

# SURFACE WATER QUALITY STANDARDS

As part of the ongoing program to manage Texas water quality, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) is currently reviewing the Texas Surface Water Quality Standards, including the standards for contact recreation use.

Preliminary public comment plus input from the Surface Water Quality Standards Advisory Work Group have provided guidance on options available for revising the standards, said Jim Davenport, leader of the TCEQ Water Quality Standards Team. This advisory group, with representation from water associations, the agricultural industry, engineering firms, environmental organizations, consumer groups and government entities, is working with TCEQ staff to review and possibly revise the standards.

For contact recreation use, Davenport said TCEQ is reviewing the range of applicable recreational categories, the way in which these uses are assigned, and the numerical criteria that are appropriate to effectively protect recreational uses.

“The Commission will seek substantial additional public comment on any proposed changes to the standards before adopting them into the state administrative code,” Davenport said. “Because of the complexity and regulatory importance of the water quality standards, the overall process is expected to continue into 2009.”

For some, Texas’ standards for contact recreation are

not appropriate for many water bodies on the impaired list.

Aaron Wendt, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board’s state watershed coordinator, said the standards for contact recreation, with only a few exceptions, are uniformly applied regardless of water body type or the actual level of recreation use.

“Because a minimum of 10 water samples over a five-year period is considered an adequate dataset, it’s pretty easy to get listed for bacteria impairment,” Wendt said.

Kevin Wagner, a project manager for Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI), agreed, asking the question, “Should almost *all* water bodies in the state be protected for contact recreation as they are now?”

Wagner said some people believe that making rural creeks with almost no contact recreation meet the same standard as Hill Country rivers that have people swimming and tubing all year long is unnecessary and too costly for the state and local stakeholders.

Dr. Allan Jones, TWRI’s director, said the standards issue needs to be resolved. “If not, we may be shooting at targets almost impossible to meet.”

For more information, visit TCEQ’s Web site at [www.tceq.state.tx.us/nav/eq/eq\\_swqs.html](http://www.tceq.state.tx.us/nav/eq/eq_swqs.html).

