

Aransas Creek (2004A) Recreational Use Attainability Analysis Summary and Recommendation

A recreational use-attainability analysis (RUAA) was conducted on Aransas Creek (2004A) in the summer of 2012 to determine the appropriate recreational use and numeric criteria. Aransas Creek is an unclassified intermittent water body with perennial pools that is approximately 20 miles in length. The creek is located in Bee County and Live Oak County. It was identified in the 2012 Texas Clean Water Act Section 303(d) List of Impaired Water Bodies due to elevated bacteria levels. It was initially listed in 2006.

The RUAA identified that the presumed use of primary contact recreation (PCR) for Aransas Creek should be revised to secondary contact recreation 1 (SCR 1). SCR applies to water bodies where water recreation can occur, but the nature of the recreation does not involve a significant risk of ingestion. SCR 1 applies to intermittent and perennial freshwaters where site-specific information demonstrates that primary contact recreation has little to no likelihood of occurring due to physical characteristics of the water body such as shallow depths or lack of pools.

During the field surveys, field staff did not observe any type of recreation occurring on the stream. Interviews with stakeholders and landowners indicated that most people have never personally used or witnessed PCR on the stream. A few interviews indicated that some people use and have witnessed fishing and hunting on the creek. Evidence of SCR (fishing equipment) was found at three sites. Tracks from all-terrain vehicles were discovered near one site as well as a small fishing pier. At the time of the field surveys, the study area was experiencing severe drought conditions which resulted in dry stream beds at five of the eight study sites. Water was pooled at the remaining three sites, but only two were significant enough to allow thalweg depth measurement. Aransas Creek had an average thalweg of 0.05 meters (1.97 in) and there was no observed flow. Public access is available at two of eight survey sites via bridge crossings; there are no public parks on the creek.

Naturally low water levels decrease the likelihood of PCR use. Aransas Creek has a shallow average depth, supporting reclassification to SCR1. In accordance with §307.4 (j)(3)(C) of the Texas Surface Water Quality Standards, the TCEQ recommends a reclassification from PCR to SCR1 with the corresponding geometric mean of 630 colonies *E. coli*/100mL for all of Aransas Creek, from western Bee County to its confluence with the Aransas River two miles north of Skidmore. This reclassification is appropriate due to “natural, ephemeral, intermittent low flow conditions or water levels” in accordance with reasons specified in 40 CFR §131.10(g)(2).

Prior to changing the currently assigned recreational use of Aransas Creek in the Texas Surface Water Quality Standards, the TCEQ would provide additional public notice and opportunity for public comment. In addition, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency would review this proposed change under the provisions of the federal Clean Water Act.