

Cottonwood Branch (1242B) Recreational Use Attainability Analysis Summary and Recommendation

A recreational use attainability analysis (RUAA) was conducted on Cottonwood Branch (1242B) in the summer of 2009 to determine the appropriate recreational use and numeric criteria. Cottonwood Branch is an unclassified intermittent with pools water body in Brazos County, TX, approximately 7 miles in length. It is currently listed on 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 Cottonwood Branch 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, staff did not observe any type of recreation occurring on the stream. Interviews with water resource professionals and a game warden familiar with the watershed could not confirm any type of recreation that occurs on the stream. Physical characteristics of the stream include an average thalweg of 0.29 meters (11.42 in), pools greater than one meter deep and no measurable flow during the study. Public access is described as moderate as the headwaters of the stream flow through a residential area, although there were only small pools at this location at the time of the study. The remainder of the stream flows through an industrial area before joining the Brazos River.

Naturally low water levels decrease the likelihood of PCR use. Cottonwood Branch has a shallow average depth and no evidence of PCR, 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 Cottonwood Branch, from the confluence with Still Creek upstream 0.95 km to the confluence with an unnamed tributary. 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 Cottonwood Branch 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.