

Next Door Post

3/24/23

Area: 0.5 mile radius from the intersection of Hancock Dr. and Strass Dr.

Subject: Water line break in Shoal Creek

The City of Austin's Watershed Protection has completed its investigation and response to the water line break in Shoal Creek.

On Tuesday, March 14, Austin Water and Watershed Protection responded to a water line break in Shoal Creek, near the intersection of Shoal Creek Blvd. and Bull Creek Blvd. Austin Water has repaired the water line and stopped the discharge. In accordance with best practices advised by Watershed Protection, Austin Water deployed de-chlorination tablets in the flow path of the creek to minimize direct impacts to the aquatic habitat. While tap water is safe for human consumption and contact, the chlorinated water is impactful to aquatic life.

We estimate more than 300 fish were killed with a concentration near Hancock Dr. To put this number in perspective, it is probably less than 0.1% of all the fish in Shoal Creek. However, it may represent up to 35% of the fish immediately around Hancock Dr. These numbers are estimates, based on data from previous fish relocations. In a typical section of Shoal Creek, we would expect to see approximately eight common species: Largemouth bass, bluegill sunfish, green sunfish, redbreast sunfish, blacktail shiner, gambusia, central stoneroller, and Rio Grande cichlid.

Watershed Protection staff were out at the site on a daily basis between Tuesday, March 14, and Sunday, March 19. On Saturday, our crews removed 10 to 12 tons of debris that were potentially obstructing the creek at the Hancock Dr. bridge and three trash bags of dead fish that were caught in the debris.

You may continue to see dead fish in the creek over the next few days. Not all fish are affected in the same way. Some may die quickly. Others may die days later from stress or complications. In addition, dead fish will float and sink during different states of decomposition. Creek flow and rain events may continue to move small numbers of dead fish downstream.

In this instance, the relatively small number of remaining fish killed by chlorinated water do not pose a threat to the creek. They can be harmlessly consumed by predators or scavengers (such as snapping turtles, herons, racoons, etc.) or will decompose through natural processes.

There are many variables that affect how a waterline break will impact wildlife. Our recent drought conditions have reduced flow in the creek which increases the effect that chlorinated water has on fish. The dead fish and the turbid conditions were the only notable impacts. The creek has been impacted by water line breaks in the past and aquatic life will return to their previous condition. It is hard to know how long that will take, but it will likely be within a season or two.

Please be cautious when out enjoying the creek and avoid areas with dead fish. There is always some level of risk in a natural water body, including the potential for bacteria, parasites, harmful algae and other dangers. People and pets should not drink water from the creek, avoid contact with any algae and rinse skin and animal fur after contact with the water. Do not allow dogs to lick fur prior to rinsing. Do

not enter the creek if water is warm, stagnant or if you see algae, film or scum. In addition, do not enter if there has been rain in the past three days or if there are a lot of dogs present.
