

WATERSHED WEEKS IN REVIEW



Still Opportunity to Comment

The public still has time to make public comments to TCEQ regarding the City of Junction's application to renew the wastewater treatment facility permit.

The Permit Number for making comments is :
WQ0010199001

The original comment period was scheduled to end in April, but at the request of the Alliance, Representative Andy Murr asked TCEQ to hold a Public Meeting to discuss the permit renewal. The comment period will close at the end of the meeting.

Public Meeting on Junction Wastewater Plant Set

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has set the date for a Public Meeting to ask questions and make formal comments about the City of Junction's Wastewater Treatment Facility permit renewal.

The date is August 31 at 7 pm.

This will be a virtual meeting. Instructions regarding the meeting formalities and how to participate are [found here](#).

The first part of the meeting will provide the public an informal opportunity to ask questions of the City and of TCEQ. Comments and questions raised during this period will not be part of the public record.

The second part of the meeting will provide an opportunity for the public to make formal comments on the permit. Comments made during this period will be part of the public record and will require responses from TCEQ.

Comments may also be submitted electronically. (Instructions in article, left)

Talking Points : City of Junction Wastewater Treatment Plant

If you wish to make comments to TCEQ via written comments or comments made during the public meeting, here are a few suggestions to include:

- State your name and where you live.
NOTE: It is very important for landowners downstream of the wastewater treatment plant to make comments, as they are the most affected.
- State your interest in the Llano, how your family uses it (irrigation, fishing, swimming,).
- Mention if you have a business that depends on river tourism.
- Maintaining Kimble County's image as the "Land of Living Waters" is important.
- Since 2018, the wastewater treatment facility has exceeded the discharge limits outlined in the existing permit 12 of the last 13 quarters.
- The existing permit has no nutrient limits. The Llano, like other Hill Country rivers, naturally have few nutrients and are very susceptible to added nutrients. In other words, algae growth can easily occur within the river.
- Perhaps the best solution is for the City to discharge all or some of the wastewater to land via irrigation.



Conserving Freshwater Mussels, the Unsung Heroes of Texas Rivers

This article was published in the June 2021 issue of Texas Wildlife Magazine, a publication of the Texas Wildlife Association. It is reprinted here with permission from TWA.

By Aubry Buzek
US Fish and Wildlife Service



A Trinity pigtoe mussel found in Lake Fork Creek, a tributary of the Sabine River in East Texas.

A SIGN OF TROUBLE

As teenagers, TWA Member Charles Granstaff and his future wife Marci often roamed her family's property on the San Saba River, fishing, exploring, and picking up curiosities they found along the way. Of particular interest were giant, dish-sized mussel shells they found strewn abundantly about.

"Those would always get our attention," Charles said.

After the couple married, started a family, and took over the management of the property in the late 1990s, Charles noticed the river wasn't running as it did previously. By 2011, the effects of excessive pumping and frequent drought at times left a 40-mile stretch of the river completely dry.

Not only was the water disappearing, but the attention-grabbing mussel shells that were once a common sight on the river were vanishing, too. Aside from the collection the family had displayed on its mantle, Charles realized he hadn't actually seen one in decades.

Charles' experience isn't unique. According to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Freshwater Mussel Biologist Clint Robertson, landowners from around the state have told him that the mussels they once saw everywhere are now getting harder to find.

AN UNSUNG HERO

One couldn't be faulted for not noticing the presence or absence of freshwater mussels in Texas rivers. It's easy to overlook a species that looks and acts more like a rock than an animal.

But there's more to Texas' freshwater mussels than meets the eye. As renowned Texas outdoor writer Larry Hodge once said, "Beauty would serve little purpose for a creature that spends its life partially buried in mud."

Because mussels lack the aesthetic appeal of a warbler or monarch, mussel enthusiasts tend to use colorful analogies to get people excited about the species' conservation, calling them "canaries in the coalmine" or "silent sentinels." Robertson may have come up with the best elevator pitch for the species yet.

"They're the little water treatment plants of the river," he said.

Like water treatment plants, freshwater mussels clean the aquatic ecosystem by filtering impurities from the water. Mussels also feed on algae, bacteria and silt and serve as water quality indicators.

Anyone who enjoys fishing or swimming in Texas rivers might consider thanking these unsung heroes for their contributions to ecosystem health.

"Having healthy, diverse mussel beds helps clean the river and clean the water," Robertson said. "They feed fish, raccoons, otters, and even birds."

He continued, "They're also a good indicator the fish population is good, because mussels need the fish as part of their

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Sign up for a Riparian Site Visit



Does your riparian area look like this?

The Llano River Watershed Alliance has begun offering on-site technical consultation to assist landowners whose riparian areas need some assistance returning to their properly functioning condition.

During these visits, we will help landowners identify areas where Best Management Practices could be employed to increase vegetative growth and reduce erosion, allowing the riparian area to trap sediment, store more water, and provide shade to improve habitat for aquatic species.

There is no charge for this consultation or for the plantings, which will be delivered in the fall.

If you are interested in this opportunity, please contact southllanoriver@gmail.com.

Rio Grande Cichlid *Herichthys cyanoguttatus*

Gary Garrett, University of Texas



(Image © Joseph R. Tomelleri)

The Rio Grande Cichlid (also known as the Rio Grande Perch) is the only cichlid native to the United States. It occurs naturally in the Rio Grande and Pecos drainages in Texas and has been introduced as far north as the Edwards Plateau region (including the Llano River) and San Gabriel River in the Brazos River system. Many people think it is a sunfish (like Bluegill or Green Sunfish) and although they do have a resemblance, there are also some distinct

differences. The Rio Grande Cichlid often has blue or blue-green iridescent to whitish spots all over the head and body. It also has only one nostril opening on each side of the head (sunfishes have two) and has a lateral line that is broken into two parts (it is continuous in sunfishes). Rio Grande Cichlids have five to seven anal fin spines as opposed to three spines in most sunfishes.

During breeding season, adults are particularly conspicuous when the front half of the body turns white, and the rear half black. Males will also develop a pronounced nuchal hump on the forehead.

The Texas state record was caught in the South Llano River in 2001 and weighed 1.59 pounds. The record stood for 10 years until a 2.02 pound specimen was caught at Lake Dunlap on the Guadalupe River in 2011.

In 2020, Nolan Ryan's grandson, Jackson, caught a Rio Grande Cichlid in the North Llano that was over 12" long, and likely a world record. We will never know for sure because they only took pictures and released it back into the river.

For more information on Rio Grande Cichlid as well as all the other fishes in Texas, check out <http://www.fishesoftexas.org>

Editor's Note: Gary Garrett is Vice-President of LRWA



Thanks to Alliance member Tony Plutino of Llano River Region Adventures for giving us a shout-out at the Mason Round-Up Parade earlier this month.

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