Nolan Creek wastewater overflow under control

Holden Wilen | Herald staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, November 3, 2015 4:30 am

Killeen officials said Monday they have completed repairs after almost 200,000 gallons of wastewater overflowed into Nolan Creek on Friday following last week's heavy rainfall, and a researcher studying the creek said the overflow should not have a detrimental impact.

Nolan Creek Sewage

Dirty water is seen Monday, Nov. 2, 2015, near Nolan Creek on North 38th Street in Killeen.

City spokeswoman Hilary Shine said crews responded Friday afternoon after an overflow occurred near 38th Street, but a second weather cell later that evening hindered their attempts at making repairs. On Saturday, crews stopped the overflow about 5 p.m. and completed repairs by 8:30 p.m.

Shine said crews determined extreme inflow and infiltration due to rain and a large grease blockage resulted in the wastewater overflow, estimated at 195,000 gallons. From Killeen, Nolan Creek flows east through Harker Heights, Nolanville and Belton.

"Repair involved clearing the blockage," Shine said. "Crews will be utilizing CCTV equipment to look inside the lines to further identify the cause of the blockage."

According to Shine and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality spokesman Terry Clawson, the city provided timely notification to the TCEQ Waco regional office Friday evening.

Clawson said TCEQ's Waco office will monitor and follow up with the city regarding all response and repair efforts, but has not documented any "known significant impact" or initiated an investigation.

Previous issues at Nolan Creek

According to Herald reports, a sewage spill of 289,000 gallons into Nolan Creek occurred in Killeen in 2011. Following the spill, the Texas Institute for Applied Environmental Research initiated a study of the Nolan Creek watershed.

In July, Belton officials announced two water sampling tests identified elevated levels of E. coli in the creek, which according to TCEQ does not serve as a source of drinking water.

According to a previous Herald report, in October 2013, officials identified unsafe levels of bacteria in the northwestern neck of the watershed around Killeen, but studies then did not find any unsafe E. coli levels or other bacteria farther downstream.

Anne McFarland, interim executive director at the Texas Institute for Applied Environmental Science, said testing of the creek ended in June but will begin again in 2016.

While 195,000 gallons might sound like a lot, she said, the city managed to get the situation under control quickly. McFarland also said the heavy rainfall may have prevented further contamination from occurring.

“An overflow is not good, but in essence the good news is that with heavy rains bacteria didn’t rush through the system,” McFarland said. “It’s probably not going to set back the creek too much.”

Moving forward

According to Clawson, in November 2011, Killeen entered into an agreement with the TCEQ requiring the city to implement interim measures the system will take to mitigate the effects of sanitary sewer overflows.

“Their plan includes several projects to include the repair and replacement of the collection system, thereby reducing the amount of inflow/infiltration into the system,” Clawson said.

Shine said the sewer system has level alarms to notify staff when levels rise.

Also, because a grease blockage played a role in the overflow, she offered a reminder to residents to never pour grease, fats, lard and other substances down the drain.

“When poured down kitchen drains, it accumulates in sewer pipes. It coagulates as it moves through the system gathering solids as it goes,” Shine said. “A clog forms and can overflow the sewer system. Residents are asked to let fats and oils cool then wipe pots and pans with a paper towel to throw in the trash can. The city also offers used cooking oil recycling at the Killeen Recycling Center.”

In Temple, city workers had to clean up a mess Monday after 790,000 gallons overflowed at four separate locations following heavy rainfall last week