



# TEXAS STATE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION BOARD

## Program News and Activities

JULY 2015

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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### UPCOMING STATE BOARD WORK SESSION AND MEETING

The State Board has tentatively scheduled a Work Session on **Wednesday, September 16, 2015** and a formal State Board Meeting on **Thursday, September 17, 2015 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](mailto:kpreece@tsswcb.texas.gov).

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### FISCAL OPERATIONS

August 31<sup>st</sup> is the deadline for submitting FY2015 Regular and Supplemental Matching Fund claims.

August 31<sup>st</sup> is the deadline for submitting a FY2015 online Performance Report for Technical Assistance.

August 31<sup>st</sup> is the deadline for completing online purchase verification for any information technology assistance received during FY2015.

September 1<sup>st</sup> is the deadline for submitting a FY2015 Financial Statement / Audit Notification Form.

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### SPECIAL PROJECTS

#### 2015 Annual Meeting of District Directors

Mark your calendars for October 26-28, 2015 and plan on attending the 75<sup>th</sup> Annual State Meeting held in Corpus Christi.

Reservations for the 75<sup>th</sup> Annual State Meeting at the Omni Bayfront Tower please call 1-800-The OMNI.

We will have a different schedule for our Annual Meeting our award presentation will be Monday night at the banquet. Please be sure and join us this year for our 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting.

**Exhibitor Information for the 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting can be found at <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/en/swcds/annualmeeting>**

**ROOM UPDATE: Currently there are no rooms available for Tuesday night, the only way these rooms will become available is if folks cancel their reservation. Rooms are still available for Sunday and Monday night.**

## GULF COAST CONSERVATION PLANNING PROJECT

The overall health of the Gulf of Mexico region and the restoration of its ecosystems in response to impacts that occurred as a result of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill remain a priority for conservation agencies, groups, and private landowners in Texas.

TSSWCB and USDA-NRCS are working together through the Gulf Coast Conservation Planning Project in an effort to encourage the voluntary restoration of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem through technical assistance and financial incentives provided to agricultural producers. This effort will significantly expand wildlife habitat restoration efforts by farmers and ranchers along the Texas Gulf Coast.

USDA-NRCS, in a matching agreement with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), has established funding opportunities through TSSWCB for SWCDs to provide technical assistance to landowners. SWCDs along the Gulf Coast will be able to help landowners maintain the viability and profitability of their operations while voluntarily creating and enhancing healthy habitat for coastal migratory and shore birds.

The project's goal is to accelerate the development of voluntary conservation plans and adoption of conservation practices that improve water quality, reduce nutrient and sediment runoff, and benefit wildlife habitat and ecosystems across Texas coastal counties. These

conservation plans may also qualify as TSSWCB-certified Water Quality Management Plans to address nonpoint source water pollution.

On May 26, 27, and 28, 2015, TSSWCB staff met with SWCD and USDA-NRCS representatives along the Gulf Coast to explain how the Gulf Coast Conservation Planning Project will be conducted and how conservation planning requests will be handled. The meetings were held in Liberty, Edna, Corpus Christi, and San Benito.

On July 2, 2015, the State Board issued a second Request for Proposals (RFP) soliciting additional conservation planners to have under contract to work on the Gulf Coast Conservation Planning Project with the affected SWCDs. The deadline for submission of proposals is July 30, 2015. The RFP is available on the Comptroller's website at [http://esbd.cpa.state.tx.us/bid\\_show.cfm?bidid=118509](http://esbd.cpa.state.tx.us/bid_show.cfm?bidid=118509).

More information on the Gulf Coast Conservation Planning Project is available at <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/gulf>.

## LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN INITIATIVE

The lesser prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) is an upland, grassland-nesting bird found in mixed grass, sand-sage, and shinnery oak prairies of the northeastern Texas Panhandle, the southwestern Texas South Plains, and portions of Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. Due to the loss of native prairie, as well as, fragmented and degraded habitat, populations of the bird have declined significantly, leading the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to list the bird as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act.

As a result, USDA-NRCS expanded its conservation efforts and established the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative (LPCI). USDA-NRCS provides technical assistance and financial incentives for agricultural producers to voluntarily implement conservation practices that promote healthy grazinglands and benefit the lesser prairie-chicken and other wildlife through the LPCI. In most cases, practices that are good for the bird are good for ranching and can lead to improved rangeland health.

Agricultural producers with land in the lesser prairie-chicken range can gain regulatory predictability if they work with USDA-NRCS to voluntarily undertake conservation activities that benefit the bird's population and habitat. An agreement between USDA and USFWS states that ranchers and farmers can receive regulatory assurances from USFWS for up to 30 years for carrying out these voluntary conservation activities regardless of the regulatory status of the bird.

TSSWCB and USDA-NRCS are working together through the LPCI in an effort to accelerate the development of conservation plans and adoption of conservation practices in the lesser prairie-chicken range through technical assistance provided to agricultural producers. USDA-NRCS, in a Working Lands for Wildlife matching agreement with TSSWCB, has established funding opportunities for SWCDs to provide conservation planning assistance to landowners in the lesser prairie-chicken range.

On July 1, 2015, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) released the results from the 2015 annual aerial survey of lesser prairie-chicken populations. According to the results, the lesser prairie-chicken population increased 25% from 2014 to 2015 across its five-state range. The total lesser prairie-chicken population now numbers just over 29,000 birds, according to WAFWA, which commissioned the survey. Increases in the population were observed in three of four of the bird's ecoregions across the five states. This year's increase, on the heels of last year's 20% increase, is evidence of the species' ability to rapidly recover from downturns as a result of drought and poor range condition. Continued improvement in nesting habitat associated with abundant spring rainfall and ongoing private landowner efforts to conserve and restore their habitat, has contributed to the bird's population rebound. WAFWA has established a range-wide population recovery goal of 67,000 birds. More information on the results of the aerial survey is available on the WAFWA website at <http://www.wafwa.org/>.

More information on the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative is available at

<http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/infoed/lpci> or <http://lpcinitiative.org/>.

### **TSSWCB Facebook and Twitter**

Be sure and check out our Facebook and Twitter. We have over an increase of nearly 500 likes which brings our total for TSSWCB to 723 likes. We highly encourage districts to join the social media movement.

### **Soil and Water Conservation Soil Stewardship Public Speaking Contest**

Kara Harris of the Idalou FFA Chapter earned top honors in the Soil Stewardship Public Speaking Contest. Second place winner in the event was Hayden-James Hughes, a member of the Perryton FFA Chapter. Earning 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the event was Jacob Traylor, a member of the Gilmer FFA Chapter.

A \$3,000 scholarship will be awarded to Kara Harris while Hayden-James Hughes will receive a \$2,000 scholarship. Jacob Traylor will receive a \$1,000 scholarship. The scholarships are awarded through the Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation District's Public Information and Education Program.

The theme of this year's contest is *"From the Era of the Dust Bowl to the Present—Commemorating 75 years of Soil and Water Conservation"*

Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board would like to thank those that took time to come and judge this event. We greatly appreciate it.

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## **POULTRY WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLANS**

### **Program Activities**

Highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak in several Mid-West states since December 2014 has affected over 200 farms with over 48 million birds lost. The last detection reported to USDA was June 17, 2015. While farm visits by TSSWCB staff have resumed, bio-security

protocols continue to be followed during farm visits where birds are present. This is a precautionary measure only, as no flu cases have yet been discovered in Texas.

All poultry staff continues to update existing WQMPs, develop new WQMPs for new and proposed poultry operations, conduct CAFO inspections on 20% of existing large poultry farms, conduct status reviews of all poultry WQMPs, and assist producers in obtaining incentive funding for installing approved practices on their farms.

For more information on Poultry WQMPs, please visit <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/poultry> or contact the Poultry Program Office at (936) 462-7020.

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## WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN PROGRAM

With the enactment of Senate Bill 503 in 1993, the Texas Legislature designated the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) the lead agency in the state for the abatement, management, and prevention of nonpoint source pollution from agricultural or silvicultural sources. Additionally, the Legislature authorized the agency to administer a certified water quality management plan (WQMP) program, complete with a cost-share program to incentivize participation and offset the cost of implementing soil and water land improvement measures, for lands within the state. While the TSSWCB makes the program available on a statewide basis, the State Board approves priorities based on activity and geography to target the cost-share incentive funding to the areas of the state that exhibit the most need for nonpoint source pollution abatement.

The purpose of cost-share funding is to provide an incentive to landowners or operators to install soil and water conservation land improvement measures consistent with the purpose of controlling erosion, conserving water, and/or protecting water quality. Rule requires this be done in accordance with a water quality management plan certified by the State Board.

For the current biennium, the staff of the State Board conducted a stakeholder process through a survey submitted to each of the state's 216 soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs). Each survey contained information regarding the known agricultural and silvicultural nonpoint source water quality concerns that pertained to the local SWCD and the State District (Area) of the SWCD. Input was requested and received on these known concerns. Additionally, the staff of the State Board solicited SWCDs for any local concern not known to the state. All 216 completed and returned their surveys.

The State Board may allocate funds appropriated from general revenue fund and other sources for cost-share incentive funding among particular soil and water conservation land improvement measures, specific SWCDs, among areas of the state through cost-share incentive priorities, or a combination thereof, and may adjust such allocations throughout the year as available funds and SWCD needs and priorities change in order to achieve the most efficient use of state funds. Additionally, the State Board may designate a portion of the funds allocated to a SWCD or to cost-share incentive priorities to reimburse SWCDs for obligations incurred in administering cost-share incentive activities.

On July 16, 2015, agency staff recommended that the program's \$1,950,000 for cost-share incentive funding for the Fiscal Year 2016 be allocated in the following manner:

Set aside 5% of the total budget (\$97,500) for reimbursing SWCDs for their administrative costs in administering the program at the local level. Administrative payments will be calculated on cost-share payments made to applicants rather than on amounts obligated by SWCDs.

Divide the remaining funds for cost-share into six separate allocations:

(1) A statewide allocation in the amount of \$100,000 for providing cost-share funds to applicants to address complaints and other unforeseen situations.

- (2) An Area I Allocation in the amount of \$350,500.
- (3) An Area II Allocation in the amount of \$350,500.
- (4) An Area III Allocation in the amount of \$350,500.
- (5) An Area IV Allocation in the amount of \$350,500.
- (6) An Area V Allocation in the amount of \$350,500.

Staff of the State Board recommended approval of Cost-Share Incentive Priorities for Fiscal Year 2016. These priorities are geographically defined by either watersheds or aquifer recharge zones and known to the staff of the State Board.

Staff also recommended the State Board approve the following criteria and point values for ranking cost-share requests for Fiscal Year 2016.

- 1. NPS Priority Area Watershed where a WPP or TMDL exists or is in development  
  
OR - NPS Priority Area Watershed with an RUAA (but no WPP or TMDL)
- 2. NPS Priority Area Major Aquifer (Ogallala & Seymour)
- 3. NPS Priority Area Coastal Zone District
- 4. Impaired Watershed with agricultural sources cited on Texas 303(d) List but no TMDL or WPP exists or is in development
- 5. Major Aquifer with Nitrate Concerns
- 6. Confined animal feeding operation is present
- 7. Unconfined livestock will graze 25% or more of the operating unit
- 8. Cultivation will occur on 25% or more of the operating unit

- 9. Nutrients will be applied to 25% or more of the operating unit
- 10. Animal waste will be utilized for nutrients on 25% or more of the operating unit
- 11. Irrigation will occur on 25% or more of the operating unit
- 12. Unfunded applicant from fiscal year 2014
- 13. Unfunded applicant from fiscal year 2015

Staff recommended that request forms be ranked one week after the first month of the new fiscal year, and that remaining funds be obligated in the same manner month after month until such time all funds are obligated. Additionally, staff recommends that when two or more requests for cost-share are tied in point values the date on which the applicant signed the request for cost-share should be used to break the tie.

Based on recommendations from the district survey, staff recommended that a non-geographic priority area be approved in Area 4 for all poultry operations regardless of their location within the Area.

The State Board voted to approve all items as presented.

More information on the *Water Quality Management Plan Program* is available at <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/en/wqmp>

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## 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

##### **FY2010 – FY2014 CWA §319(h) Grant Status**

There are currently 32 on-going §319(h) grant-funded projects addressing a wide array of agricultural and silvicultural NPS issues. Unliquidated federal funds for these 32 on-going projects total approximately \$8.9 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).

##### **FY2016 Request for Proposals**

On June 5, 2015, the FY2016 Request for Proposals (RFP) for the NPS Grant Program closed. The TSSWCB received 42 proposals from various entities across the state. TSSWCB SRM staff is in the process of reviewing the proposals.

##### **FY2013 – FY2015 State Grant Status**

There are currently 20 on-going projects addressing an array of agricultural and silvicultural NPS issues. Unliquidated state funds for these 20 on-going projects total approximately \$2 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

##### **Clean Waters Initiative**

On June 24, 2015, TSSWCB SRM staff [Brian Koch] attended a Clean Waters Initiative (CWI) workshop, focused on Agriculture Programs and Invasive Species Management. TSSWCB SRM staff presented information on water quality activities in Southeast Texas and how the TSSWCB uses the WQMP program to help achieve the water quality improvement goals. There were also presentations on dealing with feral hogs, Chinese tallow, and water hyacinth, all common invasive species in Southeast Texas. CWI workshops are focused on activities that help with water quality improvement from many identified sources.

##### **Galveston Bay Estuary Program**

Galveston Bay is an estuary of national importance and, through the federal CWA §320, is included in the National Estuary Program administered by the EPA. The Galveston Bay Council (GBC) is the stakeholder advisory group that coordinates the implementation of the *Galveston Bay Plan*, which is a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan developed under the auspices of the National Estuary Program. The TSSWCB is a named member of the Galveston Bay Council.

On July 8, 2015, TSSWCB SRM staff [Brian Koch] attended a Galveston Bay Council Budget and Priorities subcommittee meeting in Houston. This meeting focused on planning of the State of the Bay Symposium to be held in Galveston on January 13-14, 2016. The theme of the

symposium is 20 years of successful implementation of the Galveston Bay Plan. Presentations, posters, and topics will be focused on the ongoing implementation of the plan.

On July 15, 2015, TSSWCB SRM staff [Brian Koch] attended a Galveston Bay Council Meeting in Houston. This meeting featured presentations on the HGAC Clean Rivers Program Basin Highlights Report, and presentations on oysters from a commercial fishing perspective and from the state health department perspective.

More information is available at <http://www.gbep.state.tx.us/>. The implementation of the *Galveston Bay Plan* affects agricultural and silvicultural operations in watersheds that drain to the Galveston Bay complex in Brazoria, Chambers, Galveston, Harris and Liberty Counties.

### STATE DISTRICT III

#### Lower Nueces River

Impairment: Total Dissolved Solids  
Concern: Chlorophyll-a, Nutrients, Sediment  
Mechanism: WPP  
Lead: TSSWCB  
Projects: "Development of the Lower Nueces River Watershed Protection Plan", Nueces River Authority; Federal \$309,727/External \$248,968

On July 7, 2015, TSSWCB SRM staff [Brian Koch] attended a stakeholder meeting for the Lower Nueces River WPP in Corpus Christi. This meeting was held to get stakeholder comments on several chapters of the WPP. The chapters were focused on implementation, potential pollution sources, and costs of implementation. This WPP is expected to be completed in the fall of 2015.

More information, including the draft *Source Water Protection Plan*, is available at <http://www.nuecesriverpartnership.org/>. This WPP has the potential to affect livestock and farming operations in the Lower Nueces River watershed below Lake Corpus Christi in Jim Wells, Nueces, and San Patricio Counties.

#### Other State District III Projects

Project: "Recreational Use Attainability Analysis for San Miguel Creek", Nueces River Authority; State \$128,571

On July 7, 2015, TSSWCB SRM staff [Wesley Gibson] participated in a public meeting in Pearsall to discuss an ongoing RUAA on San Miguel Creek and inform local stakeholders on the findings of the first field survey. The second field survey was conducted July 18-21, 2015. More information on this RUAA is available at <https://www.nueces-ra.org/SMC/>.

### STATE DISTRICT IV

#### Double Bayou

Impairment: Bacteria, Dissolved Oxygen  
Mechanism: WPP  
Lead: TSSWCB  
Project: "Development of a Watershed Protection Plan for Double Bayou", Houston Advanced Research Center; Federal \$1,023,614/ External \$388,149

On July 21, 2015, TSSWCB SRM staff [Brian Koch] attended a Double Bayou WPP stakeholder meeting in Double Bayou. This meeting was held to allow stakeholder comments on several sections of the WPP and to provide input on management measures described in the WPP. The WPP is expected to be completed and sent to EPA for 9-element consistency review by the end of 2015.

More information is available at <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/watersheds#doublebayou>. This WPP has the potential to affect agricultural operations in the Double Bayou watershed in Chambers and Liberty Counties.

#### Lake Houston

Impairment: Bacteria  
Mechanism: TMDL, I-Plan  
Lead: TCEQ

The Bacteria Implementation Group (BIG) is focused on implementing 72 bacteria TMDLs in the greater Houston area, including Lake Houston, Buffalo and Whiteoak Bayous, Clear Creek and others. The BIG is responsible for receiving input, establishing workgroups,

facilitating communications, developing recommendations, and providing oversight in the development of the I-Plan designed to achieve the load reductions called for in these TMDLs.

On June 22, 2015, TSSWCB SRM staff [Brian Koch] attended a Bacteria Implementation Group annual meeting in Houston. This meeting was held to update the steering committee on the progress of implementation of the I-Plan. Most of the changes are adding new TMDLs to the existing I-Plan, because of their location and proximity to the project area. Trends in bacteria numbers are improving as a whole, but there are still a few areas that need work. Discussion on adding the East and West Forks of the San Jacinto River continued, mainly because the stakeholders there would like representation on the steering committee.

More information on the greater Houston area Bacteria Implementation Group (BIG) is available at <http://www.h-gac.com/community/water/tmdl/BIG/default.aspx>. More information on the Lake Houston TMDLs is available at <http://www.tceq.texas.gov/waterquality/tmdl/82-lakehouston.html>. These TMDLs affect livestock operations in the Lake Houston watershed in Grimes, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery, San Jacinto, Walker and Waller Counties.

### **STATEWIDE PROJECTS (NOT WATERSHED SPECIFIC)**

Project: "Continued Statewide Delivery of the Texas Watershed Steward Program", Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service; Federal \$417,398/ External \$72,033

A Texas Watershed Steward workshop took place on June 23, 2015, in Granbury. Over 30 people attended the workshop that was sponsored by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas A&M AgriLife Research, and TSSWCB. The training included an overview of water quality and watershed management in Texas as well as current efforts to help improve and protect Lake Granbury. Attendees also learned about community-driven watershed protection and management.

A Texas Watershed Steward workshop took place on July 21, 2015, in League City. Over 40 people attended the workshop that was sponsored by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and TSSWCB in cooperation with the Dickinson Bayou Watershed Partnership, Texas Sea Grant and the Clear Creek Independent School District. The training included an overview of water quality and watershed management in Texas as well as current efforts to help improve and protect Dickinson Bayou. Attendees also learned about community-driven watershed protection and management.

More information on the Texas Watershed Steward Program is available at <http://tw.s.tamu.edu/>.

### **Upcoming Public Meetings**

- July 30, 2015 – Cedar Bayou Watershed Partnership Meeting (Baytown)
- August 3, 2015 – Mud and West Mud Creek RUAA Meeting (Rusk)
- August 4, 2015 – Prairie, Mud, West Mud Creek and Neches River Above Lake Palestine RUAA Meeting (Tyler)
- August 6 – 7, 2015 – Fundamentals of Developing a Water Quality Monitoring Plan (Temple)
- August 10, 2015 – Kickapoo Creek and Neches River RUAA Meeting (Chandler)
- August 13, 2015 – Little Cypress Bayou RUAA Meeting (Orange)
- August 13, 2015 – Plum Creek Watershed Partnership Meeting (Uhland)
- August 12, 2015 – Watershed Coordinator Roundtable (San Marcos)
- August 17, 2015 – Cypress Creek WPP Meeting (Wimberley)
- August 18, 2015 – Double Bayou Watershed Partnership Meeting (Double Bayou)
- August 25, 2015 – Lower Nueces River Partnership Meeting (Corpus Christi)
- August 26, 2015 – San Marcos Watershed Initiative Meeting (San Marcos)
- September 3, 2015 – Feral Hog Workshop (Bryan)
- September 3, 2015 – Galveston Bay Council Water and Sediment Quality Workgroup Meeting (Houston)
- September 10, 2015 – Regional Watershed Coordinator Steering Committee (Columbus)
- September 10, 2015 – TGPC Public Outreach and Education Meeting (Austin)

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## RIO GRANDE CARRIZO CANE ERADICATION PROGRAM

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 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature, in 2015, directed the TSSWCB, through SB1734, to develop and implement a program to eradicate carrizo cane along the Rio Grande. On March 13, 2015, Senator Carlos Uresti introduced SB1734. The Texas State Senate passed SB1734 on April 28, 2015, and the Texas House of Representatives passed the bill on May 21, 2015. SB1734 was signed by the Governor on June 10, 2015; the statute is effective immediately.

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.

Carrizo cane is a noxious brush species that consumes precious water resources to a degree that is detrimental to water conservation. 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 program that establishes long-term management of invasive carrizo cane at a landscape scale along the entire 1,255-mile 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.

TSSWCB is currently in the very early phases of developing this program and the agency is seeking any information from the public and governmental entities on how best to implement a program to control *arundo*. The process to develop a program will involve affected landowners, municipalities, other state and federal governmental entities, and concerned citizens.

On June 9, 2015, TSSWCB staff participated in a field tour in Weslaco hosted by the USDA Agricultural Research Service. The tour highlighted carrizo cane biological control methods.

On July 7-10, 2015, TSSWCB met with numerous members of the Texas Congressional Delegation in Washington, DC to discuss federal funding for carrizo cane removal along the Rio Grande.

On July 14, 2015, the U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Committee approved the FY2016 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill (HR3128). In the Committee Report accompanying HR3128, the Committee expresses continued concern about the impact of carrizo cane on the activities of the Border Patrol along the Rio Grande and directs the Border Patrol to work with the TSSWCB on efforts to control carrizo cane.

A newly developed fact sheet for the Rio Grande Carrizo Cane Eradication Program is available on the program webpage.

More information on the Rio Grande Carrizo Cane Eradication Program is available at <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/arundo>.

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## WATER SUPPLY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

In order to help meet the State's critical water conservation needs and ensure availability of water supplies, the TSSWCB administers the WSEP 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 83<sup>rd</sup> Texas Legislature continued funding for

the WSEP by providing \$2,135,413 in general revenue funds for FY2015.

WSEP staff activities (from June 27, 2015 to July 28, 2015):

- WSEP staff assisted SWCD Directors with WSEP issues at board meetings for the Kendall SWCD #216, Kerr County SWCD #217, Pedernales SWCD #218, Gillespie County SWCD #220, Bandera SWCD #229, and Upper Nueces-Frio SWCD #238.
- WSEP staff assisted Conservation Planners in the Upper Guadalupe River, Pedernales River, Frio River, Upper Nueces River, and Edwards Aquifer projects and worked with landowners in several project watersheds to develop cost-share contracts.
- WSEP staff worked with project applicants to assess unobligated funds from the FY2015 project cost-share allocations in order to consider reallocation of FY2015 grant funding to maximize expenditure of WSEP funds during this fiscal year.
- Throughout June and July all 16 Regional Water Planning Groups (RWPGs) hosted hearings to receive oral public comment on their 2016 Initially Prepared Regional Water Plans (IPPs). The IPPs were submitted on May 1, 2015 to the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) for review. After each of the hearings, there is a 60-day public comment period and a 90-day public agency comment period to submit written comments. After which, the RWPGs will consider and address all comments received and submit their final adopted 2016 Regional Water Plans to the TWDB no later than December 1, 2015. WSEP staff is reviewing the IPPs to ascertain how each RWPG addressed brush control for water supply enhancement. The IPPs are available at <http://www.twdb.texas.gov/waterplanning/rwp/plans/2016/IPP.asp>.
- On June 20, 2015, the Governor signed HB 1, the general appropriations bill for the 2016-2017 biennium. The 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature continued funding for the WSEP by providing \$2,638,413 in general revenue funds for each fiscal year of the new biennium. This is an increase of \$1M across the biennium for the WSEP. This increase partially funds the exceptional item included in the agency's Legislative Appropriations Request for the new biennium, which sought additional funding to partially meet unmet demand for cost-share to landowners and to conduct new feasibility studies.
- On June 23, 2015, TSSWCB issued a request for proposals (RFP) for water supply enhancement projects seeking funding in FY2016 to conduct brush control under the WSEP. Proposed projects should focus on watersheds with a demonstrated water conservation need and where brush control has been shown, using a computer model, to be a feasible strategy to enhance surface and/or ground water supplies. Proposals must be received by 5:00 p.m. CDT, Monday, August 3, 2015, to be considered for funding. A competitive proposal review process will be used so that the most appropriate and effective projects are selected for funding. Project proposals will be evaluated giving priority to projects that balance the most critical water conservation need of municipal water user groups with the highest potential water yield from brush control. The proposal submission packet includes the application for proposed water supply enhancement projects, a set of instructions that provides explanations of questions on the form and resources for answering those questions, and a set of guidelines that details project eligibility requirements and provides additional information critical for successful applications. A memo to all SWCDs regarding the RFP was sent on June 23, 2015. A complete copy of the proposal submission packet is available at <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/brushcontrol/rfp>.

- On July 7, 2015, WSEP staff met with U.S. Geological Survey staff in Johnson City to discuss potential cooperative projects for FY2016 funding.
- On July 9, 2015, WSEP staff participated in the Texas Wildlife Association's 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Private Lands Summit, Sustainability of Land-Based Profits and Products, in San Antonio. Topics highlighted at the summit included ecotourism, livestock practices, conservation mitigation banking, and the important role that private lands stewardship plays in the sustainability of land-based products.
- On July 9, 2015, WSEP staff attended the Upper Llano River Watershed Protection Plan Coordination Committee meeting in Junction. The Coordination Committee met to review progress by Texas Tech University in developing the computer model of the watershed. One focus of discussion during the meeting was on preliminary results from the model related to brush control and water supply enhancement. The model predicts that after conducting brush control, groundwater recharge may increase by more than 100,000 ac-ft. Once completed, the model will be used to produce a brush control feasibility study for the North and South Llano Rivers.
- On July 16, 2015, the State Board de-allocated \$953.00 in FY2015 WSEP cost-share funds from five projects:
  - Edwards Aquifer - Medina River (Bandera SWCD 229) - \$50.00
  - Edwards Aquifer - Nueces River (Upper Nueces-Frio SWCD 238) - \$798.00
  - Lake Arrowhead (Miller-Brazos SWCD 542) - \$17.00
  - Twin Buttes Reservoir (Eldorado-Divide SWCD 247) - \$73.00
  - E.V. Spence Reservoir (Mitchell SWCD 207) - \$15.00

Also, the State Board reallocated \$224,896.01 in FY2015 WSEP cost-share funds to three projects:

- Lake Nimitz / Upper Guadalupe River (Kerr County SWCD 217) - \$55,755.00
- Lake Kemp (Wilbarger SWCD 537) - \$103,778.01
- Canyon Lake / Upper Guadalupe River (Kendall SWCD 216) - \$65,363.00

This action fully allocated all remaining FY2015 cost-share funds.

- A newly developed fact sheet for the WSEP is available on the program webpage.

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

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## FLOOD CONTROL DAM PROGRAMS

The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) is appropriated general revenue by the Texas Legislature to provide grants to the sponsors of flood control dams for operation, maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation. The TSSWCB administers an Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Grant Program and a Structural Repair Grant Program, both of which are administered according to rules adopted by the State Board in 31TAC529. The rules for these programs specify which flood control dams are eligible for funding, the entities that are eligible to apply and receive funding, and the conditions under which a grant must be administered, matched, and reported.

For FY2013, \$2,050,997 was allocated to 69 dam sponsors to conduct O&M activities on flood control dams through August 26, 2015. To date there is a balance of \$71,795 that still needs to be spent before the August 2015 deadline.

For FY2015, \$1,000,000 was allocated to 69 dam sponsors to conduct O&M activities on flood control dams through June 30, 2017. To date there is a balance of \$640,214 that still needs to be spent before the June 2017 deadline.

The TSSWCB has contracted with the Dalworth SWCD to conduct a major repair on Mountain Creek, Site 10, in Ellis County using \$5,600,000 of FY2014 funds.

The TSSWCB has also contracted with the McCulloch SWCD to conduct repairs on Deep Creek, Site 8, in McCulloch County using \$362,000 of FY2015 funds.

The TSSWCB will be contracting with the Ellis-Prairie SWCD to complete needed repairs on Chambers Creek site 5 in Ellis County.

The TSSWCB will also be contracting with Wise County to complete needed repairs on Denton Creek site 17 in Wise County.

For more information on these programs, please visit the TSSWCB's website at:  
<http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/en/floodcontrol>

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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.

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