Minutes
Atascosa River (Segment 2107)
Bacteria Total Maximum Daily Load
Public Meeting

Evergreen Underground Water Conservation District
Pleasanton, Texas
June 24, 2008
7:00 – 8:30 pm

Attendees
David Alviso, Jr., City of Pleasanton
Larry Johnson, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
Tony Franklin, Atascosa Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD)
Diana J. Bautista, Atascosa County Judge
Jerry Kosub, Atascosa SWCD
Stephen Twidwell, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
Rocky Freund, Neuces River Authority
Michael Korus, Atascosa SWCD
Stan & Nancy Coughran, Coughran Ranch
Adrian Perez, Texas State Soil & Water Conservation Board

Support staff
Chip Morris - Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)
Andrew Sullivan - TCEQ
Aaron Wendt- TSSWCB
Larry Hauck- Texas Institute for Applied Environmental Research (TIAER)

Administrative Issues
A public meeting on the Atascosa River (2107) Bacteria Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) project was conducted on Tuesday, June 24, 2008 from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm at the Evergreen Underground Water District offices. The meeting was conducted to inform the public about the status of the ongoing Atascosa River Bacteria TMDL project. Hard-copies of the PowerPoint presentations were provided to meeting attendees. An open-house type format took place prior to the meeting from 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM, which included the showing of an approximately 15-minute movie on the Clean Rivers Program of TCEQ containing how the program operates, its benefits, and the cooperation generated among agencies as a result of the program.

Introductions
Chip Morris of TCEQ opened the meeting and he introduced support staff in attendance. He also expressed appreciation for the attendance of stakeholders and encouraged their participation by asking questions during and after presentations.

Overview of Water Quality Impairments

Mr. Andrew Sullivan of TCEQ provided an overview of the impairments to the Atascosa River. He discussed the bacteria impairments resulting from elevated *E. coli* levels and indicated that this impairment would be the emphasis of the presentations. He also discussed the current nonsupport of the aquatic life use designation of the river that is based on depressed dissolved oxygen levels resulting from low flows and mentioned that some process other than a TMDL seemed most likely to deal with this issue.

Mr. Sullivan stated that TCEQ divides streams into AUs based on location of monitoring stations. He explained that the lowermost AU was located around the communities of Whitsett and Campbellton, the next upstream AU was below Pleasanton near McCoy, and a third AU was centered around Pleasanton and Poteet. Upstream of this third AU, the Atascosa River contains flow too seldom for meaningful sampling. For the Atascosa River, the lower two AUs were indicated to be impaired due to elevated *E. coli* based on the draft 2008 303(d) list. He further explained that the third AU around Pleasanton was assessed as not impaired and, thus, supporting the contact recreation use.

Source Assessment

Mr. Sullivan next discussed the issue of bacteria source assessment. He indicated that generally point sources, such as wastewater treatment facilities (WWTFs), were more highly controllable than nonpoint sources such as wildlife sources and agricultural runoff. He then presented an overview of the possibility of conducting TCEQ inspections at the permitted WWTFs and feedlots in the watershed. It was noted, however, that most of these permitted facilities are located above the two impaired AUs. Mr. Sullivan then presented an overview of load duration curves (LDCs) as a simple assessment method that takes advantage of existing data to graphically present results to discern the broad categories of point and nonpoint sources of bacteria contribution. Another source assessment method that was presented was that of targeted monitoring where bacteria samples are collected near suspected sources and in smaller areas, such as tributaries, to refine where bacteria are originating. Mr. Sullivan presented watershed surveys as yet another source assessment tool that involves actual reconnaissance of the watershed under various conditions of rainfall and streamflow, which then combined with local knowledge, can assist in isolating bacteria sources. Bacteria source tracking (BST) was also presented by Mr. Sullivan as a tool that employs various bacteriological laboratory methods to discern sources of bacteria at the levels of human, livestock/poultry and non domestic animals. He further stated that BST could be employed in this watershed. Together this toolbox approach of source identification includes facility inspections, LDCs, targeted monitoring, watershed surveys, and BST.

Mr. Sullivan concluded this portion of the presentations with an overview of project status. He indicated in the past the types of impairments and their locations had been verified, in the present potential sources are being evaluated, and in the future plan development and water quality standards revisions will be considered. He further elaborated that the present determination of potential sources will include targeted monitoring at more locations along the impaired portion of the river and on tributaries to that impaired portion. Also, bacteria source tracking could be employed in the watershed, but a decision has not been made on that at this time.

Water Quality Standards

Mr. Sullivan provided information on potential revisions of the State's water quality standards that could impact the Atascosa River. He began with an overview of the Federal Clean Water Act, including the "fishable/swimmable" goal for all waters. The present recreational bacteria criteria were presented along with the potential revisions to the criteria that included two levels of primary contact, a single level of secondary contact, and a noncontact recreation level.

Mr. Sullivan then discussed use attainability analysis (UAA) as a scientifically structured means of determining the appropriate level of use for the Atascosa River. The six potential reasons for altering the subcategory of a designated use were presented.

Implementation – Technical and Cost-Share Assistance

Mr. Aaron Wendt and Mr. Tony Franklin of the TSSWCB provided information on the technical and financial assistance for cattlemen in the Atascosa River watershed. Mr. Wendt explained the partnership arrangement of the local soil and water conservation districts with the TSSWCB at the state level and the NRCS at the federal level. He presented how the TSSWCB has been established by the Texas Legislature to be the lead agency for planning, implementing and managing programs and practices for preventing and abating agricultural nonpoint sources of pollution. Further, he stated that the implementation strategy by the TSSWCB is totally voluntary for the landowner and producer, except for poultry operations. Mr. Wendt further mentioned that WQMPs provide protection from the liabilities of a complaint based on water quality issues, because an implemented WQMP indicates adherence to all accepted practices necessary to protect water quality. Mr. Franklin presented information on grazing management plans and indicated that two WQMPs are now completed in the watershed.

Mr. Wendt provided information on the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and stated that the Atascosa River watershed is considered one of the State's priority areas for that program and that 13 contracts for financial assistance have occurred in the watershed. He concluded with an overview of the Lone Star Healthy Streams educational and research project.

Future Activities and Wrap-Up

Mr. Sullivan concluded the meeting with statements summarizing the pertinent points of the meeting. He restated that only the lower two AUs of the Atascosa River are still impaired by bacteria and not supporting the contact recreation use. The potential exists for modifications of the recreation use standard under the ongoing revision of the State water quality standards and this offers the potential for a criterion more suited to the watershed. The next meeting will occur when there has been enough progress on the project to have some specifics to present.

Questions and Answers

Several questions and statements were made by stakeholders attending the meeting. These questions, statements, and the answers provided are summarized below. Unless noted otherwise, answers were provided by the support staff of TCEQ and TSSWCB.

Q. Are the numbers presented for the concentrations of *E. coli* in the graphs geometric means of the data?
A. Yes, these values are geometric means.

Q. Are septic systems considered point source or nonpoint source? They appear to be more of a point source than a nonpoint source.
A. While under strict regulatory definitions, septic systems are classified as nonpoint source, they definitely fall in a gray area and could be considered either. The perspective that they are more of a point source than a nonpoint source has validity of reasoning.

Q. Under the proposed revisions to the recreation criteria of the water quality standards, where would that Atascosa River be considered?
A. The Atascosa River would most likely be considered under the primary contact, recreation 2 (geometric mean concentration of 206 colonies /100 ml) because it is a perennial water body.

Q. What kind of water body would be categorized under the secondary contact recreation criteria (630 colonies /100 ml)?
A. Most likely intermittent streams such as many of the tributaries to the Atascosa could be categorized as secondary contact recreation.

Q. What is a target date to wrap up this project? It has been going on about 12 years.
A. We do not have a target date. The standards revision process may further delay the project. The TMDL process is a very slow because it involves confirming impairments and then determining actual sources. However, we will continue to make progress and continue to move toward reducing pollutant sources.

Q. How many attendees here are actually from the concerned public in the watershed rather than agency staff?
A. About six attendees raised there hands.

Q. Once the sources of the bacteria pollution are defined, how do we correct this issue? For example, if the pollution comes from a sewer.
A. If the pollution is from a sewer line, it is most likely a regulated source and will be dealt with in that manner. Unregulated sources and wildlife will need to be dealt with on a voluntary basis. Wildlife is a special issue, because they are not considered detrimental. Control of wildlife is especially challenging and typically is not desirable.

Q. Is EQIP a grant or what?
A. EQIP is a voluntary federal program. To receive EQIP funds requires some level of matching funds or efforts.

Q. Mr. Sullivan asked the attendees if they knew the sources of flows in the river and tributaries when conditions are dry like presently occurring.
A. David Alviso of the City of Pleasanton indicated that flows are contributed by the WWTFs, for example the Pleasanton facility is discharging about 750,000 gallons per day, though under these dry conditions it is unknown how far that flow makes it. The other sources of flow are really unknown at this time as most tributaries are dry right now though some in the southeast parts of the watershed are flowing.

A general observation was made by an attendee that it is interesting that the bacterial impaired part of the Atascosa River is the lower part of the watershed where density of humans and livestock are less than other portions of the watershed.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:30 p.m.