



Coordinated Watershed Protection in Southeast and South Central Texas

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Update from the Regional Watershed Coordinator

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Hello everyone, and welcome to the April newsletter. This has been another busy month of meetings and activities across the region.

The Sabine River Authority held their Clean Rivers Program Steering Committee Meeting in Orange on April 5. This was

WCSC Meeting Schedule

June 7, 2007

September 6, 2007

December 6, 2007

March 8, 2008

one of three meetings held in the basin, with the two previous meetings held in Greenville and Longview. The 2007 Basin Highlights Report was overviewed, and showed the

impairments and concerns in the basin. Most of the concerns were located in the smaller tributaries to the Sabine River. The TMDLs for Adams and Cow Bayous were reviewed, and plans for implementation will begin after the next TMDL advisory group meeting in May.

The Dickinson Bayou Watershed Partnership held a meeting on April 19. This was one of two meetings for the

partnership throughout the year. In order to update past attendees and introduce new participants, an overview of the mission statement, vision, and goals was given by Bud Solmonsson from Texas Sea Grant and Sara Snell, Dickinson Bayou Watershed Partnership Chair.



Dickinson Bayou Watershed Partnership Meeting on April 19; photo by Brian Koch

Summaries from all of the workgroups were given, with most workgroups starting to draft their portions of the plan. Additionally, stakeholders were invited to join workgroups, and provide any input to help with the plan.

Roger Miranda from TCEQ provided an update on the two TMDLs underway. The TMDL for DO is being held up because of challenges in modeling the unique

geologic and hydrologic functions affecting the bayou; however results from the modeling should be available by the end of the summer. Work on the TMDL for bacteria has begun, and a target for completion was given for 2009. The draft WPP is being developed to address the bacteria and DO impairments, and should be complete in the fall.

The Luling Foundation Farm held their 80th annual Field Day, in Luling, on May 17. Seminars were held with topics focusing on Animal ID, Organic Farming, Biofuels, and Fire Ant Control, with a demonstration on Brush Control, using the method of stump cutting.



Onlookers browse the TSSWCB display at the 80th annual Luling Foundation Farm Field Day; photo by Brian Koch

Additionally, the Foundation awarded scholarships to area students that were focused on careers in Health Care and Agriculture. Texas Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples was the keynote speaker focusing on the future of agriculture in Texas.

On May 22, a meeting was held in Orange to discuss the implementation of several TMDLs for bacteria and dissolved oxygen for Adams and Cow Bayous. A brief overview of the TMDLs was given, with failing septic systems identified as the main pollution source, with contributions from various NPS including urban runoff and agricultural runoff, as well as, permitted point sources.

Discussion included regionalization of wastewater infrastructure, education components to target homeowners, and increasing stakeholder representation on the advisory group by identifying key partners who were not participating. Also, discussions of adaptive management during implementation to target anticipated growth in the area, the possibility of hiring a watershed coordinator, performing a septic system survey, and establishing five subcommittees to target implementation. The five subcommittees discussed include: Failing Septics, Outreach/Education, Wastewater Regionalization, Funding Sources, and Agricultural NPS. The next meeting will be July 17 in West Orange.

The Dickinson Bayou Watershed Partnership Land Use Workgroup meeting was held on May 23 in Dickinson. An update from the partnership meeting in April was given; highlighting stakeholder comments from the meeting, with many people concerned about how the partnership could enhance awareness of and care toward the bayou. It is anticipated that CWA 319 dollars from TCEQ would fund implementation of portions of the plan. The WPP will focus on the two impairments, bacteria and DO, and include all other potential pollution. Also, an intern was hired to aid the land use workgroup in quantifying the dynamic land use changes taking place, and create a "current" snapshot of the watershed, with the most current land cover data and compare that to historical data, and growth predictions for the watershed.

The Galveston Bay Estuary Program Water and Sediment Quality Subcommittee meeting was held on May 24. Discussion took place on the strategic action plan for Galveston Bay, which included supporting WPPs and TMDL I-Plans, coordinating an effective NPS campaign, creating awareness for stakeholders, and supporting implementation of BMPs, with demonstrations. Other discussion included current projects, including WPPs for Dickinson and Bastrop Bayous, and a

training video for construction site managers and creating a database to track progress, currently under development by the City of Baytown. New projects include septic system implementation and upgrade in West Field Estates in Houston, Clean Marinas Program, and Protection of Sims Woods in Houston.

For more information and past issues of this newsletter please visit:
<http://www.tsswcb.state.tx.us/cwp>

Rural Ranchers Help Trinity River and Themselves

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Dr. Jim Cathey dipped a bottle into the Trinity River and held it up to the sun. The water was as murky as chocolate milk. A few minutes later and a few miles away, he dipped another container into water from the Trinity that flowed through a manufactured wetland.

"It's like bottled water that you'd find in a convenience store," Cathey said.

Though the water wasn't ready to drink, its clarity helped Cathey prove a point to a visiting team of ecologists and researchers from Texas Cooperative Extension. Wetlands naturally filter sediment and chemicals from the water, he said.

Cathey, an Extension wildlife specialist, and the team visited the Richland-Chambers wetlands this spring on a tour of the Trinity. They set out on the three-day journey to examine rural landowners' efforts to improve the river. Cathey is also leading educational efforts for a state project to rehabilitate the river.

"You don't hear as much about the Trinity as you do about other rivers in the state," he said. "But it flows from the Dallas area

all the way to Houston, and a lot of people rely on it."

At Richland-Chambers, about 80 miles southeast of Dallas, two agencies have teamed up to rebuild more than 200 acres of wetlands to be used as a natural filter. The agencies - Tarrant Regional Water District and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department - intend to eventually restore wetlands on 2,000 acres in the Richland Creek Wildlife Management Area.



Created Wetland in the Richland Creek Wildlife Management Area; photo by Earl Nottingham, TPWD

There, water from the Trinity is pumped into the restored wetlands. The water will eventually be piped into the Richland-Chambers Reservoir.

Help from the State

The river suffers from decades of poor land management along its banks, Cathey said. Ranchers and farmers cleared the land for cattle grazing and cotton long ago, he said. With few trees and other vegetation to slow stormwater drainage, runoff flows too quickly over the land and into the creek, eroding the banks along the way. Conditions are similar all along the Trinity.

The river has also been degraded by sewage and treated effluent from the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

But communities and hundreds of other property owners along the river are counting on the state's effort to improve

the Trinity's ecosystem and water quality. The sweeping plan, called the Trinity River Basin Environmental Restoration Initiative, was announced by Gov. Rick Perry in September 2005.

Two agencies of The Texas A&M University System are leading the river's restoration initiative. The Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI) will coordinate urban projects. And the Institute of Renewable Natural Resources (IRNR) will manage rural efforts. Both agencies are units of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station and Texas Cooperative Extension.

Cathey, who is leading the project's educational efforts, will write manuals and consult with landowners about restoring and managing habitats. The state is also counting on help from the property owners, Cathey said. They are able to do things that the state cannot, such as reintroduce native plants and wildlife on private land along the river. They can also restore wetlands, which would help clean the river, he said.



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers boat on the Trinity River at its mouth at the Gulf of Mexico near Wallisville; photo by Kathleen Phillips Texas Agricultural Experiment Station

"To say the Trinity is important is an understatement," Cathey said.

The river is a primary water source for 8.9 million residents, according to TWRI. With its headwaters northwest of the Dallas-Fort Worth area, the river extends 512 miles to Galveston Bay. Nearly 2,000

miles of its tributaries drain 11.5 million acres.

While improvement projects are already under way in Dallas and Fort Worth, the Governor's plan would help accelerate efforts in both urban and rural areas.

Rural Ranchers

Jim Reed's family wasn't always fond of the Trinity. It smelled bad. And it often flooded their ranch, said Reed, whose 1,800 acres sit on 6 miles of the river near Kerens, about 70 miles southeast of Dallas.

"There were a lot of bad feelings about the Trinity River bottom," Reed said.

But Reed, a third-generation rancher, said he and other property owners along the river have had a change of heart in recent years. Economics provided their fresh perspective.

The river, they now realize, can help them save their land for their children and generations beyond. They're banking on the state's project to improve the river's water quality and restore its ecosystem, he said.

"It took us a while to look above all the negative to see that the river has tremendous value," said Reed, 63, the senior member of his family.

The family has begun to plant trees and other native fauna to restore the river's habitats for wildlife. Doing so has allowed the family to supplement a declining cattle ranch. Visitors to the Reed Family Ranch now pay to hunt white-tailed deer, ducks and hogs. Others camp and fish.

"Right now, birding is becoming the popular thing," Reed said.

Reed and other landowners along the river, such as Robert McFarlane of Palestine, have pledged support. McFarlane and Reed are founding

members of the Trinity River Basin Conservation Foundation, begun in 2005 to foster efforts to improve the river's quality.

The coalition of community leaders and landowners aims to improve the quality of life, economic sustainability and ecological integrity of the Trinity River, McFarlane said.

"We think it's great," said McFarlane, a cardiologist who owns Big Woods Hunting Resort in Tennessee Colony. "It's been unfolding for a long time and it's going in the right direction."

USFWS Grant to Help Conserve Guadalupe River Delta

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has announced \$18.8 million in grants to 14 states under the National Coastal Wetlands Grant Program to help conserve, restore and protect coastal wetlands. This includes an important project to protect habitat for fish and wildlife in the delta formed where the Guadalupe River flows into San Antonio Bay on the Texas coast. National Coastal Wetlands Grants are used to acquire, restore or enhance coastal wetlands for long-term conservation benefits to wildlife and habitat.

"One of this program's many strengths is its support of the states' own coastal conservation priorities," said H. Dale Hall, USFWS Director. "The coastal areas supported by this program represent essential habitat for aquatic and terrestrial plants and animals. Not only will these funds be used to support recovery of imperiled species, they will also help prevent species from becoming threatened by restoring and protecting the coastal areas where they live."

The USFWS awards the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation grants to state agencies through a competitive process. The program is funded under provisions of the 1990 Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act, with money generated from excise taxes on fishing equipment and motorboat and small engine fuels.

For one grant project, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has partnered with the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority and Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust to leverage nearly \$400,000 in federal grant funds with nearly \$200,000 in partner funds. This will aid Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust in acquiring fee title to approximately 689 acres of coastal habitat for perpetual conservation.



Endangered Whooping Cranes winter on San Antonio Bay, near the Guadalupe Delta; TPWD photo

The property is 93 percent wetlands and contains 4.35 miles of riparian streams in the Guadalupe River Delta. There is a diversity of habitats and proximity to the coast which make the delta a key breeding, stop-over and wintering habitat for migratory birds, and an important nursery for fisheries species. It is part of the San Antonio Bay system, which is the winter home of the world's last wild population of endangered whooping cranes.

The project will help create a corridor of conserved lands, benefit existing projects and promote future partnerships. The

project builds on the fact that 147,377 acres of land are already protected in the area, including the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and the Guadalupe Delta Wildlife Management Area.



Update from the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership

Nikki Dictson, Extension Program Specialist, Texas Cooperative Extension, College Station, Texas, n-dictson@tamu.edu

April and May were busy months for the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership (PCWP). The work group meetings allowed for open discussion and questions on the assessment results that were presented at the March Steering Committee meeting.

The second draft of the Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) was recently sent to the partnership for review and comment. The draft WPP currently contains the following sections: Watershed Management; State of the Watershed; Plum Creek Watershed Partnership; Methods of Analysis; Estimate of Load Reductions; and Pollutant Sources in Plum Creek Watershed. The draft WPP will continue to be updated as additional sections are drafted and as comments are received and incorporated. The draft WPP can be downloaded from the website at <http://pcwp.tamu.edu/> and is open to comment by the public. Matt Berg with Texas Cooperative Extension is leading the effort of writing the Plum Creek WPP. Please feel free to email comments to Matt Berg at: MBerg@ag.tamu.edu or fax them to 979-845-0604.

The Outreach and Education work group reviewed and discussed the draft work plan for the Clean Water Act §106 funding

being provided by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to develop and pilot outreach and education activities in the Plum Creek Watershed that could be utilized in other watersheds. Working through the Plum Creek Outreach and Education Work Group, TCEQ, Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority and Texas Cooperative Extension developed a workplan for these funds to be used in the watershed.

TCEQ is contracting with GBRA to coordinate many activities with the 106 funding including: develop online training for individuals to illustrate how wastewater treatment facilities and on-site sewage facilities work, best management practices for fats, oils, and grease (FOG) and household chemical use and disposal, develop online training for stormwater best management practices (BMPs) for municipal operations and employees, identification and clean up of illegal dump sites, develop a watershed protection brochure template that can be used by watershed groups as community outreach,



Illegal dumping along Plum Creek is a concern for stakeholders and will be addressed with funding through TCEQ; photo by Brian Koch

coordinate NPS Pollution Training Workshops, and hold informational workshops and develop outreach and education resources for homeowners, installers and maintenance providers of on-site sewage facilities. This is very exciting to have this funding provided in the Plum Creek Watershed to start

education and outreach activities even before the WPP is completed.

The Agricultural NPS work group reviewed and discussed appropriate agriculture BMPs that would be accepted in the watershed and where funding could be obtained through cost share programs and grants for these practices. This group also discussed how to reach the differing audiences and what incentives (CEU's, etc.) might get them to take time out of their busy schedules to attend educational trainings and workshops. It will be very important to advertise about any potential funding implementing practices and for any educational trainings or workshops in the area to reach a broader audience. There is also a great concern for the increasing amount of planned conversion of farms and ranches into high density residential developments and the future impact to the Plum Creek Watershed.



When the city and the country meet there are sometimes unique combinations of land uses, such as the goats and the Taco Bell in Lockhart, Texas; Photo by Nikki Dictson.

The Wastewater and Industry Work Group discussed recommending many of the main elements of the East Hays County Wastewater Compact that evolved from the *Eastern Hays County Regional Wastewater Facility Planning Study* conducted in 2005 for GBRA. Major recommendations of the compact are: 1) Encouraging larger developments (10 or more homes) to install centralized

wastewater systems, 2) Proper operation and maintenance of wastewater infrastructure is essential to public welfare, thus the operation of future wastewater facilities in the area should be jointly permitted (e.g. private developer and public entity) and operated by the public entity as these will at some future time become part of a municipality, 3) Encourage future development to design facilities that meet the level represented by the TCEQs 5-5-2-1 effluent set, 4) East Hays County has limited water supplies so to conserve water it is desired that new development include provisions to minimize the use of potable water for irrigation, 5) Parties agree to jointly participate in the review of proposed wastewater projects and plans, and in special studies, and 6) All parties agree to support the core provisions of the Compact.

The Urban Stormwater and NPS work group started discussing how to achieve the reduction rates within the urban sector and what programs are out there to provide outreach and education. It is felt by the group that educating the citizens on issues such as nutrient and bacteria sources and how they might be impacting the watershed is critical. There are many homeowners associations in the northern portion of the watershed that would be a good way to reach and educate the urban population. The group also decided to look into finding funding sources to assist the cities with inspecting and repairing sewer and storm systems, new floodplain maps and plans, and erosion issues. The cities in the watershed are already doing many good things to improve water quality and these should be included in the WPP.

The Water Quality and Habitat Work Group reviewed and discussed the draft *2006 Texas Water Quality Inventory and 303(d) List*. Aaron Wendt with TSSWCB presented an update on the proposed Monitoring Plan for Plum Creek. This allowed the group to have a final chance to review and discuss the plan before it went to EPA for funding approval. The

group also reviewed and commented on the new nutrient load duration curves at each of the three monitoring stations for total phosphorus, nitrate, ammonia and orthophosphorus in Plum Creek.



High Density Residential Development located in the Plum Creek Watershed; Photo by Matt Berg.

The PCWP Steering Committee met on May 10 in Lockhart. The meeting consisted of open discussion on the process and draft WPP, including: improving wetlands to naturally filter the water, receiving agency approval on SELECT and LDC approaches, building a database of landowners along the creek, identifying existing programs that could benefit water quality, and rainwater harvesting techniques and education, and the need to monitor and track future implementation efforts.

Aaron Wendt informed the group that the Monitoring workplan for Plum Creek had been approved by EPA and that once the Quality Assurance Protection Plan (QAPP) is approved then the monitoring can begin. Updates from each of the work groups were presented at the meeting along with an update on the progress of drafting text for the WPP and the need for member input.

PCWP Meetings in June

**Outreach and Education Work Group
June 5, 2007
9:00 am - 12:00 pm
Luling Foundation Farm Office, Luling**

**Agricultural NPS Work Group
June 5, 2007
6:00 - 9:00 pm
Lockhart County Annex, Lockhart**

**Urban Stormwater and NPS Work Group
June 14, 2007
9:30 am -12:00 pm
Kyle City Hall, Kyle**

**Wastewater and Industry Work Group
June 14, 2007
2:30 pm - 5:00 pm
Kyle City Hall, Kyle**

**Water Quality and Habitat Work Group
June 20, 2007
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Polonia Water Supply Corp., Lockhart**

Prescribed Burn Workshop Aug. 2-4 in Sonora

Blair Fannin, Texas Cooperative Extension
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Ranch owners and managers interested in learning about prescribed burning are invited to an Academy for Ranch Management workshop Aug. 2-4 at the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station at Sonora.

"The workshop is designed to teach fire characteristics, how to plan and carry out a prescribed burn, habitat manipulation, and post-burn management," said Ray Hinnant, one of the workshop instructors. "This workshop can be taken alone to learn the basics of prescribed burning or used as a prerequisite for an advanced prescribed burning workshop that can satisfy the educational component for the Certified Prescribed Burn Manager," Hinnant said. "The Academy for Ranch Management has trained more than 120 individuals in prescribed burning, and more than 30 have passed the educational component of the Certified Prescribed Burn Manager," Hinnant said.

Participants will be able to see the results of different prescribed burns at the station that have been conducted for over 20 years, he said. Attendees will develop a burning plan and participate in a practice

burn. To assist them when they return to their ranches, participants will receive the Burn Boss handbook that has space for contact information, a check sheet to make sure they are prepared for the burn, tables to assist in estimating fire behavior, and a journal for several burns, Hinnant said.

Individuals are encouraged to register early for the workshop. Cost is \$395, which includes lodging and meals. For more information about registration or directions to the station, contact Hinnant at 979-776-0693 or ranchmanagement@yahoo.com. More information on the Academy for Ranch Management can be found at <http://www.ranchmanagement.org>.

Upcoming Water Quality Meetings and Announcements

June 5, 2007
Ag Waste Pesticide Collection-Luling
8am-1pm Luling Livestock Auction

June 6, 2007
Ag Waste Pesticide Collection-Giddings
8am-1pm Sons of Herman Hall

June 7, 2007
Ag Waste Pesticide Collection-Wharton
8am-1pm Wharton County Fair Grounds

June 7, 2007
TSSWCB Regional Watershed Coordination Steering Committee Meeting
10am-12pm Columbus

June 13, 2007
Upper Oyster and Gilleland Creek bacteria TMDLs on TCEQ agenda for consideration for adoption

June 26, 2007
TCEQ Surface Water Quality Standards Advisory Work Group
9 am-4pm Austin

June 29, 2007
Joint TSSWCB/TCEQ Work Session to consider action on the Bacteria TMDL Task Force Report

July 17, 2007
Orange County TMDL I-Plan Meeting
10am West Orange

Contact Information

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This newsletter is published for the benefit of entities with water quality management responsibilities in Southeast and South Central Texas. Its purpose is to inform readers and highlight watershed activities taking place throughout the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board Wharton Regional Office service area.

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