Texas Instream Flow Program
Lower San Antonio River Study Design Workgroup
Goal, Objectives and Indicators

Goal

The goal for the Lower San Antonio River system is a naturally functioning and sustainable ecosystem that supports a balance of ecological benefits and economic, recreational and educational uses.

Objectives & Indicators

Overall Objective

- Determine natural, historic, and current associated with each discipline.

Biology		
Objective Determine and maintain flows necessary to support: o native species and biological communities known to occur in the river and riparian zones o key aquatic habitats		
Indicators		
Category	Indicator	Explanation
Instream Biological Communities	Native Richness	Richness, or the number of species or taxa, is a measure of community health, can be applied at a variety of scales (reach to basin to statewide), and can be related to modifications in flow. May also use proportions such as the proportion of native to non-native species
	Relative Abundance	The number of organisms of a particular species as a percentage of the total community
	Fish • Flow sensitive species • Sport fish • Prey species • Imperiled species • Intolerant species	Fish are useful indicators because: o they occupy a range of habitats and have a variety of life histories that are generally known; o their position at various levels of the aquatic food chain provides an integrative view of the watershed; o they are useful for examining both direct toxicity and stressful conditions by looking at indicators such as missing species or depressed growth and reproduction; o they are valued by the public. There are many species of fish in the river and all of them cannot be studied individually. Those that may warrant study include: flow sensitive species, sport fishes, prey species, imperiled species, and intolerant species.
	Other Aquatic Organisms	Mussels and river plants, if any, may be

	• Mussels • River plants, if any	appropriate as indicators.
Instream Habitat	Habitat Quality and Quantity for Key Species	Involves relating suitable habitat (microhabitat) and flow for key species. Habitat attributes may include current velocity, depth, substrate and cover; other attributes may be important for some species.
	Mesohabitat Area and Diversity	This indicator stems from the knowledge that diverse habitats support diverse communities. Mesohabitat analysis provides a quantifiable relationship between larger scale habitat (e.g. riffles, runs, pools) area and flow; habitat diversity can be derived from same data. Uses biological data for all species in a community (e.g., fish species) to define the attributes of each mesohabitat.
Riparian Habitat	Vegetation • Age class distribution of riparian plant species • Riparian species richness and diversity • Density • % Canopy cover	These are key components in assessing the diversity, health, and functionality of riparian habitat and ensuring that adequate riparian species are present for recruitment and maintenance of the ecosystem. Riparian plants typically must maintain contact with the water table, so their presence and diversity is an important indicator of soil moisture (water table) characteristics. The listed vegetation parameters can be correlated with important riparian functions, such as stream bank stabilization, temperature dynamics, and nutrient cycling.
	Soils • Riparian soil types	In the absence of riparian vegetative indicators, soil characteristics identified by the soil survey database can be used to determine past or present hydrologic influence and hence historical riparian area extent.
	Hydrology • Gradient of inundation • Base flow levels	Periodic occurrence of flood (overbanking) flows, associated channel dynamics and the preservation of base flows capable of sustaining high floodplain water tables are essential to maintaining the health of riparian ecosystems. Ground water depths can be sampled at each study reach and coupled with surface water data to produce a probability of inundation curve. Overbanking flow requirements can be modeled.

Hydrology		
Objectives Develop a flow regime that sustains ecological processes throughout the system: • Determine components of the flow regime and their characteristics (frequency, timing, duration, rate of change, magnitude) that support study objectives from other disciplines • Determine the natural variability of flow component characteristics • Evaluate water losses and gains throughout the system		
Indicators		
Category	Indicator	Explanation
Flow regime components	Overbank flows (frequency, timing, duration, rate of change, and magnitude)	Infrequent, high magnitude flow events that enter the floodplain. • Maintenance of riparian areas. • Transport of sediment and nutrients. • Allow fish and other biota to utilize floodplain habitat during and after floods. • Riparian and floodplain connectivity to the river channel.
	High pulse flows (frequency, timing, duration, rate of change, and magnitude)	Short duration, high magnitude within channel flow events. • Maintain physical habitat features along the river channel. • Provide longitudinal connectivity along the river corridor for many species (e.g., migratory fish). • Provide lateral connectivity (e.g., connections to oxbow lakes).
	Base habitat flows (frequency, timing, duration, rate of change and magnitude)	Range of average or "normal" flow conditions. • Provide instream habitat quantity and quality needed to maintain the diversity of biological communities. • Maintain water quality conditions. • Recharge groundwater. • Provides for recreational or other uses.
	Subsistence flows (frequency, timing, duration, rate of change, and magnitude)	Low flows maintained during times of very dry conditions. • Maintain water quality standards. • Prevent loss of aquatic organisms.
Natural variability	Natural	Determination of the natural variability of the above indicators, based on the older portions of gage records, presumably less impacted by human activity. The exact time period may vary by site.
	Current	Variability of the above indicators based on the last 20-25 years of gage records.
Losses/gains	Gain or loss in section of river	Difference in the amount of water entering and leaving a specific section of the river channel. Sources of gains include inflow from tributaries, alluvial and deeper aquifers, and discharges to the river. Sources of losses include evaporation, evapo-transpiration from riparian areas, diversions, and recharge of alluvial and deeper aquifers. Indicator may be influenced by shallow groundwater surface elevation and hydraulic head of deeper aquifers.

Water Quality		
Objective Maintain flow in order to sustain water quality to support: o Biodiversity o Economic uses, and o Recreational uses		
Indicators		
Category	Indicator	Explanation
Nutrients	Nitrogen Organic, Nitrate + nitrite, Ammonia, Total Phosphorus Filterable reactive, Total	The nutrients nitrogen and phosphorus are essential for plant growth. High concentrations indicate potential for excessive weed and algal growth. Total nutrients are made up of a dissolved component (e.g. nitrate plus nitrite, ammonia and filterable reactive phosphorus) and an organic component, which is bound to carbon (e.g. organic nitrogen). Nutrients in the dissolved state can be readily used by plants.
Oxygen	Dissolved oxygen	Oxygen is essential for both plants and animals. There is often a relationship between discharge and dissolved oxygen concentrations. Decreased dissolved oxygen can be harmful to fish and other aquatic organisms. Nonpoint-source pollution as well as the decomposition of leaf litter, grass clippings, sewage, and runoff from feedlots can decrease the amount of dissolved oxygen in water. Dissolved oxygen is measured in milligrams per liter (mg/L). Expected levels: 4.0 to 12.0 mg/L .
Temperature	Temperature	Aquatic organisms are dependent on certain temperature ranges for optimal health. Temperature affects many water parameters, including the amount of dissolved oxygen available, the types of plants and animals present, and the susceptibility of organisms to parasites, pollution, and disease. Causes of water temperature changes include weather conditions, shade, and discharges into the water from urban sources or groundwater inflows. Temperature is measured in degrees Celsius (°C). Seasonal trends: May to October: 22 to 35°C, November to April: 2 to 27°C. Low flow conditions can also have an influence on temperature.
Recreational health	Bacteria	*E. coli* and Enterococci bacteria are measured to determine the relative risk of swimming (contact recreation), depending on whether the water body is fresh or marine. These bacteria originate from the wastes of warm-blooded animals. The presence of these bacteria indicates that associated pathogens from these wastes may be reaching a body of water. Sources may include inadequately treated sewage, improperly managed animal waste from livestock, pets in urban areas, aquatic birds and mammals, or failing septic systems.

Geomorphology		
Objective Determine and balance the geomorphic effects of different flows, including: o channel migration o positive and negative effects of overbank flows o woody-debris dynamics		
Indicators		
Category	Indicators	Explanation
Channel migration	Rate of lateral channel migration	Rate of lateral movement of channel across valley. Some migration of the channel is crucial to support diverse riparian habitats and a healthy ecosystem.
	Rate of channel avulsion	Rate of creation of channel cut-offs. Cut-offs, in the form of oxbow lakes, back water areas, and abandoned channels, provide distinct and important habitats.
	Rate of bank erosion	The rate at which flows erode the sides of channels. This will vary by bank material and condition of the banks (vegetated, saturated, etc.).
Overbank flows	Total area inundated	The amount of out of channel area inundated by an overbank flow of a particular magnitude.
	Habitat area inundated	The amount of habitat area of a particular type that is inundated by a particular magnitude of overbank flow.
	Stage (at USGS gage locations)	The National Weather Service provides flood impact summaries for most USGS streamflow gage sites, based on water surface elevation or "stage." These summaries provide an estimate of negative impacts of overbank flows.
Woody-debris	Volume	The volume of woody debris in a section of river. A certain amount of woody debris is necessary to provide food and/or shelter for various organisms.
	Transport rate	The rate at which woody debris moves past a specific point along the river.
	Recruitment rate	The rate that woody debris enters a section of river. Wood may be supplied by upstream sections of the river, tributaries, tree fall from the banks, or washed into the river during flood events.
Channel shape characteristics	In-channel bars (area, configuration, sediment size)	Sediment bars are an important in-channel bed form. Flow across these features provides a diversity of hydraulic conditions. Bar formation, in combination with opposite-bank erosion, is the driving process behind channel migration. As bars age, they gradually create new areas of floodplain and riparian habitat.
	Meander pools (depth)	Meander pools are another important in-channel bed form. Deep pools provide diverse hydraulic conditions and cover for some species. They also provide refuge habitat for many species during low flow periods.

Connectivity		
Objectives • Identify the interaction of groundwater and surface water • Evaluate the connectivity of important habitat features of the river and riparian zone that support the basin goal		
Indicators		
Category	Indicator	Explanation
Groundwater/ surface water interaction	Gain or loss in section of river	Difference in the amount of water entering and leaving a specific section of the river channel. Sources of gains include inflow from tributaries, alluvial and deeper aquifers, and discharges to the river. Sources of losses include evaporation, evapo-transpiration from riparian areas, diversions, and recharge of alluvial and deeper aquifers. Indicator may be influenced by shallow groundwater surface elevation and hydraulic head of deeper aquifers.
Habitat features	Connection to river (frequency, duration, and timing)	Periodic connectivity between riparian areas and the river is important to maintain the health of these areas and the organisms that depend on them.
Freshwater inflows to estuary	Volume of flow (monthly and yearly totals) at USGS gage # 08188500 at Goliad	Freshwater inflow requirements for the Guadalupe Estuary (San Antonio Bay) have been studied by other state programs. Recommendations have been made in the form of yearly and monthly volumes of freshwater inflow. The San Antonio River is an important source of inflow for the Guadalupe Estuary. Determining the total volume of flow (yearly and monthly) provided at this gage will allow evaluation of the impact of instream flow recommendations on estuary freshwater inflows.