

MEETING SUMMARY

Clean Rivers Program Upper Basin Water Quality Advisory Committee Meeting
March 20, 2018

The meeting convened at 9 a.m. at the Upper Colorado River Authority (UCRA) office (512 Orient) in San Angelo. Chuck Brown, UCRA, moderated the meeting. Brown welcomed everyone and asked participants to introduce themselves.

Robert Lee Chloride Monitoring Study Update:

Brown presented information on UCRA's Robert Lee Chloride Monitoring study. The goal of the project is to identify the source of the salinity issue in order to meet stream standards within the water body. A project overview was provided. Scott McWilliams, UCRA, is currently conducting a desk review. Many water wells have been drilled but the locations are challenging to identify. UCRA will be working with Winton Milliff, Manager of the Coke County Underground Water Conservation District in Robert Lee, to contact landowners. UCRA is still waiting for final approval of the Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

Brady Creek WPP Implementation Project Update:

The Brady Creek Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) project began in September 1, 2017. Brown gave an overview of the project and a brief history. The completion and approval of the Brady Creek Watershed Protection Plan identified strategies to improve water quality. This is the first phase of a multi-phase project, which involves the installation of vortex separators and the relocation of Brady's treated wastewater discharge point to Richards Park over a 10-12 year period, as funding is available. One vortex separator will be installed with this phase of the project. Total project budget for the current project is \$373,980.

UCRA kicked off the Education/Outreach portion of the project with a Stakeholder meeting in February and is waiting for approval of the QAPP by TCEQ. UCRA has partnered with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and is hosting a free Texas Watershed Steward Workshop in Brady on April 12, 2018. Continuing Education Units are available to workshop participants and informational flyers were available as handouts for any attendees who were interested. There is also a link on UCRA's website at www.ucratx.org.

Integrated Report:

TCEQ's Colorado Basin Assessor, Robin Cypher, presented information on the Texas Integrated Report of Surface Water Quality. Cypher stated that the 2016 Integrated Report is in draft form. Data review is being conducted. EPA is encouraging States to develop water quality standards for nutrients and TCEQ and EPA have been in discussion over the development of agreed upon methods. The draft 2016 Integrated Report should be available for public comment between now and August 2018.

Staff is currently prepping for the 2018 Integrated Report. A methodology work group will be meeting in early summer/late fall.

A question was asked in regards to measuring chlorophyll-*a* in reservoirs vs. rivers. Cypher responded that parameters can be tested more consistently in reservoirs, so that is the area of concentration at this time. They are also considering just looking at nutrient parameters, though no decisions have been made yet.

Coordinated Monitoring Meeting Recap:

The group met on March 19, 2018 at the UCRA office and reviewed the monitoring sites utilizing the Coordinated Monitoring Schedule website— <https://cms.lcra.org/>. The group looks at what is being monitored and discusses any modifications that may need to be made to the current schedules. No significant changes were made to the schedule at the Coordinated Monitoring Meeting; however a station in Segment 1426 on Elm Creek (station ID 15536) was dropped and a more representative location upstream was added to the schedule (station ID 12169) in its place.

Brown discussed various water quality parameters and showed the group how to access the online map to obtain information about specific stream segments.

Lake Level Report:

Brown pulled up the most current lake level report provided by the City of San Angelo and discussion ensued. In a worst case scenario, City of San Angelo currently projects a 2 ½ year surface water supply with no additional rainfall. Brown serves on the TWDB Region F Water Planning group, which is currently discussing water supply projects and is also the liaison for Region G. Brown encouraged members in attendance to notify him of any desired water supply projects so they could be included into the 2021 state water plan.

Data for statewide lake levels can be found via UCRA’s website homepage at www.ucratx.org, by clicking on the “Lake Storage Levels” link in the left hand column.

Golden Algae Updates:

Lynn Wright, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), gave a summary of golden algae findings from November to present. There was a fish kill in early December at EV Spence with slight to mild toxicity. Cell counts and toxicity are not always related and at times there are small pockets that are problematic. In early January there were a few more fish kills, mostly shad species. There have been no reported kills in February and March.

Testing at OH Ivie indicated no golden algae, fish kills or toxicity. This is consistent with other reservoirs in the watershed with the exception of Lake Colorado City. There were some fish kills and currently a high toxicity level at that location, but the fish population is so small that it was insignificant.

Q: Any golden algae reported near Buchannan?

A: Not sure since it is not part of Wright’s area, but can check with the TPWD in that district.

There is also a page on the TPWD website that tracks this information and can be found at:

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/water/enviroconcerns/hab/ga/status.phtml>

Native Mussels:

Lisa Benton, Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), presented information on the native mussels that are currently being evaluated by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for listing under the Endangered Species Act. These mussels are important because they essentially function as the “livers of the rivers” by filtering water and they also serve as an important part of the food chain. Many freshwater mussel species throughout North America have been identified for conservation priority.

In February 2018, the US Fish and Wildlife Service amended the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to include the endangered listing of the Texas hornshell mussel, a freshwater mussel native to the Rio Grande watershed. Currently, there are five other species being considered for listing in the Colorado River basin. Four of the species – Texas fawnsfoot, Texas fatmucket, Texas pimpleback and false spike – are currently being evaluated with a proposed decision to be made by fall 2018. There will then be a full year before the final decision is made, allowing for a period of public comment and additional scientific data gathering.

Q: If a mussel is listed, what is the impact to landowners?

A: It could mean that water would need to be managed differently if they are a water rights holder. It is also an opportunity for landowners to receive technical expertise and potential cost-sharing dollars for implementing practices on their property that protect water quality and riparian health.

Q: Is there evidence that extinction of certain mussels has occurred over time?

A: Potentially, however, historical data is sometimes a challenge to gather.

For more information, a power point presentation will be available on UCRA's WQAC project webpage at:

http://www.ucratx.org/water_adv.html

Zebra Mussel Update:

Stephen Davis, LCRA, gave a presentation about invasive zebra mussels, which were first detected in the Colorado River basin in the summer of 2017.

Zebra mussels are a non-native invasive mussel species that can grow in large numbers and can adversely affect water intakes, distribution and treatment systems. In addition, they can have ecological, recreational and economic impacts. Because zebra mussels are transported via boats, it is very important that boaters follow the Clean Drain Dry protocol when leaving a reservoir and traveling to another.

Lakes Travis and Austin are currently classified as "infested" by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and Lady Bird Lake is said to be "suspect" because zebra mussel larvae were detected in a December 2017 sample but no adult zebra mussels have been detected (update: as of 3/26/2018 adult zebra mussels are confirmed to be in Lady Bird Lake).

While there is no way to completely eradicate the mussels, they can be managed. Ongoing research shows that zebra mussels in Texas lakes follow a boom-bust cycle in the first several years of infestation. When the food resources are depleted, water levels recede or the temperatures exceed a certain threshold, the population can dwindle quickly. Zebra mussels prefer slow-moving waters and therefore are of primary concern in reservoirs. They can become established in rivers downstream of infested reservoirs, but they typically do not have high population densities.

LCRA's current zebra mussel activities include: shoreline surveys, plankton monitoring, stakeholder engagement through volunteer monitoring as well as clean, drain and dry decontamination procedures for watercraft. LCRA has also partnered with TWPD in this effort through education and outreach initiatives, research and monitoring.

Early detection is very important, so if anyone knows of people wanting to volunteer and deploy samplers in specific target areas, please let Davis or Benton know.

Roundtable Discussion:

Sarah Eagle, TCEQ told the group that a legislative change was made last year that modifies the frequency of reporting. The Basin Summary Report is now due every six years (every third biennium) in order to streamline reporting for partners.

There was no further discussion. Brown thanked participants for their attendance and the meeting concluded.