

1.9.4 Lower Neches River

Below B.A. Steinhagen Reservoir, the Neches River becomes part of the Big Thicket National Preserve until it reaches Beaumont. The channel through the lower Neches River is wide and open and the river is flanked by numerous backwater sloughs and oxbows. Moring (2003) collected 47 species of fish from this section of the Neches River, including several species considered intolerant of degradation (Appendix C). B.A. Steinhagen Reservoir and the Neches and Angelina rivers support one of the most abundant and diverse assemblages of Unionids (freshwater mussels) remaining in Texas (Howells 1997b, Howells et al 1996). The abundance and diversity of freshwater mussels is significant considering the general decline in distribution and abundance of Unionids observed in North America and Texas due to overharvest, pollution, and habitat alteration over the last century. The ecologically significant stream segment is from the confluence with Sabine Lake in Orange County upstream to Town Bluff Dam in Jasper/Tyler County (TCEQ classified stream segments 0601 and 0602).

- **Biological function-** extensive freshwater palustrine and riverine wetland habitats associated with the river display significant overall habitat value considering the quantity and quality (USFWS 2005).
- **Riparian conservation area-** fringed by the Canyonlands, Upper Neches River Corridor, Jack Gore Baygall, Neches Bottom, Lower Neches River Corridor, and Beaumont units of the Big Thicket National Preserve and the 7,988-acre Lower Neches River Wildlife Management Area.
- **High water quality/exceptional aquatic life/high aesthetic value-** Texas Natural Rivers system nominee for exceptional aesthetic value (NPS 1995).
- **Threatened or endangered species/unique communities-** significant due to presence of unique, exemplary, and unusually extensive natural community including the blue sucker (*Cyprinus elongatus*) (St.T) (Moring 2003), paddlefish (*Polyodon spathula*)(St.T) (Wilde 2000), and alligator snapping turtle (*Macrolemys temminckii*) (SOC/St.T) (Rudolph et al 2002).



Figure 9. Neches River north of US 96/FM 2246 in Jasper County (8/14/01).



Figure 10. Backwater habitat of Neches River east of US 96 road crossing (8/14/01).