



# Improving Water Quality in Nueces Bay A TMDL Project for Zinc in Oysters

The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) has banned harvesting of oysters throughout Nueces Bay (Segment 2482) because of high concentrations of zinc in oyster tissues.

Zinc is an essential trace element naturally present in living tissue, and essential to the healthy function of the body. Zinc plays an important role in metabolism, tissue repair, cell replication, and growth. However, like all trace elements, zinc is toxic if consumed in excess over an extended period. Excessive intake of zinc may result in the reduced absorption and utilization of copper and iron by the body.

The TCEQ initiated a total maximum daily load project to determine the measures necessary to restore water quality in the bay. The goal of a TMDL is to determine the amount (or load) of a pollutant that a body of water can receive and still support its designated uses. This allowable load is then allocated among the categories of sources within the watershed, and stakeholders work with the state to develop measures that reduce pollutant loads.

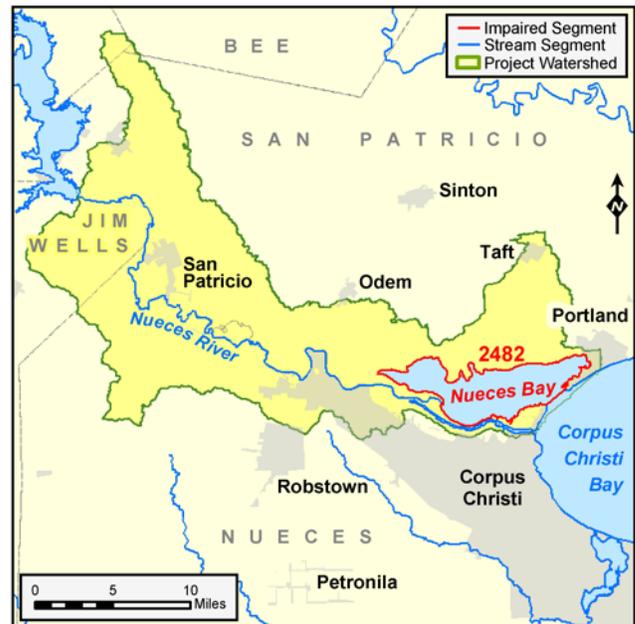
Learn more about water quality standards, monitoring, and TMDLs by reading *Preserving and Improving Water Quality*, available on our website at [www.tceq.state.tx.us/goto/tmdl/](http://www.tceq.state.tx.us/goto/tmdl/).

## Description of the Nueces Bay Watershed

Nueces Bay has an area of 28.9 square miles and drains the Nueces River Basin (16,950 square miles), along with portions of the San Antonio-Nueces and Nueces-Rio Grande Coastal Basins. Nueces Bay is a shallow, secondary bay that receives freshwater from the Nueces River and exchanges saline water with Corpus Christi Bay. The climate in this region is arid most of the time, except when influenced by freshets and tropical storms, which often result in flooding.

The headwaters of the Nueces River originate in the central Texas hill country. Principal tributaries of the Nueces River include the Atascosa and Frio Rivers. The western part of the Edwards Aquifer lies within the river basin, along with two major reservoirs—Choke Canyon Reservoir and Lake Corpus Christi. The western part of Corpus Christi is the only major metropolitan area within the river's watershed.

Nueces Bay has economic and ecologic importance to the surrounding region. Economic activities in and around the bay include petrochemical refining and



production, agriculture, manufacturing, recreation, maritime commerce, and tourism. Ecologically, Nueces Bay is home to many plants and animals, and plays a role in water purification and storm protection.

## Project Development

The historical data set for zinc in oysters was limited and indicated excessively high levels of zinc in oyster tissue. The DSHS collected new samples of oyster, fish, and crab tissue beginning in February 2002. A new risk assessment in January 2003 confirmed high levels of zinc in oyster tissue. The TCEQ compiled its data sets and those of the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program (CBBEP) for zinc in water and sediment, then drainage areas were spatially delineated. The Center for Research in Water Resources (CRWR) updated a total loadings model for the bay in June 2003. The TCEQ developed a draft TMDL using the updated model along with historical and recently collected data.

The TCEQ adopted the TMDL on November 1, 2006; the EPA approved it December 15, 2006. The TCEQ approved the implementation plan October 24, 2007. The plan recommends continued sampling to track attenuating zinc levels in Nueces Bay.

## Public Participation

In all its projects, the TCEQ seeks to gather opinion and information from people who represent government, permitted facilities, agriculture, business, environmental, and community and private interests in the watershed. The stakeholder committees of the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuary Program (CBBEP) are the forum for local public participation in the Nueces Bay project.

The CBBEP hosted the first stakeholder meeting on September 27, 2002, in Corpus Christi. A second meeting was held on October 22, 2003. Stakeholders and project staff discussed the results of the loadings model and the allocation of the allowable load to the sources in the watershed.

Presentations have been made at the regularly scheduled meetings of the Port Industries of Corpus Christi. The TCEQ held a public meeting on July 27, 2006, to hear comment on the draft TMDL. Comments were incorporated into the final TMDL.

## For More Information

Contact the project manager listed below, or visit the project website at:

<[www.tceq.state.tx.us/implementation/water/tmdl/21-nuecesbay.html](http://www.tceq.state.tx.us/implementation/water/tmdl/21-nuecesbay.html)>

### TCEQ TMDL Program:

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## TMDL Development Status

Start Date: December 2000

Projected End Date: August 2006

TCEQ Adoption: November 1, 2006

Submitted to EPA Region 6: November 8, 2006

EPA Region 6 Approval: December 15, 2006

## Implementation Plan Status

Start Date: December 2006

TCEQ Approval: October 24, 2007

## Project Highlights

- Implementation monitoring began in 2006.
- The commission approved the Implementation Plan on October 24, 2007.
- During 2007-9, there were multiple attempts to collect oysters. However, due to extreme fluctuations in salinity from flooding and drought, there were no viable (living or marketable size) oysters available.
- Implementation monitoring is ongoing.
- The 2010 "Final Report of Implementation Effectiveness Monitoring," available on the project website, provides additional details about results of the project through August 2010.

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