

Tributaries of the Neches River Below Lake Palestine (Middle Neches)
Water Quality Meeting
July 17, 2020 10:00am
Online Zoom Meeting

Meeting Summary

Welcome, introductions and housekeeping items

Anna Gitter (TWRI) welcomed meeting attendees and went over a few housekeeping items for the online meeting. Due to the webinar style of the meeting, attendees did not introduce themselves, but Anna introduced the speakers/moderators, which included herself, Michael Schramm (TWRI Research Specialist III), Dr. Lucas Gregory (TWRI Senior Research Scientist) and Dania Grundmann (TCEQ TMDL Project Manager).

TCEQ TMDL Project Manager Updates

Dania Grundmann (TCEQ) provided updates, which included the project timeline and a brief discussion of the technical support document. Work from the TSD will be presented in future meetings and will be the basis for the development of total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) for the impaired water bodies. The status of the TMDL development and accompanying implementation plan (I-Plan) will be provided at future meetings. TWRI will continue meeting with local stakeholders to related to TMDL and I-Plan development.

Water Quality and Approaches for Stakeholder Involvement

Water Quality

Anna Gitter (TWRI) presented a brief overview of the project watershed. The Middle Neches Project is limited to portions of Cedar Creek (0604A_02), Hurricane Creek (0604B_01), Jack Creek (0604C_01), and Biloxi Creek (0604M_03). A map of the impaired portions of the streams called assessment units (AUs) and their associated watershed areas were presented. Bacteria data for each impaired AU was also discussed. Summary data presented as geometric means from the latest TCEQ water quality assessment indicated that bacteria levels exceed the primary contact recreation standard (126 colony forming units/100mL of *E. coli*) but that the levels are not excessive.

Strategies to Address Water Quality

Anna Gitter (TWRI) provided a presentation on different approaches for addressing water quality impairments. Those approaches included TMDL /I-Plan and watershed protection plans (WPPs). A TMDL is driven by the Clean Water Act and is a budget for the specific pollutant of interest, which is bacteria for the Middle Neches watershed. The document establishes load reductions needed to meet the water quality standard, is reviewed and approved by the EPA, results in the removal from the 303(d) list. The TMDL I-Plan accompanies the TMDL document and outlines the implementation strategies to meet water quality standards. The I-Plan is a voluntary plan developed by the

stakeholders and is approved by TCEQ. The I-Plan is not submitted to EPA for review or approval. A WPP is a holistic plan that addresses all impairments and concerns in the watershed. It is a voluntary document and stakeholders determine what measures are included in the WPP. A WPP must be reviewed and accepted by the EPA (but does not remove the waterbody from the 303(d) list) and qualifies the watershed to apply for EPA 319 nonpoint source grant funding to implement certain activities.

Stakeholder Involvement

Anna Gitter (TWRI) discussed stakeholder involvement in future planning and implementation in the watershed. The definition of a stakeholder and the roles a stakeholder has in the watershed was also presented. The different stakeholder engagement groups, stakeholder group, coordination committee and work group, were briefly discussed to gauge interest in which format might be preferred for the future.

All participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire to a) gather a list of individuals who participated in the meeting; b) determine which water quality strategy (TMDL/I-Plan/WPP) was preferred by stakeholders in the watershed; c) identify interest in the different stakeholder engagement groups; and d) identify any other concerns in the watershed. At the end of the meeting, 15 respondents (out of the 23 who had logged in to the online meeting), had filled out the questionnaire. Preliminary results were as follows:

- Plan Type Desired -- only 10 respondents; 8 agency, 2 individuals
 - TMDL & I-Plan only → 20% in favor
 - WPP only → 30% in favor
 - Both TMDL/I-Plan and WPP → 50% in favor
- Willingness to participate in stakeholder group – only 8 respondents: 6 agency, 2 individual
 - General stakeholder → 14% willing to participate
 - Coordination committee → 43% willing to participate
 - Working group → 43% willing to participate

It is important to note that of the 15 respondents, 12 were from an agency and 3 were individuals. This is not a full representation of the watershed stakeholders, so further discussions with stakeholders who were not able to attend the meeting will be conducted in July and August 2020.

Next Steps/Path Forward

Anna Gitter discussed that the decision on the path forward would be sent out with meeting minutes in August 2020. We will continue meeting with stakeholders and developing the technical support document. Through future email communication, we hope to help stakeholders select their desired stakeholder structure before the next meeting in the fall.

Questions from meeting participants included:

- What was the result of the recreational use attainability analysis (RUAA)?
 - o Screening of Cedar Creek and Hurricane Creek verified that primary contact recreation was appropriate for the streams. An RUAA study was conducted on Jack Creek and Biloxi Creeks. Primary contact recreation 1 was confirmed for these streams. RUAA reports are available at <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/waterquality/standards/ruaas/neches>
- How is contact recreation use determined?
 - o Most waters in the state are presumed to support primary contact recreation. An RUAA is initiated to confirm actual or attainable uses.

Closing Remarks

Dania Grundmann (TCEQ) reiterated that the WPP is a viable option in an engaged watershed that can be developed along with the TMDL and I-Plan. A WPP can use the foundation developed by the TMDL process to craft a plan suitable to the impaired watersheds. This process has been used in other watersheds with strong stakeholder interest with success. WPPs are developed through the TCEQ Non-Point Source Team or the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB). There is an application process involved with this and the ability to secure funding is not guaranteed.

Adjournment

Attendee	Organization
Kyle Wright	USDA NRCS
Sarah Bailey	Texas A&M Forest Service
Justin Nance	NRCS
Carol Moulton	TCEQ
Dania Grundmann danial.ggrundmann@tceq.texas.gov	TCEQ
Carla Ethridge	ANRA
Scott Griffith	TCEQ Beaumont Region
Jeremiah Poling	ANRA
Jessica Johnstone	TCEQ
Donna Work	Texas A&M Forest Service
Adam Whisenant	TPWD
Robert Slaughter	Texas Master Naturalist
Emily Anne Fauver	USDA NRCS
Mari Hanley	Texas Master Naturalist
Anne Tindell	Self
John Gardner	Self
Tina Hendon	Ecosystem Planning & Restoration Consulting
Julie Shackelford	The Conservation Fund
Anna Gitter	TWRI
Michael Schramm	TWRI
Lucas Gregory	TWRI