



Nueces River Authority

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Clean Rivers Program Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: 6:00 pm on June 13th, 2022

Meeting Location: Del Mar College-Heritage (East) Campus, Solomon Coles Building, Room 227

The Coastal Bend Bays Foundation (CBBF) co-hosted the FY2022 Clean Rivers Program Steering Committee Meeting at their Coastal Issues Forum June meeting. Sam Sugarek, Director of Water Quality Programs with the Nueces River Authority

6:05 pm: The meeting began with an introduction by Sharon Bailey Murphy. Sam Sugarek (SS) – Kicked off the meeting discussing the Texas Clean River Program and the 2022 integrated report for the Coastal Bays, Mission Aransas, Nueces, Oso, Baffin Bay, and the Rio Grande Valley.

Richard Gonzales (RG) -A question was asked concerning the funding % the TCEQ supplies to the NRA Coastal Bend Division Office. SS answered by saying that it's around 50%. A follow up question was asked about the remaining % of funding. SS answered that other water quality studies, Baffin Bay studies, other TCEQ Studies, CBBEP. SS clarified that NRA is an agency of the state, and not a State Agency. No monies are appropriated, NRA is grant driven with a BoD, like a private company.

Carrie Myer (CM) – Asked to clarify that the Estuary Program I referred to is the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program (CBBEP), that they give is money, TCEQ gives us grant money that we have to apply for. SS replied in the affirmative saying NRA works with multiple state agencies (TGLO, TPWD, TSSWCB, Colleges, anybody that will work with us).

Unknown Attendee (UA) – Asked if we worked with water rights holders, asking if the word “authority” in our name means we have power over water rights. SS answered that we have some water rights on Choke Canyon Reservoir but that the Water Master makes decisions on pumping amounts for water right holders.

6:12 pm - Slide show begins – SS reads off the slides discussing the history of the CRP, Clean Rivers Act. SS discusses the SWQM/ CRP program, Lab accreditation/certification, QAPP....

UA – Asks whether we coordinate/work with the Texas Stream Team to get water quality data.

SS answered by saying that NRA does not coordinate with them and instead uses our own in-house water quality monitoring team.

UA - asked about the monitoring site locations. SS answered by saying a map of the sites is coming up in the presentation, and then showed the map, discussing the different basins that NRA works in, who the partners are, where the sites are....

RG - asked if NRA has staff that works down in the Rio Grande Valley. Ss answered by saying that NRA drives down there and back, gets bacteria data, mentioned the 8-hour holding time for bacteria, mentioning early mornings...

SS discussed the # of sites, the datasonde calibration log/standards, calibration/post calibration procedure, use of certified labs, field data collection parameters, pictures, streamflow data acquisition (USGS/ manual streamflow measurements), site selection methodology

CM – asked if we do any studies of the surface of the river, bank erosion information? SS answered that in certain cases we do when conducting biological assessments, but in general for CRP, NRA gets information from the centroid of the stream (thalweg) and tries to not disturb the water.

UA – another question was asked if we partner with Beach Watch? SS answered that we do not partner with them, but they do similar work but with respect to bacteria data, the swimming standard, on the coastal bays/beaches. Our CRP data covers more parameters (lists off tests from the list of parameters on the presentation).

CM - A follow up question asked if we test stormwater. SS answered that NRA test ambient water quality and is unbiased to rain events. The sampling schedule gets set and we stick to it. NRA writes flow, rain information on the field sheets.

SS – Discussed the IR that is used by the state, the timeframe of the assessment, that 7 years of data is averaged together every two years.

UA – A question was asked how many river authority there are in Texas. SS answered that there was a list on a previous slide, probably around 15 river authorities.

SS – Discussed standards, water “uses” and went over the list of uses and the parameters that corresponds to the uses.

CM – asked if the NRA ever found any chemical that ended up shutting down a business or caused a fine? SS answered that NRA that some problemed waste-water plants have been fined, that the NRA doesn’t have regulator authority (no “teeth” or fining ability). NRA works with TCEQ to assess the water and lets TCEQ know of any issues.

SS – Discussed water quality stations in Basin 20, the Mission/Aransas Watershed. Metals monitoring on Chiltipin Creek, Port Bay, and Conn Brown Harbor. A list of impairments and

concerns, screening levels was discussed for Basin 20. A list of bacteria sources was discussed and how parameters affect water quality data. Dissolved oxygen dynamics were discussed.

UA – A question was asked why sites are deemed “tidal”? SS answered that the sites are influenced by tides as opposed to being upland river sites.

SS – Discussed the Mission Aransas WPP for bacteria by TWRI. CM asked who oversees the information they collect? SS answered that TWRI and that the study was similar to the Corpus Christi Bay WPP that many were familiar with

SS - Discussed Basin 21 next. Will cover the portion up to the reservoir system, discussed the upper basin briefly. He discussed that water rushes off the Edward's Plateau and takes approximately 3 weeks from the headwaters to the reservoir system. SS discussed back-to-back floods of 100,000 CFS that were flowing down the Nueces a few years ago.

SS – Sampling stations locations on the Lower Nueces and Lake CC Reservoir were discussed. The list of impairments for Basin 21, noting a relative lack of impairments for the area's water supply was discussed. Impairments in the tidal portion of the Nueces River were discussed, that fish kills were related to the WWTP and microtidal environment occur with water sloshing back and forth.

CM – Asked if the pollutants we are finding were consistently finding in certain areas? SS answered yes.

UA – commented that next door to the meat packing plant, there was a business that services skid-o-can and wondered where they were taking the waste. She mentioned the odor was very strong.

CM – Asked if TCEQ uses our data or the public to respond to water quality issues? SS said it was a combination of both, case by case. And the role of self-reporting was covering the issues. She also asked about surface water as opposed to what? SS replied that there was surface water and groundwater but CRP only looks at surface water. CM asked whether we look for nurdles. SS answered that he has worked with Jace Tunnell looking for nurdles and went on the Great Nurdle Expedition and that he's roped a few into the nurdle hunting.

UA – asked if the data is publicly accessible? SS responded that NRA recently updated their website to include a clickable map with links to studies... A follow up question asked where the pictures in the presentation came from. SS answered that the pic/info came from the latest Basin Highlights Report and that it will be on the website. SS explained that NRA had a IT guy that quit so we used his salary \$ to upgrade the website.

SS – explained again how the data in the IR reports are used to update the report every two years with 7 years worth of data. He then explained some of the details found in the segment maps. SS discussed the Assessment Units (AUs) and Lake CC details.

CM – pointed out that the lake level chart had a long stretch where it was full in 2018/2019. SS explained that it was the longest stretch of being full that was found in our historical data records.

SS – noted that we have 10 minutes left for the presentation but with 80 slides left. “No more questions at this time”. He then mentioned the OSSF project on the Lower Nueces River below the Reservoir.

RG – asked about the OSSF program in Segment 2102, whether the septic systems were rebuilt or not. SS answered that they were either rebuilt or pumped out.

SS – Discussed the water quality Segment 2106 and 2107. He mentioned the goal to address the habitat, fish community impairment by conducting an Aquatic Life Monitoring Study.

CM asked whether we were finding more insects in that river (Atascosa River). SS replied saying that the ALM would check on that along with water chemistry, fish, bugs, habitat, flow...

CM asked whether NRA would be conducting the ALM. SS answered that we “assist” the TCEQ and TPWD biologist with these studies and rely on their expertise.

CM asked about the flow in the Atascosa. SS replied by saying that flow in the Atascosa maintain flows the longest compared with the Frio and Nueces rivers.

SS discussed Choke Canyon Reservoir and the reservoir system and why we store most water in Choke Canyon. SS also discussed the Choke Canyon monitoring project that will occur next FY.

CM - Asked about the lack of TCEQ recommendations on the Atascosa AUU/RUAA and why a recommendation from a study in 2010 was not release yet. SS answered that the study addressed swimmers and that no change to the standard meant that the most stringent standard would remain.

SS – resumed talking about Choke Canyon, the current drought and what it would take to fill the lake. He mentioned that it would take a large prolonged wet period and/or epic flood to fill it, which has happened only 3 times since it was constructed.

7:14 pm SS – Began discussing Basin 22, the Nueces Rio Grande Coastal Basin, and showed a list of impairments, the fish consumption warnings, and discussed the watershed and receiving water dynamics.

SS – discussed Petronila Creek and the issues it is facing, including brine water dumping discharges, bacteria issues with wastewater. NRA is operating the WWTP plant in Driscoll. He then mentioned the monitoring in the tidal that is conducted by TCEQ. SS then went over the flood data on Petronila Creek during the three floods in Summer 2021. SS showed a video of

The Riparian Study on Petronila Creek. UA asked about whether rock filters along the creek would work? SS responded that plants would be the best filter by absorbing nutrients, providing shade for increased oxygenation, habitat for fish...

7:28 pm – SS discusses Basin 24 – Bays and Estuaries. A review of the impairments occurred. SS – discussed testing Port Bay for metals in water. He mentioned that Mission Aransas NERR would be testing the sediment for mercury. SS said to date, no hits on mercury had occurred.

SS – Discussed the issues on bacteria in Corpus Christi Bay, Nueces Bay, Redfish Bay and CC Inner Harbor. He mentioned the Zinc in oysters water in Nueces Bay, Copper in water in Conn Brown Harbor, and ammonia in the Inner Harbor.

SS – discussed the issues with Oso Creek/Bay. CM asked about the kite boarders in Oso Bay and the issues of Shallow water, low DO.

UA – Asked about whether contaminants from the city landfills are getting into the Oso. SS responded by saying that we haven't looked for metals but we look at nutrients and salts generally, that the water is not used for water supply.

SS – Discussed the water monitoring sites down in the RGV and showed a list of impairments/concerns. He then discussed the issues in Baffin Bay, Valley Drain, San Fernando Creek, and Los Olmos Creek. He discussed the bat populations under the bridge.

SS – Discussed water quality in South Bay, Brownsville Ship Channel WPP, Port Isabel Fishing Harbor. SS discussed the issue of the RGV not having a lab.

RG asked about why the NRA doesn't open up a satellite office down in the LRGV. SS replied saying that we do go down there and get samples for the Corpus Christi Lab. If NRA had more funding, that could be possible.

SS – discussed the issues with the Brownsville Ship Channel and the San Martin Lake System sampling. He then discussed the Education Outreach Program using the groundwater, rainfall, rain barn model. He then discussed the Up2U Program inspired by the Ricky Nelson song of the same name.

SS – Gave respect to Sky Lewey for her 22 years of work with the Riparian Evaluations, Education Program, Invasive species removal (*Arundo donax*).

The End!

A YouTube video of the meeting can be found using the link below:

[“Nueces River Authority Clean Rivers Program – Public Steering Committee” with Sam Sugarek - YouTube](#)