

Dry Branch (1255I) Recreational Use Attainability Analysis Summary and Recommendation

A recreational use attainability analysis (RUAA) was conducted on Dry Branch (1255I) in the summer of 2012 to determine the appropriate recreational use and numeric criteria. Dry Branch is an unclassified ephemeral/intermittent with perennial pools water body in Erath County, TX, approximately 7 miles in length. It is currently listed on the 2014 Texas Clean Water Act Section 303(d) List of Impaired Water Bodies due to elevated bacteria levels. It was initially listed in 2010.

The RUAA identified that the presumed use of primary contact recreation (PCR) for Dry 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, field staff did not observe any recreational activities. PCR was documented as a personal use by one interviewee. This interviewee has a large impoundment on their property and it is regularly used for PCR and other recreational activities. Other interviewees cited lack of water and private property/accessibility as reasons for why the creek was not used for recreation. None of the interviewees witnessed or heard of recreational activities. Evidence of use included a fishing reel and tire tracks. Physical characteristics of the stream include an average thalweg of 0.03 meters (1.18 in), no substantial pools, and no flow. Seven impoundments are located on Dry Branch, at least two of them have an average thalweg deeper than 1 m. At the time of the surveys, Dry Branch had a mid-range Palmer drought index. Public access to Dry Branch is very limited as most of the creek runs adjacent to a golf course and private property. Access to the creek is affected by private property and thick vegetation.

Naturally low water levels decrease the likelihood of PCR use. Dry Branch has a shallow average depth, low flow, and no substantial pools, 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 Dry Branch, from its confluence with the Upper North Bosque River, upstream to its headwaters 2.3 miles east of SH 106 in Erath County, excluding reservoir UB6. 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 Dry 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.