1.12.4 Catfish Creek

Catfish Creek, also known as Catfish Bayou, begins about nine miles southwest of Athens in Henderson County and flows southwesterly 30 miles into the Trinity River in western Anderson County. There are 26 reservoirs in the Trinity River Basin upstream of Catfish Creek and, more importantly, Catfish Creek is the only tributary of comparable size that has not been impacted by a major reservoir (Leifeste and Hughes 1967). The Catfish Creek ecosystem is representative of one of the few remaining relatively undisturbed spring-fed riparian wetlands of the western Gulf Plain natural region (NPS 1983). Soils in the bottomlands along Catfish Creek are moderately permeable, shallow, gray-brown, sandy loams (Leifeste and Hughes 1967). Twenty-four tributaries, many of which are spring-fed (Gibson, Lock, D.D. Spring, Kidd Spring, Long, Berry, Crawford, and Skeet branches), maintain a free-flowing meandering bottomland that consists of forest, marshes, swamps, and bogs. Bottomland forests occupy about 11 percent of the Catfish Creek Basin, while marshes and swamps occupy only about eight percent (Telfair 1988). Marshes and swamps are important to fish and wildlife as many species are dependent upon these areas during all or part of their lifecycle; and they are generally more productive in terms of biomass than surrounding areas (Niering 1985). Telfair (1988) reported 676 species of vascular plants from the Gus Engeling Wildlife Management Area along Catfish Creek, including 112 trees, shrubs, and woody vines, 130 grasses, 57 legumes, 85 composite forbs, 222 other forbs, and 70 wetland and aquatic plants. Forty-eight fish species, including numerous species intolerant of degradation, have been verified from Catfish Creek and its tributaries on the WMA (Telfair 1988). Fish species collected from Catfish Creek proper are listed in Appendix C. The high diversity of fish species and large number of intolerant species reflect the high quality habitat present and the relatively undisturbed nature of Catfish Creek. Other species verifications from the Catfish Creek ecosystem include: 61 species of amphibians and reptiles, 34 species of mammals (Strapper 1984), and 360 species of migratory and breeding birds (Telfair 1988). The ecologically significant stream segment is from the confluence with the Trinity River northwest of Palestine upstream to its headwaters southwest of Athens in Henderson County.

- **Biological function**- designated as a National Natural Landmark for containing the best example of the few remaining undisturbed riparian habitats in the Western Gulf Coast Plain region (NPS 1983)

- **Riparian conservation area**- fringed by the 10,958-acre Gus Engeling Wildlife Management Area

- **High water quality/exceptional aquatic life/high aesthetic value**- identified as an East Central Texas Plains ecoregion reference stream for dissolved oxygen (Bayer et al. 1992).

- **Threatened or endangered species/unique communities**- significant due to presence of the creek chubsucker (*Erimyzon oblongus*) (SOC/St.T) (Kelly 1995), and the alligator snapping turtle (*Macroclemys temminckii*) (SOC/St.T) (Rudolph et al. 2002).

Figure 49. Catfish Creek north of US 287 in Anderson County (8/13/01).

Figure 50. Catfish Creek at CR 473 in Gus Engeling WMA in Anderson County (8/13/01).