria source tracking using genetic markers and using land use models to help determine why bacteria has been elevated in the lower river for the last seven years. Stakeholders would meet regularly to discuss options to address bacteria levels and come to a consensus on the best path forward. WPPs are driven by local stakeholders and are typically funded through grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Service or TCEQ. Cowan asked for input from the council members to understand their perspective and if they would recommend proceeding with a WPP project.

Council members asked several questions about the potential project, which prompted discussions about potential bacteria sources, how water quality could be improved once a source was determined, and potential regulatory requirements if federal dollars were used to fund the project. The group overwhelmingly supported clean water, but the general consensus was stakeholders in the watershed will likely be wary of potential federal requirements because they fear land use rules or water rights issues. Cowan said he valued the feedback. Stakeholder support is necessary for a watershed protection plan to work. Cowan said if a WPP is not initiated, LCRA would continue sampling through the Clean Rivers Program and look for alternatives to address the high bacteria levels.

Cowan concluded the meeting with a brief zebra mussel status report. Zebra mussels are confirmed in Lake Waco and Lake Belton, but monitoring by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and LCRA indicates zebra mussels have not made it into the Colorado River basin.

The Clean Rivers Program portion of the meeting concluded at 3:50 p.m. Dyer then updated the council on other LCRA matters. The meeting adjourned at 4 p.m.

Submitted by David Cowan
11/18/15