

MEETING SUMMARY

Clean Rivers Upper Basin Water Quality Advisory Committee Meeting
March 23, 2016

The meeting convened at 9 a.m. at the UCRA office (512 Orient) in San Angelo.

Chuck Brown, UCRA Director of Operations, moderated the meeting. Brown welcomed everyone and introduced committee members.

Status of Water Quality – TCEQ Integrated Report

Robin Cypher, TCEQ, gave the group an update on the timeline for the Texas Integrated Report (TxIR), the report card for water quality in the state. The 2014 TxIR was approved by EPA in November, 2015. The 2016 report is in draft form now. It will go out for public comment in May and is expected to go to TCEQ Commissioners in October. Cypher explained that in the draft 2016 TxIR there are 22 impaired water bodies in the Colorado River basin; eleven are in the upper basin. There is one new listing in the draft 2016 report.

A committee member asked Cypher about the meaning of DO. She explained that DO is the dissolved oxygen available for fish and aquatic bugs. Low DO can stress biological populations and is used as a general measure of a streams health. Low DO is often caused by low flow, but pollutants also contribute. Improvements to DO in San Angelo over time is likely due to the combination of structural controls and educational efforts within the community through partnerships with UCRA, TCEQ, EPA and COSA.

A question was asked about the OC Fisher assessment and why it would still be on the list after the studies conducted by Texas Institute for Applied Environmental Research. Cypher said that the TxIR and statewide standards may not have been based only on results of that study. Data from multiple sources may be used to determine whether a standard changes, and the process to get a standard changed is a tedious one.

Cypher was asked why the standard for total dissolved solids was lowered for segment 1426 after questions were posed about the current criteria within that segment (David Cowan followed up on the question after the meeting). It was also explained that different teams handle different regulatory activities within TCEQ. For example, while Cypher handles assessments, her team does not set standards.

If the public comment period is open the TCEQ standards team can still look into a specific issue. Because EPA reviews each criteria individually, rather than addressing the document as a whole, areas of concern are considered “open” if not approved by EPA.

CRMWD Updates:

John Burch updated members on some of the relevant current activities at CRMWD. Burch addressed lake levels and said that levels are up as Lake JB Thomas received significant runoff in the last 18 months. He also discussed timeline trends since the 1990’s.

Members asked if there are any projections of a timeline for water availability in OH Ivie. Burch said he didn’t have the information readily available as that is operations data is not under his purview, but he can get this info upon request. UCRA staff commented that current projections would have OH Ivie elevation below the intake channel by January 2018 with no additional inflow during the period.

Burch showed a 3 year chart with capacity levels for JB Thomas, EV Spence and OH Ivie. All reflect steady increases with Thomas containing more water than Spence and Ivie combined. Burch showed participants how to access information on levels through the CRMWD website @ http://www.crmwd.org/crmwd_operations.htm

Burch spoke about the Raw Water Plant in Big Spring and gave an overview of the process. This is a blended water system.

CRMWD is also monitoring Salt Cedar, Golden Algae and Zebra Mussels. There are laws in effect that require boats be completely drained when coming off of a lake to combat the zebra mussel issue (called "Drain & Dry").

QUESTIONS:

Q. Do lakes spread out as they fill up?

A. Yes, but the levels need be in the higher range. Thomas does this the fastest but Ivie and Spence have the largest surface areas.

Q. What drives pumping?

A. Customer demand drives pumping.

Q. Are efforts within Underground Water Districts coordinated?

A. While wells are not typically utilized by CRMWD, coordination does occur through periodic regional meetings. TWDB also has guidelines that are utilized.

Q. What kind of monitoring is required or has been done at the Raw Water system plant?

A. TCEQ requires extensive monitoring and a list is available of what has been tested. The TWDB also conducted a two year study with four sampling events, looking at meds, pharmaceuticals, pesticides and other chemicals. The study determined that chemicals are either being eliminated or significantly reduced. Results can be provided upon request. While the plant is classified as a *Direct Potable Re-use facility* by TCEQ (for permitting purposes), what occurs is a blending process making it more of an *Indirect* potable re-use system.

A map was pulled up to give participants a picture of where all of the lakes and reservoirs are located within the upper Colorado basin.

The PowerPoint presentation Burch showed the group will be posted on the UCRA's CRP Water Quality Advisory Board webpage. Burch encouraged participants to contact him if they have any additional questions.

Colorado River Alliance Presentation:

Brent Lyles, Executive Director presented information about the organization. Lyles spoke to the group about the *Science Center on Wheels*, a mobile education program designed for middle and elementary schools in the Austin area. The organization also participates in the annual Lake Travis cleanup and is involved in the Barstow Speaker series. The agency website is: <http://www.coloradoriver.org/>

The group has been focused on Austin water quality for a number of years but is interested in broadening their partner base to include the upper region. Current goals include expanding services outside of the basin, becoming river champions within groups and building on current strengths. Lyles asked the group to think about how their organization can work within the upper basin. He would like to include anyone in the group who might be interested in being on the e-newsletter listserve. Lyles will also be visiting with SAISD about bringing the mobile education center to San Angelo students.

Dave Cowan remarked that the Mobile Education Center is a really great way to reach youth as they will be the future decision makers.

Robert Lee Chloride Study:

UCRA has applied for a NPS 319h grant to study elevated chlorides in Robert Lee. Project components include water well screening and sampling to determine why chlorides are elevated. UCRA will partner with City of Robert Lee staff to conduct the investigation. The study is a result of the 1426 TMDL I plan updates made by UCRA in 2014.

Healthy Initiatives Grant:

An EPA Healthy Watersheds Initiative grant has been submitted by UCRA to the US Endowment for Forestry and Communities. This is a proactive project which involves community effort and cooperation with landowners to preserve pristine water bodies. The area of interest is the S. Concho Springs and the award will be announced in April or May.

Discussion of Potential Red Arroyo Stormwater Project:

The potential Red Arroyo Stormwater Project was discussed at length. Several years ago UCRA staff realized that a significant amount of stormwater is produced in this area after a rainfall event and posed the question, what if we retained it? As a result, numerous studies have been conducted. A lively discussion ensued with concerns expressed by local landowners.

UCRA staff discussed the fact that it is not a dam or reservoir, but rather a big excavation in a relatively small area (50-60 surface acres), evaporation would be minimal. While it would not be full all year round, studies show that the retained water could be released and would promulgate flows. In-stream flows could benefit by metered discharge. This would also remove pollutants and it could be a potential municipal water source if managed properly. Brown said that the project was presented to council a couple years ago when the water situation was dire. It is in their hands now.

Other comments/concerns:

A.J. Jones expressed that he felt the Red Arroyo has potential safety problems in regards to flooding and is concerned about protection for area landowners. He also believes the holes should be filled. Jones expressed that oversight is crucial and feels that the Watermaster program has been imperative to rivers coming back. He stated that people need to work together for the common good.

Brown said that the Concho River has not ceased flow since 2011. Both Brown and McWilliams pointed out that the Red Arroyo project could actually assist in flow. It was emphasized that the Red Arroyo project is not a dam, it is a hole that would create additional water for municipal supply and downstream release, not less.

Hoelscher said that he just wants all the angles to be explored.

Brown explained that the Water Advisory Board is considering several options in regards to water supply for San Angelo. The Red Arroyo project is only one. UCRA's job is and always has been to protect the river. The reality in a municipality is that the larger water user will always take precedence. Ultimately there needs to be a balanced compromise.

Roundtable Discussion:

David Cowan announced that the annual 700 Springs Ranch Tour is coming up in April. It is a great opportunity for people to understand where water comes from in Llano from an historical perspective.

Russell Bond, TCEQ said that the draft 2017 water quality standards will be published March 31 and TCEQ will take formal comments through April 2017.

Natalie Goldstrohm, TPWD, said the recent Kills & Spills report has come out and talked about Brady Creek, Golden Algae and fish kills at Colorado State Park.

Jerry Guajardo, LCRA thanked UCRA for their hospitality.

Brown and Cowan thanked members for their participation and the discussion concluded. The meeting ended at noon.