

Lower Leon Creek Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Public Meeting

Meeting Summary – January 13, 2004

Attendees:

Kirk Nixon, John Bryant, Ken Diehl, Gregg Ellshardt, Mike Gonzales, Mark Beaman, Andrew Sullivan, Earlene Lambeth

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS:

Earlene Lambeth (TCEQ) opened the first public meeting to provide information on the Lower Leon Creek TMDL project. Gratitude was expressed to the San Antonio River Authority for use of their boardroom to hold the public meeting. Introductions were made, handouts distributed, and setting of brief ground rules were established. Everyone's ideas are important—share the time and to please keep comments related to the Lower Leon Creek.

The purpose of the meeting was to inform the public and potential stakeholders on the status of work that was being performed under a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) project for the Lower Leon Creek as required under the 1972 federal Clean Water Act. The evenings' meetings agenda included presentations on the TMDL program and processes, history and development of the project, the 305(b) and 303 (d) listing processes, and the opportunity to provide input from the public on the project. Public participation is very important and ensures that state government considers local perspectives' in its decisions. The Lower Leon Creek(s) project will be a joint effort among the state and local stakeholders.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Mr. Andrew Sullivan, the TMDL Project Manager at the TCEQ, focused the discussion on the work that has been done for the Lower Leon Creek for a little over a year. Mr. Sullivan began with an introduction to the TMDL process. He explained 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, such as recreation or support of a designated aquatic life. The load is allocated among all the potential sources of pollution within the watershed for which measures to reduce pollutant loads are developed as necessary. The entire load for the watershed can be addressed considering known point sources such industries and domestic wastewater treatment plants. In addition, non-point sources (i.e. agricultural and urban runoff) are also considered and factored into the TMDL. Mr. Sullivan continued explaining the history of the Lower Leon Creek project and how established water quality standards are set by the TCEQ and approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Mr. Sullivan reported that the designated uses involved in this TMDL project are high aquatic life use and contact recreation. The contact recreation use is assessed against criteria for fecal coliform \ E. coli Bacteria

(typically used as an indicator of the presence of other disease causing organisms). He explained that the aquatic life use is comprised of several subcategories such as high, intermediate, or limited, whereas recreational uses consist of a single level. For aquatic life use, dissolved oxygen criteria are used, which is basically a measure of oxygen in the water upon which aquatic animals use for survival.

Mr. Sullivan also explained how the 303(d) List identifies water bodies that do not meet, or are not expected to meet, applicable water quality standards. The list has a schedule showing when TMDLs will be developed for impaired waters. The EPA approves the 303(d) list and the list is compiled every two years. The listing of the Lower Leon Creek originally occurred in 2000 and will continue until sufficient 24-hour measurements are available to demonstrate support or nonsupport of the criterion.

Mr. Sullivan explained that water quality impairments had been identified through a 7-mile reach in the vicinity of Loop 13 in San Antonio. The Lower Leon Creek was not meeting the standard for high aquatic life use due to depressed dissolved oxygen levels as well as the recreation use due to elevated levels of fecal coliform \ E. coli Bacteria. Mr. Sullivan went on to explain that the fecal coliform \ E. coli Bacteria is generally not disease causing in and of themselves but indicate the presence of other organisms that could cause disease found in the impairment areas.

Historical data has been compiled for the impaired segment of the Lower Leon Creek and additional data is being collected to verify the existence of the observed impairment(s). Mr. Sullivan reported that a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) had been developed as well as a Monitoring Plan for the on-going project. Mr. Sullivan said that TCEQ was about a year into the Monitoring Plan and would continue until August 2004. After the additional monitoring is complete a summary of the results of the data collected is expected to be available in the fall of 2004. At that time a determination would be made to develop a TMDL or take other appropriate action to address the impairment(s).

No sources are being identified at this point in the project, however, if a determination is made that the creek is not meeting the uses, another phase of the project will begin to look at point and non-point sources for the purposes of TMDL development. At this time the project is concentrating on collecting physical, chemical and biological data. Several sites have been selected along the creek that are representative of the watershed and being monitored against the criteria (3 sites for DO and Bacteria – Stations 12838, 12845, & 14198). Flow on the creek is also a consideration.

There are three potential outcomes of the work being performed for the Lower Leon Creek - a possible de-listing from the 303(d) list due to meeting the uses, a determination that the standards need to be changed through an intensive Use Attainability Analysis (UAA) or a TMDL. A UAA would mean possibly changing the aquatic life use and criteria as mentioned in the beginning of this summary from high to a lower

level (a UAA does not apply to recreational uses). The final potential outcome of the study would be a full and complex TMDL. These are items still to be determined and reported in the outcome of the study report in the fall of 2004.

Potential stakeholders will be kept informed, data will be available through the TCEQ web site, and if the waterbody is not de-listed, another meeting will be held to discuss the results of the monitoring data and take further action as needed.

TCEQ - TX Commission on Environmental Quality

TMDL – Total Maximum Daily Load