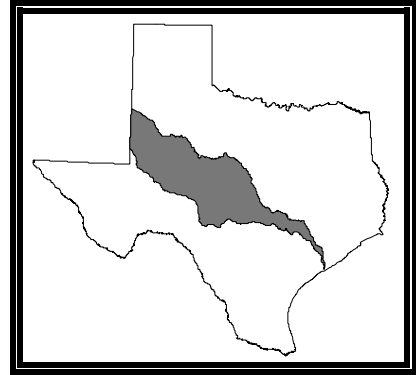


Basin 14

Colorado River



Colorado River Basin Narrative Summary

The headwaters of the Colorado River are located in the western portion of the state in Dawson County and flow southeast approximately 900 miles to Matagorda Bay in the Gulf of Mexico. This feature makes the Colorado River the longest river in the United States that is contained within the borders of one state.

The Colorado River basin includes 55 counties and covers approximately 40,000 square miles from eastern New Mexico to the Gulf of Mexico. It's flow carries it from an elevation of almost 3,000 ft. above sea level in the semi-arid west, through the rugged canyons of the Texas Hill Country before crossing the Coastal Plains to empty in the Gulf. Major community centers include Austin, San Angelo, Bay City, Big Spring, Brownwood, and El Campo. Important tributaries to the Colorado include the North and South Concho River near San Angelo; San Saba River near San Saba; Pecan Bayou near Brownwood; Llano River near Llano; Pedernales River near Johnson City; and Barton Creek and Onion Creek near Austin.

For water quality management purposes, the Colorado River Basin has been divided into 34 classified segments consisting of 1,525 stream miles. Fifteen major reservoirs are located throughout the basin, which cover 119,591 surface acres.

Naturally saline soils and oil-field related activities, coupled with several years of drought have created high levels of dissolved solids in the upper portion of the basin. E.V. Spence Reservoir and the Colorado River below the reservoir do not meet their designated uses because of elevated amounts of dissolved solids. The water quality of the San Saba, Llano, and Pedernales Rivers is good. In the middle portion of the basin, most water bodies support their designated uses. The water quality of the Highland Lakes is good, with periodic depressed dissolved oxygen concentrations resulting from seasonal mixing. Elevated nutrient levels and fecal coliform densities found in many of the tributary streams in the Austin area originate mostly from unidentified non-point source runoff.

The largest citizen-based monitoring program in the state, the Colorado River Watch Network (CRWN), extends from the mouth of the Colorado River upstream through the Highland Lakes, to Pecan Bayou above Brownwood, to the Llano River at Junction, to the San Saba River at San Saba, and to the Pedernales above Stonewall. Volunteers sample 10 mainstem segments of the Colorado River and many of its tributaries. Sampling is conducted monthly for about seven different constituents. Funding and support for the CRWN is provided by the LCRA and the CRP.