

White Oak Creek (0303B) Recreational Use-Attainability Analysis Summary and Recommendation

A recreational use-attainability analysis (RUAA) was conducted on White Oak Creek (0303B) in the summer of 2016 to determine the appropriate recreational use and numeric criteria. White Oak Creek is an unclassified perennial water body that is approximately 120 miles in length. The creek is located in Hopkins, Franklin, Titus, and Morris counties. It was identified in the 2018 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 White Oak Creek 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 primary contact recreation occurring on the stream. Nineteen interviews were conducted with stakeholders and landowners. The landowners and stakeholders have not personally used or observed PCR on the stream. One interviewee stated that they had heard of swimming on the creek. White Oak Creek had an average thalweg of 1.0 meters (39.37 in) and no substantial pools deeper than 1 meter. Stream flow was normal at the upstream sites, and high to flooded at the downstream sites. The Palmer Drought Severity Index at the time of the surveys was very moist to extremely moist. The most downstream section of the creek flows through the White Oak Creek Wildlife Management Area which provides public access for fishing, hiking and other activities year-round. Outside of the White Oak Creek Wildlife Management Area public access is mainly limited to the immediate area around public road crossings. Access from the stream bank was difficult in many locations due to slick banks, near vertical slopes, and dense vegetation. Access within the stream was difficult due to logjams and flood debris.

Steep banks and dense vegetation decrease the likelihood of PCR use. White Oak Creek has limited access for recreation and few accounts 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 White Oak Creek, from the confluence with the Sulphur River north of Naples in Morris County to Lake Sulphur Springs in Hopkins County. This reclassification is appropriate due to “natural, ephemeral, intermittent or low flow conditions or water levels prevent the attainment of the use” in accordance with reasons specified in 40 CFR §131.10(g)(2).

Prior to changing the currently assigned recreational use of White Oak Creek 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.