

Improving Austin Streams:

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IAS Coordination Committee Moves to Implementation Phase of I-Plan

With final approval of the [Improving Austin Streams Implementation Plan](#) (I-Plan), the IAS Coordination Committee has turned its focus to the plan's implementation. The Coordination Committee has increased its representation, and members and their organizations are working on the various management measures in the plan. While the I-Plan itself is focused on efforts to reduce bacteria in four Austin watersheds (Walnut Creek, Waller Creek, Spicewood Tributary of Shoal Creek, and Taylor Slough South), it will serve as a model for improving water quality in all Austin streams. The Coordination Committee will meet at least twice a year to review and tweak the plan's implementation.

One of the implementation efforts is through Keep Austin Beautiful, which during this spring and summer of both 2014 and 2015 focused on recruiting stream adopters and hosting restoration projects. KAB is only one of many efforts underway to improve the quality the four stream segments targeted by the IAS I-Plan (Walnut Creek, Waller Creek, Spicewood Tributary of Shoal Creek and Taylor Slough South



Volunteers work on creek habitat restoration during a volunteer workday organized through Keep Austin Beautiful.

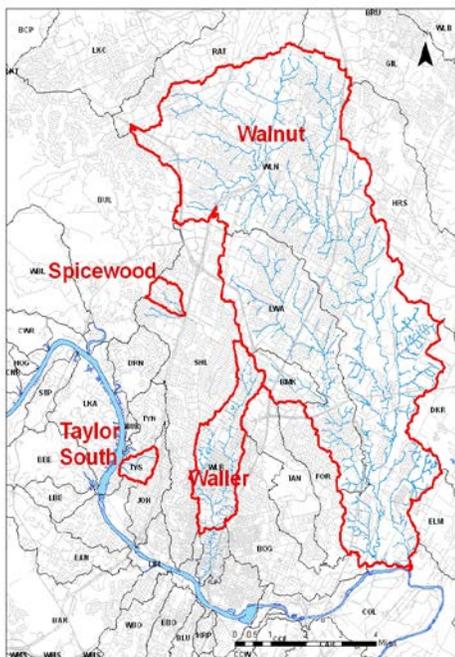


Figure 1. Map of watersheds in Austin listed as impaired for contact recreation

The I-Plan was approved by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) on January 21, 2015, when it also adopted [Total Maximum Daily Loads](#) (TMDLs), a detailed water quality assessment that determines the limits on sources of indicator bacteria in the watersheds.

The Implementation Plan outlines the measures that the groups involved will take to clean up these streams. The measures consist primarily of voluntary activities in the categories of:

- riparian zone restoration,
- wastewater infrastructure,
- domestic pet waste,
- resident outreach, and
- stormwater treatment.

The I-Plan was developed by the *Improving Austin Streams* (IAS) Coordination Committee, with public input and efforts of four workgroups, with a goal to “*develop and implement strategies to reduce fecal contamination such that the affected watersheds fully meet contact recreation water quality standard.*”

Background

TCEQ’s TMDL provides appropriate bacterial loads for these four Austin streams. A TMDL is the determination of limits that will be placed on sources of indicator bacteria in the watershed. TCEQ is required to regularly identify water bodies in Texas that do not support their designated uses. Human contact recreation impairment due to elevated levels of fecal indicator bacteria is the most common water quality impairment in Texas. Based on water quality monitoring by the City, four Austin creeks have been identified as having elevated levels of fecal bacteria¹ since 2006 (Figure 1). The City requested the TCEQ to pursue a TMDL and implementation plan process for these four creeks.

The I-Plan process for these four streams has moved in parallel with TCEQ’s development of the TMDL.

In addition to these four streams, City of Austin Watershed Protection Department (WPD) monitoring has identified a wider range of watersheds in Austin that have levels of fecal indicator bacteria above State of Texas long-term standards (Figure 2), but which technically do not come within this TMDL process. The City plans to use appropriate strategies developed in this I-Plan effort for improving all streams in Austin.

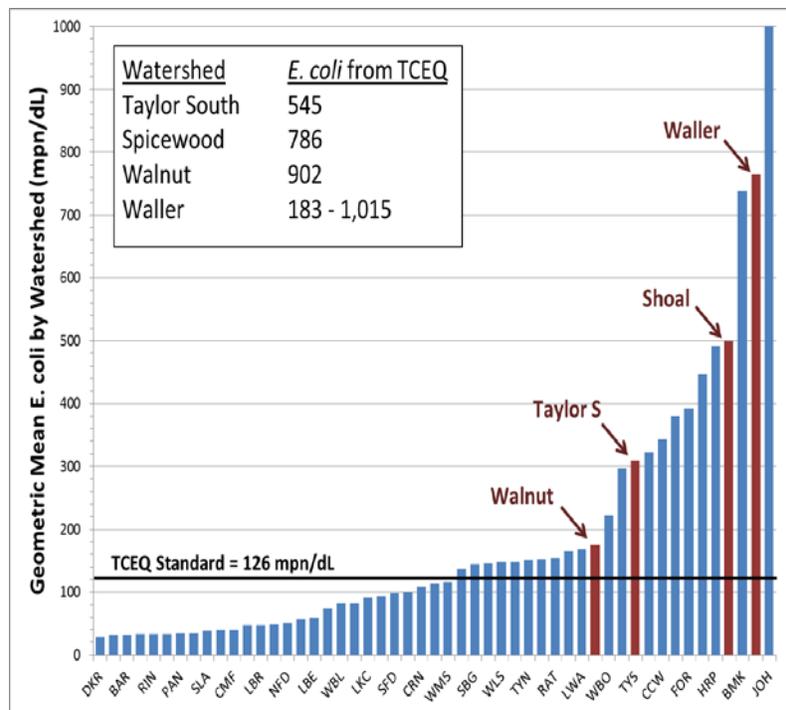


Figure 2. Chart of average E. coli by watershed in Austin. The four watersheds identified by TCEQ as impaired shown in red.

Formation of I-Plan Coordination Committee

TCEQ asked the Center for Public Policy Dispute Resolution (CPPDR) to facilitate a process where the public identified needed interests to be represented on a coordination committee that would guide and develop the I-Plan. During public meetings hosted by CPPDR, TCEQ and City of Austin in November 2012 and January 2013, citizens identified the

Fecal indicator bacteria are used to measure the long-term potential for fecal contamination, and are not a direct representation of the risk to humans from water contact. Water quality conditions fluctuate over time, and common sense-practices such as washing hands after contact with creeks, should always be used when recreating in natural waters.

following categories of stakeholder interests that should be represented on the coordination committee, and suggested names of persons who could represent those interests.

- Parks
- Environmental
- Community/neighborhood
- City of Austin
- Travis County
- Off-leash group
- State /university
- Developers
- Business

Using this input, an initial Coordination Committee was formed. All persons interested in the process but not on the Coordination Committee were encouraged to join the effort on workgroups.

The Coordination Committee met in an organizational meeting on January 25, 2013, followed by three other meetings during which the committee adopted guidelines by which it would operate, gained a common understanding of the issues involved, and discussed its goals. At its March 4, 2013 meeting, the committee formed four workgroups to develop draft strategies for the coordination committee's consideration. Workgroups are staffed by an array of coordination committee members, stakeholders and experts recruited for the effort, and interested volunteers. The coordination committee met in June 2013 to provide feedback to the workgroups, and again in July for continued evaluation of the final workgroup efforts before it adopted a draft plan on August 26, 2013. Following public comment on that draft plan, the Coordination Committee adopted a final draft, which it submitted to TCEQ in December 2013. TCEQ published the draft I-plan and TMDL, accepted public comment during July and August 2014, and held a public comment meeting on August 7, 2014. Following these comments, the Coordination Committee made modifications and approved the I-Plan in September 2014. TCEQ approved the I-Plan and adopted the TMDLs on January 21, 2015. The I-Plan is now being implemented, and the Coordination Committee meets twice a year to review its progress.

Previous Actions in the Austin Area

Austin has conducted water quality monitoring in 50 Austin watersheds since 1996. Seven of these watersheds have been on the TCEQ list of impaired water bodies due to elevated bacteria levels. The combined actions of WPD, the Austin Water Utility (AWU) and regional partners have removed three watersheds from the TCEQ draft 2012 list of contact recreation impairments. The City of Austin asked TCEQ to pursue a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and Implementation Plan process for the remaining four watersheds which is the subject of this *Improving Austin Streams* effort.

How to Get Involved

- Follow progress on the [TCEQ Improving Austin Streams web page](#).
- Come to Coordination Committee meetings.
- Contact [Dana McGehee](#) at City of Austin for opportunities to be involved or to be added to email lists. dana.mcgehee@austintexas.gov

For More Information

[Improving Austin Streams Implementation Plan](#)
[Five Total Maximum Daily Loads for Indicator Bacteria in Four Austin Streams](#)

City of Austin reports:

Taylor Slough South, Spicewood/Foster Ranch Tributary to Shoal, and Waller Creek at:

<http://assets.austintexas.gov/watershed/publications/files/SR-11-04%20TMDL%20Bacteria%20Data%20Analysis.pdf>

Walnut Creek watershed at: <http://assets.austintexas.gov/watershed/publications/files/SR-10-16%20Walnut%20Creek%20Status%20Report.pdf>

Visit the public webpage for the Implementation Plan for ongoing updates and future meeting notices:

<http://www.utexas.edu/law/centers/cppdr/training/tmdl.php>

Read the TCEQ publication, *Preserving and Improving Water Quality* at

<http://www.tceq.texas.gov/publications/gi/gi-351.html>

Project Contacts:

City of Austin:

Dana McGehee, dana.mcgehee@austintexas.gov, 512-974-2634

Chris Herrington, Chris.Herrington@austintexas.gov, 512.974.2840

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality:

Lauren Oertel, Lauren.Oertel@tceq.texas.gov 512.239.3604

Chip Morris, Chip.Morris@tceq.texas.gov 512.239.6686

For past history of project: Center for Public Policy Dispute Resolution: Suzanne Schwartz,
sschwartz@law.utexas.edu, 512.471-3507