

## Frio River

The Frio River rises in the north-central part of Real County and flows south through the county eventually flowing into the Atascosa River near the town of Three Rivers in central Live Oak County. The selected segment runs from the Real/Uvalde County line upstream to the confluence of the West Frio River and East Frio River in Real County (Fig. 30). The ecological significance of this segment is based on the following criteria:

1. Biological function – The aquatic and riparian habitats (Fig. 32) associated with the stream support an exceptionally diverse assemblage of invertebrates, fish, birds, and plants characteristic of the Edwards Plateau ecoregion. The riparian gallery forests are dominated by bald cypress, sycamore, pecan, and willows. Canyon slopes are dominated by plateau live oak and Ashe juniper. These woodlands provide important nesting, migration, and wintering habitat for a variety of birds.
2. Hydrologic function – The entire drainage basin of the Frio River in Real County is within the Edwards Aquifer drainage area. The river crosses the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone in northern Uvalde County. Choke Canyon Reservoir eventually impounds the flow of this segment. The Frio River runs into the Atascosa River which runs into the Nueces River and therefore contributes freshwater inflow to Nueces and Corpus Christi Bays, one of the state's major estuaries. The fringing riparian habitats of the river function to improve the quality of runoff and groundwater discharge into the river, attenuate peak flood flows, and to some extent, stabilize base flows.
3. Riparian conservation area – None identified.
4. High water quality/exceptional aquatic life/high aesthetic value – The Upper Frio River is a clear spring-fed stream and is one of the top 10 most popular rivers in the state for canoeing and tubing<sup>14</sup>. It has very high aesthetic value with numerous limestone outcrops and bluffs. It has been recommended for inclusion in the proposed Texas Natural Rivers System. Its waters support contact recreation and exceptional aquatic life uses<sup>19</sup>.
5. Threatened or endangered species/unique communities – The following rare species associated with aquatic or riparian habitats occur in or along this segment: the Golden-cheeked warbler (Fed. E, St.E), Black-capped vireo (Fed.E, St.E) and Zone-tailed hawk nest in riparian and canyon-side woodlands, although they are not restricted to these habitats; the Interior least tern (Fed.E, St.E) occurs in the county although it is not known to nest along the Frio River; the Tobusch fishhook cactus (Fed.E, St.E) occurs in the county and is occasionally found in gravel along creek bottoms.



Figure 32. The Frio River from RR 337 east of Leakey in Real County (11/20/00).