

————— Minutes —————

Public Meeting

Atascosa River Aquatic Life and Recreational Use Attainability Analyses

Pleasanton Volunteer Fire Department

219 West Hunt Street, Pleasanton, Texas 78064

Tuesday, August 30, 2012, 6:30 - 8:00 PM

Signed in Attendees

Fernando H. Garza

Bettie & Lloyd House

Jeanne Israel

Michael Korus

Sherry Orsack

Pete J. Pawelek

Adrian Perez

Lloyd (Bubba) Stewart

Natalie Wolff

Barbara Franklin

Marilyn Katsmorak

Tommy and Joy Caraway

Ricky Schultz

Rocky Freund

Sam Sugarek

Beth Almaraz

Brian Koch

Representing (As Stated on Meeting Sign-In Sheet)

U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service

Atascosa Farm Bureau

City of Pleasanton

Atascosa Soil and Water Conservation District

Atascosa Soil and Water Conservation District

Atascosa local

Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board

Live Oak County Farm Bureau Board

Pleasanton Natural Resources Conservation Service

Self

Self

Self

Self

Nueces River Authority

Nueces River Authority

Nueces River Authority

Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board

Elected Officials

The Honorable Diana J. Bautista- Atascosa County

Support Staff

Dania Grundmann- Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), Project Manager

Larry Beran- Texas AgriLife Research

Tim Jones- Texas Institute for Applied Environmental Research (TIAER)

Ryan Novak- Atascosa Soil and Water Conservation District

Jill Csekitz- TCEQ

Earlene Lambeth- TCEQ

Jimmy Millican- TIAER

Administrative Issues

A public meeting on the Atascosa River Aquatic Life Use-Attainability Analysis (ALUAA) and Recreational Use-Attainability Analysis (RUAA) projects was conducted on Thursday, August 30, 2012 from 6:30 pm – 8:00 PM at the Volunteer Fire Department in Pleasanton, Texas. The meeting was conducted to inform the public about the status of the ongoing Atascosa River RUAA and ALUAA projects. Hard-copies of the PowerPoint presentations were provided along with maps and the preliminary report for the Atascosa River RUAA.

Welcome

Dania Grundmann welcomed everyone and all attendees were asked to introduce themselves.

Presentation: *Use-Attainability Analyses (UAAs) in Texas*

Ms. Grundmann explained the purpose of UAAs and why they have been conducted in the Atascosa River Watershed. Ms. Grundmann explained the difference between Aquatic Life Use-Attainability Analysis (ALUAA) and Recreational Use-Attainability Analysis (RUAA). Ms. Grundmann detailed how ALUAA are two-year studies consisting of dissolved oxygen (DO) and streamflow measurements, water quality sample collection, biological surveys, and habitat assessments. Further she explained that RUAA examine historical and current recreational uses, bank access, and streamflow measurements; all during warm weather when recreation in and around the water body is most likely to occur. Ms. Grundmann said that the need for an ALUAA in the Atascosa watershed began around year 1996 when DO and *E. coli* were determined to be outside acceptable values.

Ms. Grundmann acknowledged the help of the following project participants: the TCEQ Surface Water Quality Standards Group, the Texas Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB), Texas AgriLife Research, and the Texas Institute for Applied Environmental Research (TIAER).

Ms. Grundmann concluded by providing her contact information.

Presentation: *Atascosa River Recreational Use-Attainability Analysis Study Summary*

At the start of his presentation, Mr. Tim Jones thanked the landowners and Farm Bureau for help in gaining access to study sites on private property. He noted that the study required researchers to come onto some properties multiple times a year and that landowner cooperation was essential to the success of the study.

Mr. Jones began the presentation showing the online location of RUAA procedures, noting the extensiveness of the procedures. He then distinguished between basic and comprehensive RUAs, pointing out that the comprehensive RUAA was required for the Atascosa River because it was a classified stream where presumed uses may be inappropriate.

During the next phase of the presentation Mr. Jones covered the procedures of RUAs. Sampling conditions should be warm days and periods when stream use was most likely to occur such as during spring breaks and weekends. Three to five sites per 5 miles of stream length were ideal, but Mr. Jones emphasized the difficulty in accessing such an even distribution of sites considering the layout of private land in the watershed. Many sites were chosen based on ease of public access such as parks and road crossings.

Mr. Jones continued by describing components of RUAs. He commented on the vast number of pictures and their availability to the public. Photos were taken of stream obstructions, streambanks, wildlife, people, water color, etc. Weather information was also collected from the local airport to document meteorological conditions. Field information included streamflow, water and air temperature, ease of access to the bank, etc. Even the shiftiness of sands under one's boot was documented because of its relevance to potential recreation. Mr. Jones emphasized the intensive nature of the survey. He said teams visited every location at least twice, talking to as many people as could be found and then submitted a RUAA report to the TCEQ.

Results of the RUAA events were then presented by Mr. Jones who started with a map of study assessment units (AUs) and a description of the purpose and location of AUs in the Atascosa watershed. He said an effort was made to get an even distribution of sites in each AU but it was almost impossible due to difficulties in obtaining access to private land and the paucity of road crossings. Even at public-access points permission was still required to go 300 meters beyond the entry point in either direction. Mr. Jones then presented detailed results of each AU:

AU01 At one site in AU01 there was a bobber in a tree that indicated fishing *might* have occurred there or the bobber could have washed in from an unknown upstream location. Although the landowner indicated he had fished with grandkids in the past, no fishing was observed. Mr. Jones said he started focusing on obstructions in the river channel to demonstrate that canoeing and kayaking would be extremely difficult and not enticing.

AU02 In AU02 a couple folks talked about fishing years ago. Mr. Jones said he never encountered anyone at the sites and all information was derived from interviews with local landowners.

AU03 This AU was more challenging according to Mr. Jones as it included the City of Pleasanton park area and other sites required lots of landowner permission. He said teams observed someone fishing at the park during every visit, often families with children. Picnicking, biking, and various activities were observed. Mr. Jones was also told of wading and a baptism

though this was not directly observed. In fact, Mr. Jones said, no one was ever observed in contact with the water. Water contact was only described from interviews.

AU04 No activities were observed at any of the 11 sites as most sites were dry during the study and no landowners indicated recreation in the stream. Mr. Jones related a conversation he had with a 76 year old woman who had grown up along the Atascosa River in AU04 and had never in her life seen anybody in the water.

Mr. Jones provided his contact information and asked for questions from the attendees.

Q (Attendee): Where did the established use for the Atascosa River come from?

A: Mr. Jones: The default contact recreation use is primary contact recreation use. Jill Csekitz added that a law suit in the 1980s had forced TCEQ to use primary contact recreation use criterion for all streams.

Q An attendee commented that it sounded like someone behind a desk had made the decision to have all streams comply with primary contact recreation use criteria.

A: Ms. Csekitz replied that the primary contact recreation use criteria are what all streams have to initially comply with.

Q: An attendee asked about the approximate date of the baptism that allegedly occurred in the Atascosa River.

A: Mr. Jones answered that the date was unknown and that he could neither confirm nor deny the claim that the baptism ever actually occurred.

A comment was made by an attendee that thought perhaps she had seen someone in a small boat near the park area during the study period.

Mr. Jones indicated that it was likely TIAER personnel.

Presentation: *Atascosa River Aquatic Life Use-Attainability Analysis Preliminary Summary*

Mr. Jones informed attendees that the Atascosa River currently is listed as having a high aquatic life use and informed the audience of the current criteria used for streams list as such.

The purpose and components of ALUAA's was discussed. He then discussed the monitoring work effort stating that 8 sites were chosen (2 per AU) but that the 3 upper sites were not sampled except for some DO measurements because water was only present shortly after tropical weather system had blown in. Physical locations of each of the 8 sites were presented along with the number and type of sampling events conducted at each.

Mr. Jones described the methods employed for conducting habitat assessments, collection of macrobenthic organisms and nekton (fish). The aquatic life use categories that results from the habitat assessments and biological assemblage collection were summarized and presented for the Atascosa River.

Mr. Jones presented results with a graph of 24-hr DO fluctuation and a brief description of what 24-hr DO can tell researchers about production and respiration in a stream. This was followed by a list of the work completed since the August 2011 meeting.

Q An attendee asked what habitat conditions encourage acceptable dissolved oxygen levels.

A Mr. Jones explained that clear water with plenty of sunshine and a photosynthetic source was critical to having adequate instream dissolved oxygen levels.

Q An attendee asked how does TCEQ use the ALUAA data.

A: Ms. Csekitz explained that TCEQ will use the data to make decisions on what the criteria should be for the Atascosa River.

Q An attendee asked what would happen if a determination is made that dissolved oxygen levels within the Atascosa River were too low.

A: Ms. Csekitz answered that there would likely become a need for a TMDL or Watershed Protection Plan.

An attendee commented that higher aquatic life use results in 2010 may be a result of above average rainfall during that year. Ms. Csekitz agreed and indicated that TCEQ does attempt to take into account variations in weather. One example of this is by intentionally planning multi-year studies to capture and document such variability.

Q An attendee asked how TCEQ decides how to classify a stream.

A: Ms. Csekitz answered that TCEQ will look at hydrology, weather, physical stream characteristics and biological assemblages to try and make the most informed decision regarding proper stream classification. Ms. Csekitz emphasized that the purpose of the critical period was to aid in setting attainable goals for streams.

Presentation: *Where do we go from Here?*

Jill Csekitz provided the audience with a brief overview of Texas Surface Water Quality Standards. The purpose of water quality standards and reasons for revision of standards was also presented. Ms. Csekitz thanked attendees for their valuable input that included the identification

of sampling locations, access to locations, changes that have occurred in stream flow, and public comments.

Ms. Csekitz informed attendees that the 2013 revision to Texas Water Quality Standards was under development and a public hearing would occur in June 2013 in Austin, TX. Ms. Csekitz concluded her presentation by offering her contact information and asking for questions.

Q An attendee asked why was the public hearing being held in Austin.

A Ms. Csekitz explained that the public hearing covered all water bodies within Texas rather than just the Atascosa River.

Q An attendee asked if there was any guarantee that EPA would adopt standards set by TCEQ.

A Ms. Csekitz answered that there were no guarantees but that is why TCEQ does such an extensive data collection effort to justify any proposed changes.

Q An attendee asked what if EPA does not accept the standard revision

A Ms. Csekitz answered that the previous standard would have to be used.

Q An attendee asked what EPA's options were regarding standards proposals.

A Ms Csekitz answered that EPA could either approve, reject, or take no action on a standards revision.

Larry Beran acknowledged all landowners and agencies involved in the Atascosa River project and closed the meeting at 8:00 P.M.