



TEXAS STATE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION BOARD

Program News and Activities for February 2016

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The TSSWCB produces this monthly update of the agency's activities as an informational service to local Soil and Water Conservation District Directors. I hope you find this information helpful, and if you have any questions about specific programs or projects please don't hesitate to call your local field representative or our state headquarters.

Rex Isom, *Executive Director*

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Upcoming State Board Work Session and Meeting
- 2 Budget and Accounting
- 2 Public Relations & Information
- 2 Texas Nonpoint Source Management Program
- 2 Nonpoint Source Grant Program
- 3 Water Quality Planning and Implementation
- 5 Upcoming Public Meetings
- 5 Water Supply Enhancement Program
- 7 Rio Grande Carrizo Cane Eradication Program

UPCOMING STATE BOARD WORK SESSION AND MEETING

The State Board has tentatively scheduled a Work Session on **Wednesday, March 23, 2016** and a formal State Board Meeting on **Thursday, March 24, 2016 in Temple**. More information is available at <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/boardmeetings>, or by contacting Karen Preece at (254) 773-2250, ext. 245 or kpreece@tsswcb.texas.gov

BUDGET AND ACCOUNTING

April 1st is the deadline for submitting Board Member Election Delegate and Alternate Form TSSWCB-43 for Areas II and IV.

May 15th is the deadline for claiming two thirds of Fiscal Year 2016 Matching Fund allocation.

The District Biennial Budget Request for Fiscal Years 2018-19 is scheduled to be available for online submission beginning April 1st. The deadline for submission is scheduled for May 31, 2016.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND INFORMATION

77th Annual Meeting of Texas Soil and Water Conservation District Directors:

Mark your calendars for October 17-19, 2016 and plan on attending the 77th Annual State Meeting held in Waco.

Social Media:

The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board now has a YouTube Channel. This media outlet has all of our conservation winner videos from our Annual Meeting this year in Corpus Christi. We will be sharing videos throughout the year featuring soil and water conservation efforts. Please visit our channel at:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4Dpz4w1Kl3BT-064bGYnHw>

2016 Soil Stewardship Public Speaking Contest:

Students are now in the process of researching and preparing their speeches in the 2016 Soil Stewardship Public Speaking Contest. The theme of the 2016 contest is "Land Stewardship Produces a Healthy Texas".

Districts should be aware that students preparing to enter the contest are required to consult with a director, district employee, or NRCS employee in order to gain knowledge about the work of a local SWCD. The student will require a signed affidavit by a representative of the district to validate that he or she consulted with the SWCD. A district representative must sign the document certifying

that a student has in fact consulted with the SWCD during the preparation of the speech.

TEXAS NONPOINT SOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The federal Clean Water Act (CWA) requires states to develop a program to protect the quality of water resources from the adverse effects of nonpoint source (NPS) water pollution. The *Texas NPS Management Program* is the State's comprehensive strategy for addressing NPS pollution. The program publication is updated every five years. The most recent revision was submitted by the Governor in June 2012 and thusly approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The *Texas NPS Management Program* is jointly administered by the TSSWCB and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

Implementation of the *Texas NPS Management Program* involves partnerships among many organizations. With the extent and variety of NPS issues across Texas, cooperation across political boundaries is essential. SWCDs are vital partners in working with landowners to implement best management practices (BMPs) that prevent and abate agricultural and silvicultural NPS water pollution.

More information on the *Texas NPS Management Program* is available at:

<http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/managementprogram>.

Nonpoint Source Grant Program:

FY2011 – FY2015 CWA §319(h) Grant Status

There are currently 33 on-going §319(h) grant-funded projects addressing a wide array of agricultural and silvicultural NPS issues. Unliquidated federal funds for these on-going projects total approximately \$9.5 million and are primarily being used to implement BMPs to abate NPS pollution from animal feeding operations, grazing livestock operations and row crop operations; provide technical assistance through SWCDs for the development of WQMPs; provide financial incentives for implementing certain BMPs prescribed in WQMPs; support various targeted educational programs; develop and

implement Watershed Protection Plans (WPP); and implement the NPS portion of Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Implementation Plans (I-Plan).

FY2014 – FY2016 State Grant Status

There are currently 20 on-going projects addressing an array of agricultural and silvicultural NPS issues. Unliquidated state funds for these on-going projects total approximately \$1.7 million and are primarily being used to implement agricultural NPS components of TMDL I-Plans; conduct Recreational Use Attainability Analyses (RUAA); support increased analytical infrastructure at public bacterial source tracking (BST) laboratories; demonstrate innovative BMPs on animal feeding operations and grazing lands; and collect and analyze water quality data for watersheds with impaired waterbodies.

Water Quality Planning and Implementation:

Coordination with EPA

On February 9, 2016, TSSWCB SRM staff [Liza Marshall, Jana Lloyd, TJ Helton, Wesley Gibson, Brian Koch] met with EPA staff in Temple for the annual end-of-year review (FY2015) of the *Texas NPS Management Program* and the CWA §319(h) NPS Grant Program. Many priority issues affecting TSSWCB were discussed in the meeting including financial aspects of the program and measuring success in watershed restoration. Staff discussed on-going efforts in select watersheds to develop and implement WPPs and TMDLs, and the status of statewide educational projects. The group also discussed their on-going collaborations with other state and federal agencies on water quality restoration activities. Discussion highlighted the program's accomplishments, goals and plans for the coming year.

Coordination with TCEQ

On January 25, 2016, TSSWCB SRM staff [Liza Parker, Ashley Wendt] attended the Surface Water Quality Standards Advisory Work Group Meeting in Austin. The current status of Texas surface water quality standards were discussed along with upcoming revisions to the Procedures to Implement the Texas Surface Water Quality Standards, and EPA's final rulemaking to update the National Water Quality Standards Regulation. Additionally, TCEQ staff presented information on the revised national recommended water quality

criteria for the protection of human health, nutrient criteria development updates and recommendations for recreational use changes for specific waterbodies.

Coastal Management Plan (CMP) Grant Program

Through the CMP, the General Land Office awards approximately \$1.8 million of the federal §306/§306A coastal management grant funds received from NOAA to local governments and other entities along the coast for planning and implementation of projects that address environmental problems affecting the coastal area and that promote sustainable economic development.

On January 27, 2016, TSSWCB SRM staff [Brian Koch] attended a Coastal Coordination Advisory Committee Review Team meeting in Austin. This meeting was held to review the upcoming Coastal Management Program Cycle 22 grant application materials and provide edits and comments to make the grant process easier for applicants.

More information on the CMP grant program can be found at <http://www.glo.texas.gov/what-we-do/caring-for-the-coast/grants-funding/cmp/index.html>.

STATE DISTRICT III

Oso Bay and Oso Creek

Impairment: Bacteria
Mechanism: TMDL
Lead: TCEQ

On January 28, 2016, TSSWCB SRM staff [Brian Koch] attended an Oso Bay and Creek I-plan meeting in Corpus Christi. This meeting was held to update stakeholders on progress and to establish work groups to help develop the I-plan.

More information is available at: <http://www.tceq.texas.gov/waterquality/tmdl/67-osobaybacteria.html>. This TMDL has the potential to affect livestock and farming operations in the Oso Bay/Creek watershed in Nueces County.

STATE DISTRICT IV

Carters and Burton Creeks

Impairment: Bacteria

Mechanism: TMDL, I-Plan
Lead: TCEQ

Program”, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service; Federal \$417,398/ External \$72,033

On February 11, 2016, TSSWCB SRM staff [Ashley Wendt] attended a Carters Creek Watershed Assessment project update meeting in College Station. The meeting, hosted by the Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI), delivered final results of an extensive watershed-wide monitoring effort. Data from several of the monitoring sites highlighted local areas that may be most problematic for water quality.

More information is available at <http://cartersandburton.tamu.edu/> and <http://www.tceq.texas.gov/waterquality/tmdl/85-carterscreek.html>. This TMDL and I-Plan will affect livestock operations in the Carters Creek watershed in Brazos County.

Navasota River

Impairment: Bacteria
Mechanism: Assessment
Lead: TSSWCB
Project: “Watershed Protection Plan Development for the Navasota River below Lake Limestone”, Texas Water Resources Institute; State \$210,532

On February 16, 2016, TSSWCB SRM staff [Ashley Wendt] attended a Brazos County SWCD #450 meeting in Bryan and a Robertson County SWCD #451 in Franklin. TWRI staff presented animal numbers for the district’s portion of the Navasota watershed. The feedback received from the district board members will be used to update modeling and further refine information to be used for the development of the WPP.

More information is available at <http://navasota.tamu.edu/> or <https://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/en/managementprogram/navasota>. This project affects livestock operations in the Navasota River watershed in Brazos, Grimes, Madison, Leon, Limestone and Robertson Counties.

STATEWIDE PROJECTS (NOT WATERSHED-SPECIFIC)

Project: “Continued Statewide Delivery of the Texas Watershed Steward

On January 26, 2016, TSSWCB SRM staff [Jana Lloyd] attended a Texas Watershed Steward workshop that took place in Seguin. Over 35 people attended the workshop that was sponsored by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and TSSWCB, in coordination with the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Partnership, discussed what it means to be a watershed steward, watershed impairments, managing urban and rural lands through the use of BMPs, and how to get involved in community driven watershed protection and management. The workshop included an overview of water quality and watershed management in the Geronimo Creek watershed. More information on the Texas Watershed Steward Program is available at <http://tw.s.tamu.edu/>.

Project: “Enhancing Feral Hog Management Through Statewide Implementation of Lone Star Healthy Streams”, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service; Federal \$558,010/External \$376,973

Feral Hog Management Workshops were held in Falls City on January 29 and Luling on February 9th. There were 190 and 185 attendees, respectively, at the workshops that were sponsored by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and TSSWCB. The workshops provided participants with information about the basic biology of feral hogs and their damage in watersheds, population dynamics, and laws and regulations regarding feral hogs. Also, participants learned about Agricultural regulations regarding feral hogs, disease concerns, and feral hog control. More information about the Lone Star Healthy Streams Feral Hog Component is available at <http://lshs.tamu.edu>.

Upcoming Public Meetings:

- February 29, 2016 – Mill Creek Watershed Protection Plan Meeting (Bleiberville)
- March 1, 2016 – Texas Groundwater Protection Committee Public Outreach and Education Subcommittee Meeting (Austin)
- March 3, 2016 – Texas Riparian & Stream Ecosystem Workshop- Lampasas River (Lampasas)
- March 3, 2016 – Galveston Bay Council Water and Sediment Quality Meeting (Houston)
- March 3, 2016 – Dickinson Bayou WPP Meeting (Dickinson)
- March 4, 2016 – Lone Star Healthy Streams Workshop (Hempstead)
- March 5, 2016 – Feral Hog Workshop- Brazoria County (Angleton)
- March 9, 2016 – Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program Water and Sediment Quality Implementation Team Meeting (Corpus Christi)
- March 9, 2016 – Oso Bay and Oso Creek I-plan Meeting (Corpus Christi)
- March 10, 2016 – Regional Watershed Coordination Steering Committee (Columbus)
- March 10, 2016 – Texas Watershed Stewards Workshop (Arlington)
- March 17, 2016 – San Antonio Bay Partnership Meeting (Victoria)
- March 24, 2016 – Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority Clean Rivers Program (CRP) Steering Committee Meeting (Seguin)
- March 25, 2016 – San Antonio River Authority Environmental Advisory Committee CRP Meeting (Karnes City)
- March 29, 2016 – Upper Rio Grande CRP Coordinated Monitoring Meeting (CMM) (El Paso)
- March 29, 2016 - Texas Riparian & Stream Ecosystem Workshop- Lavaca River (Edna)
- March 30, 2016 – Texas Well Owner Network Training, Leon River (Gatesville)
- March 30, 2016 – Pecos CRP CMM (Midland)
- March 30, 2016 – Nueces River Authority CRP CMM (Corpus Christi)
- March 31, 2016 – Upper Rio Grande CRP CMM (Alpine)

WATER SUPPLY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

Meeting Critical Water Conservation Needs and Enhancing Public Water Supplies Through Brush Control

Scarcity and competition for water have made sound water planning and management increasingly important. The demand for water in Texas is expected to increase by about 22%, to a demand of nearly 22 million ac-ft in 2060; while existing water supplies are projected to decrease by about 10%, to just over 15 million ac-ft.

Noxious brush, detrimental to water conservation, has invaded millions of acres of rangeland and riparian areas in Texas, reducing or eliminating stream flow and aquifer recharge through interception of rainfall and increased evapotranspiration. Brush control has the potential to enhance water yield by conserving water lost to evapotranspiration, improve soil health, restore native wildlife habitat, improve livestock grazing distribution, protect water quality, reduce hazardous fuels to mitigate wildfire, and manage invasive species.

In order to help meet the State's critical water conservation needs and ensure availability of water supplies, the Texas Legislature established the Water Supply Enhancement Program (WSEP) administered by the TSSWCB to increase available surface and ground water supplies through the targeted control of brush species that are detrimental to water conservation (e.g., juniper, mesquite, saltcedar). The 84th Texas Legislature continued funding for the WSEP by providing \$2,638,413 to the TSSWCB for FY2016.

The TSSWCB collaborates with SWCDs, and other local, regional, state, and federal agencies to identify watersheds across the state where it is feasible to implement brush control in order to enhance public water supplies. The TSSWCB uses a competitive grant process to rank feasible projects and allocate WSEP grant funds, giving priority to projects that balance the most critical water conservation need of municipal water user groups with the highest projected water yield from brush control.

In watersheds where WSEP grant funds have been allocated, the TSSWCB works through SWCDs to deliver technical assistance to landowners in order to implement brush control activities for water supply enhancement. A 10-year resource management plan is developed for each property enrolled in the WSEP which describes the brush control activities to be implemented, follow-up treatment requirements, brush density to be maintained after treatment, and supporting practices to be implemented including livestock grazing management, wildlife habitat management, and erosion control measures. Cost-share assistance is provided through the WSEP to landowners implementing brush control activities on eligible acres.

Recent Activities:

On November 19, 2015, the State Board allocated \$1,777,000 in FY2016 cost-share funds to 11 WSEP projects; this action fully allocated all FY2016 cost-share funds. In summer 2015, the TSSWCB issued a request for proposals (RFP) for projects seeking funding in FY2016 to conduct brush control under the WSEP. A competitive proposal review process (per 31 TAC §517.25 and the *State Water Supply Enhancement Plan*) was used so that the most appropriate and effective projects were identified for funding. Based on appropriated funds, the agency was only able to meet 33% of the demand for cost-share to perform brush control as requested for the 31 eligible projects, leaving an unmet demand for over \$3.5M in cost-share.

On November 19, 2015, the State Board accepted the *Brush Control Feasibility Study for the O.H. Ivie Reservoir Lake Basin* and established the studied watershed as a priority WSEP project watershed. Due to low water levels over the last 15 years, much of the immediate lake basin has been exposed resulting in dense infestations of undesirable brush species, including saltcedar. Depending on the water level condition of the reservoir and the amount of brush treated, the model projects that brush control in the immediate lake basin could yield either 722.13 or 818.48 ac-ft/yr of enhanced water supply in the reservoir. This *Feasibility Study* is available at: <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/reports#feasibilitystudy>.

The 16 Regional Water Planning Groups (RWPGs) submitted their final adopted *2016 Regional Water Plans* to the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) in December 2015. In December 2015 and January 2016, the TWDB took action to approve all *16 Regional Water Plans*. TWDB staff is moving forward with developing the *2017 State Water Plan* based on these *Regional Water Plans*. WSEP staff is reviewing the *16 Regional Water Plans* to ascertain how each RWPG addressed brush control for water supply enhancement. The approved *2016 Regional Water Plans* are available at:

<http://www.twdb.texas.gov/waterplanning/rwp/plans/2016/index.asp>.

TSSWCB staff attended the following TWDB RWPG meetings to discuss WSEP issues: Region H (November 4, 2015; Conroe) and Region M (September 30, 2015; Weslaco). A presentation on the WSEP was given by TSSWCB staff at both the Region H and Region M meetings. This presentation has now been given to 9 of the 16 RWPGs. Additional information on the regional water planning process is available at:

<http://www.twdb.texas.gov/waterplanning/rwp/>.

The *WSEP 2015 Annual Report* was developed, published, and distributed. During FY2015, through the WSEP, 23,191 ac of brush management was incentivized by the State in 11 project areas. For these acres, landowners received cost-share assistance through the program (contracts from FY2013, FY2014, and FY2015) totaling \$1,279,326 in state funding. Based on estimates provided by feasibility studies and computer models, and depending on the climatic conditions across the state that influence the sequence of drought and rainfall events, this work is projected to enhance water yield by 5,928.7 ac-ft/yr. The *Annual Report* is available at: <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/reports#wsep>.

On December 2, 2015, WSEP staff attended the Texas Groundwater Protection Committee (TGPC) Public Outreach and Education Subcommittee meeting Austin. The TSSWCB WSEP is a focus area for the Subcommittee in its efforts to implement the 2nd edition of the *Groundwater Educational Outreach Plan*. Agency

staff provided an update on WSEP activities to the Subcommittee. Additional information on the TGPC is available at: <http://www.tgpc.texas.gov/>.

On January 13, 2016, WSEP staff attended the TGPC meeting Austin. A presentation on the WSEP was given by TSSWCB staff at the meeting. Discussion focused on questions raised in a white paper on brush control recently developed by the TGPC Groundwater Issues Subcommittee. Additional information on the TGPC is available at: <http://www.tgpc.texas.gov/>.

On December 14-16, 2015, the 6th National Conference on Grazing Lands was held in Dallas. Hosted by the National Grazing Lands Coalition (formerly the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative or GLCI), the objective of the conference was *To Heighten Awareness of the Economic and Environmental Benefits of Grazing Lands*. Numerous Texas-centric sessions were held, including a session focused on brush management. More information on this conference is available at: <http://www.grazinglands.org/grazing-conference/>.

The 69th Annual Society for Range Management Meeting will be held January 31-February 4, 2016 in Corpus Christi. The theme of this year's conference *Rangelands and Wildlife* provides an overarching view of the changing landscape of Texas rangelands. More information on this conference is available at: <http://www.rangelands.org/>.

More information on the WSEP is available at: <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/brushcontrol>.

RIO GRANDE CARRIZO CANE ERADICATION PROGRAM

Improving Border Security and Restoring Ecosystem Function of the Rio Grande through Invasive Species Control

Large dense stands of invasive, non-native carrizo cane (*Arundo donax*) now occupy the banks and floodplains of the Rio Grande, thwarting law enforcement efforts along the international border, impeding and concealing the detection of criminal activity, restricting law

enforcement officers' access to riverbanks, and impairing the ecological function and biodiversity of the Rio Grande.

In order to help meet the Governor's border security priorities, the Texas Legislature, in 2015, directed the TSSWCB, through SB1734, to develop and implement a program to eradicate carrizo cane along the Rio Grande.

Carrizo cane is considered one of the greatest threats to the health of riparian ecosystems in the southwestern United States, with great negative impact to biodiversity and ecological processes. *Arundo* does not provide any food sources or nesting habitats for native wildlife. As a result of this weed's high evapotranspiration capacity, infestations threaten water supplies for agricultural and municipal drinking water uses in south Texas.

The TSSWCB must develop a Rio Grande Carrizo Cane Eradication Program (RGCCEP) that establishes long-term management of carrizo cane at a landscape scale along the entire Rio Grande, an international border with great ecological and cultural significance. Comprehensively addressing the impacts of *arundo* on border security are paramount to the program, while also accruing benefits to the ecosystem health of the Rio Grande and water user groups in South Texas.

Due to the diversity of biological, legal, and cultural issues associated with control of carrizo cane along the 1,255-mile Rio Grande international border, the TSSWCB envisions an ecosystem-based approach that will integrate the use of biological, chemical, mechanical, and cultural controls, as appropriate, to manage carrizo cane along the Rio Grande. Such an approach will necessitate a long-term maintenance program to ensure eradication is successful. Participation in the program will be voluntary for landowners.

TSSWCB is currently in the early stages of developing the RGCCEP. This process will involve affected landowners, municipalities, other state and federal governmental entities, and concerned citizens. The agency is in the "public scoping" stage of soliciting input from the public

and affected stakeholders into how this program should be developed and implemented.

Recent Activities:

On January 20, 2016, TSSWCB staff met, via conference call, with staff in U.S. Congressman Henry Cuellar's office (D-TX-28) to discuss federal funding for carrizo cane removal along the Rio Grande.

On January 25, 2016, TSSWCB staff met with USDA Agricultural Research Service staff to discuss federal funding for carrizo cane removal along the Rio Grande.

On February 3, 2016, TSSWCB staff met with staff in Senator Judith Zaffirini's office (D-21) in Austin to discuss details of the proposed RGCCEP.

On February 11, 2016, TSSWCB staff attended the Starr County SWCD #332 meeting in Rio Grande City to discuss details of the proposed RGCCEP.

On February 11, 2016, TSSWCB staff attended the Texas Border Coalition (TBC) Quarterly Meeting in Pharr. The TBC is comprised of mayors and city council members, county judges and other county executives, and business and community leaders along the border. In 2007, the TBC adopted a policy resolution that, among other issues, states the TBC's support for the clearing of carrizo cane along the Rio Grande. A presentation on the RGCCEP was given by TSSWCB staff at the meeting. More information on the TBC is available at: <http://www.texasbordercoalition.org/>.

On February 11, 2016, TSSWCB staff met with Governor's Office staff and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department staff in Austin to discuss details of the proposed RGCCEP and potential funding needs and sources.

On February 12, 2016, TSSWCB staff participated in a field tour in Weslaco hosted by the USDA Agricultural Research Service. The tour highlighted increased capacity to conduct biological control of carrizo cane.

TSSWCB staff also discussed federal funding for carrizo cane removal along the Rio Grande.

On February 16, 2016, TSSWCB staff met with the Val Verde County Sheriff and the Devil's River SWCD #224 in Del Rio to discuss details of the proposed RGCCEP.

On February 17, 2016, TSSWCB staff attended the South Texas Area Association of SWCDs meeting in Raymondville. A presentation on the RGCCEP was given by TSSWCB staff at the meeting.

More information on the RGCCEP is available at: <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/arundo>.

Monthly Program News and Activities is published by the TSSWCB for use by Texas SWCD Directors. If you have any questions regarding its contents, or have information you would like to see in a future issue, please call (254) 773-2250.



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Established in 1939, the TSSWCB administers Texas' soil and water conservation law and delivers coordinated natural resource conservation programs to agricultural producers through the State's 216 individual SWCDs. The agency is governed by a seven-member State Board composed of two Governor appointees and five individuals elected from across Texas by 1,080 Directors of local SWCDs. The TSSWCB is the lead state agency for planning, implementing, and managing programs for preventing and abating agricultural and silvicultural (forestry)

nonpoint sources of water pollution; administers a water supply enhancement program through the targeted control of brush species in areas in need of water conservation; provides operation, maintenance, and structural repair grant funds to local government sponsors of the State's network of 2,000 flood control dams; and facilitates the Texas Invasive Species Coordinating Committee.