



Improving Water Quality in Adams and Cow Bayous A TMDL Project for Bacteria, Dissolved Oxygen and pH

Water Quality in Adams and Cow Bayous

The state of Texas requires that most streams, lakes, and bays be suitable for swimming, wading, fishing, and a healthy aquatic environment. However, in two bayous in Orange County—Adams Bayou (Segment 0508) and Cow Bayou (Segment 0511) and most of their associated tributaries—low dissolved oxygen levels indicate that existing conditions are not optimal for aquatic life, and concentrations of bacteria pose a potential health risk for swimmers. In Cow Bayou, pH values are also occasionally lower than the criteria established to protect general water uses.

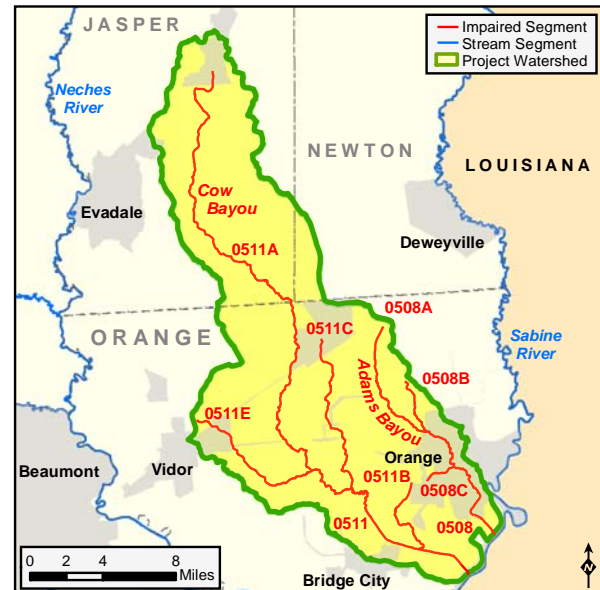
In response to these conditions, a total maximum daily load (TMDL) project has been initiated to determine the measures necessary to restore water quality in these bayous. The goal of a TMDL is to determine the amount (or load) of a pollutant that a body of water can receive and still support its designated uses. The allowable load is allocated among all the potential sources of pollution within the watershed, and measures to reduce pollutant loads are developed.

Oxygen, which dissolves in water, is essential for the survival of aquatic life. While the amount of dissolved oxygen in water fluctuates naturally, various human activities can cause unusually or chronically low dissolved oxygen levels, which may harm fish and other aquatic organisms.

Bacteria from human and animal waste often indicates the presence of disease-causing microorganisms that pose a threat to public health. People who swim or wade in the bayous may be at risk.

Although not a pollutant, pH plays a key role in the health of an aquatic ecosystem. The level of pH in a water body indicates its acidity or alkalinity. An appropriate level of pH acts as a buffer for certain pollutants. For example, certain chemicals and metals are more toxic to aquatic life at lower pH values than at high pH values.

Learn more about water quality standards and monitoring by reading *Clean Water for Texas: Working Together for Water Quality*, available on the web at www.tceq.org/goto/tmdl/.



Description of the Adams Bayou and Cow Bayou Watersheds

Adams Bayou and Cow Bayou are located in southeast Texas. Their combined watersheds cover almost 250 square miles in the coastal area of the Sabine River Basin. The topography of the region is relatively flat. The water flow in the bayous is intermittent, and periods of no flow are very common. The natural landscape is characterized by a heavy clay substrate and a mix of pine and deciduous trees.

The lower portion of the Adams Bayou watershed is urban, and includes most of the cities of Orange, West Orange, and Pinehurst. Although Segment 0508 includes only the lower, tidally-influenced portion of Adams Bayou, the area being evaluated in this project also includes the upper portion of Adams Bayou and two of its tributaries, Hudson Gully and Gum Gully. The lower portion of Adams Bayou has been dredged and channelized for navigation. Hudson Gully and Gum Gully have been channelized for drainage.

The Cow Bayou watershed is urban in some areas, and includes portions of the cities of Buna, Mauriceville, Vidor, and Bridge City. Large areas of the watershed are used for agriculture, including rangeland. Although Segment 0511 includes only the

lower, tidally-influenced portion of Cow Bayou, the area being evaluated includes the upper portion of Cow Bayou and three of its tributaries, Cole Creek, Terry Gully, and Coon Bayou. The lower portion of Cow Bayou has been dredged and channelized for navigation. Several of its tributaries have been channelized for drainage.

Both watersheds are affected by municipal and industrial wastewater discharges and by storm water runoff from agricultural, industrial, and urban areas.

Project Development

This project was initiated by the TCEQ in August 2002 through contracts with Parsons Water and Infrastructure, Inc. and the Sabine River Authority of Texas (SRA-TX). Project tasks included review of existing water quality data for the segment; selection of water quality models for determining permissible pollutant loadings and for allocating loadings for bacteria and dissolved oxygen; and the development of a monitoring plan to outline additional sampling strategies necessary to complete the TMDL. The results of additional sampling were used to determine the sources and causes of water quality impairments and to calibrate and verify the water quality models chosen to study the fate and transport of constituents of concern. Finally, the modeling results were used to determine the total maximum daily load of the

constituents that cause the various impairments.

Public Participation

The Orange County TMDL Stakeholder Advisory Group was formed to provide advice and comment on the project. Members represent government, permitted facilities, agriculture, business, environmental, and community interests in the Adams Bayou and Cow Bayou watersheds. The committee meets quarterly.

For More Information

To find out more about upcoming meetings and progress of the project, contact one of the people listed below. Or visit the TCEQ web site at <www.tceq.org/goto/tmdl/>, or the SRA web site at <www.sra.dst.tx.us/srwmp/octmdl/default.asp>.

TCEQ Project Manager

Ward Ling, TMDL Section
(512) 239-6238
eling@tceq.state.tx.us

TCEQ Regional Office

Georgie Volz, Region 10 - Beaumont
(409) 898-3838

Sabine River Authority

Miles Hall, Resource Management/
Project Development Division Manager
(409) 746-2192

TMDL Development Status

Start Date: August 2002

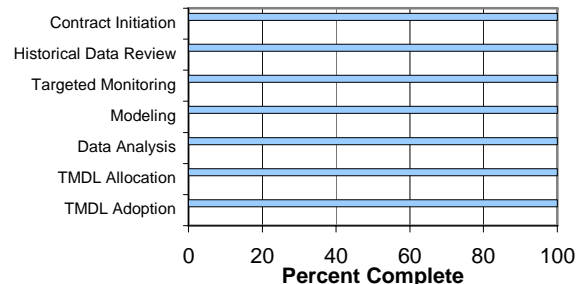
Projected End Date: August 2006

TCEQ Adoption: June 13, 2007

Submitted to EPA Region 6:

EPA Region 6 Approval:

TMDL Development



TMDL Project Highlights

- The first ever Clean Bayous Fair was held in Orange in January 2005. More than 400 attendees learned about the project and water quality issues in the area while having a fun time.
- The TMDL document identified point and nonpoint sources of pollution that contribute to the impairments. Sources include municipal wastewater treatment facilities, failing onsite sewage facilities, and other nonpoint sources.
- Work on the Implementation Plan began in spring 2007.