

Gum Tree Branch (1302A) Recreational Use Attainability Analysis Summary and Recommendation

A recreational use-attainability analysis (RUAA) was conducted on Gum Tree Branch (1302A) in the summer of 2011 to determine the appropriate recreational use and numeric criteria. Gum Tree Branch is an unclassified perennial water body within Colorado and Wharton counties, approximately 15 miles in length. 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 evidence indicating the designated use of primary contact recreation (PCR) 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.

No recreation was observed on the water body during the field surveys. Of the two interviews completed, neither reported any recreational use on Gum Tree Branch. Field staff did see one deer blind during the surveys. Average flow for this waterbody was 10.9 cubic feet per second. The average thalweg depth on Gum Tree Branch was 0.56 m (22.04 in) and there were no pools deeper than one meter. Public access to Gum Tree Branch is very limited due to privately owned land surrounding the water body.

Evidence collected during the RUAA suggests that PCR is not an existing use on Gum Tree Branch. 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 the fifteen mile stretch of Gum Tree Branch from the confluence with West Bernard Creek near Wharton CR 252 to the headwaters approximately 15 miles upstream near RR 102. 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 Gum Tree 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.