



# TEXAS STATE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION BOARD

## Program News and Activities

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SEPTEMBER 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, November 18, 2015** and a formal State Board Meeting on **Thursday, November 19, 2015 in Austin**. 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).

### FISCAL OPERATIONS

September 30<sup>th</sup> is the deadline for submitting FY2015 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Director Mileage and Per Diem claims and return of unused advance funds.

September 30<sup>th</sup> is the deadline for submitting FY2015 regular and supplemental Technical Assistance claims.

September 30<sup>th</sup> is the deadline for submitting FY2015 baseline data for the Conservation Activities Program.

October 31<sup>st</sup> is the deadline for submitting Fiscal Year 2015 completed Financial Statements.

Supplemental payments for Fiscal Year 2015 will be made on November 1<sup>st</sup>.

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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>

### Hotel Information for the Omni Hotel

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.

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

### Hotel Information for Emerald Beach

Reservations for the 75th Annual State Meeting at the Emerald Beach Hotel please call 361-883-5731 or 361-673-9076. The Group Code for the rate is SWC. There are rooms available at Emerald Beach.

### Federal Rules Defining “Waters of the United States” Under the Clean Water Act

On August 28, 2015, the final rule defining the scope of waters protected under the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) became effective. The rule was jointly proposed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). The final rule was published in the *Federal Register* on June 29, 2015.

A series of United States Supreme Court decisions muddled the jurisdiction of the federal government under the CWA. These cases raised questions about which waters are protected under the CWA, creating uncertainty both within the regulating agencies (EPA and Corps) and the regulated community over the definition of “waters of the United States” (WOTUS). The decisions resulted in the regulating agencies evaluating WOTUS jurisdiction on a case-specific basis far more frequently than is best for the clear and efficient implementation of the CWA. This has resulted in inconsistent interpretation of CWA jurisdiction and perpetuated ambiguity over where the CWA applies. Therefore, the EPA and the Corps proposed to resolve this confusion; this new rule seeks to increase CWA program predictability and consistency by increasing clarity as to the scope of WOTUS protected under the CWA.

Thirty-one States, including Texas, and a variety of industry, agricultural, and environmental groups, including Texas Farm Bureau, National Alliance of Forest Owners, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, National Corn Growers Association, and National Pork Producers Council, have filed at least 15 lawsuits challenging the rule. The EPA and the Corps are implementing/enforcing the rule across the nation. However, a federal District Court in North Dakota has granted a preliminary injunction in one of the lawsuits that temporarily blocks (enjoins) the EPA

and the Corps from implementing the final rule in 13 States (not Texas).

The EPA and the Corps will launch a publicly-accessible, online database for all jurisdictional determinations and permits issued under the new rule. The database will provide information on jurisdictional determinations associated with federal permitting programs as well as statistics on the total number, waterbody type, and watershed location. Data regarding the nature and number of pending determinations will also be made publicly available.

More information on this federal rulemaking is available at <http://www.epa.gov/uswaters>.

## Conservation Plans for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken

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), on April 10, 2014, to list the bird as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

As a result, USDA-NRCS expanded its conservation efforts and established the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative (LPCI) to implement conservation practices that promote healthy grazinglands and benefit the lesser prairie-chicken and other wildlife. Ranchers and farmers use the assistance provided through LPCI to implement grazing management systems, remove invasive plants, plant grasses and shrubs suitable for rangeland, and plant buffers to reduce soil erosion and improve water quality. In most cases, practices that are good for the bird are good for ranching and can lead to improved rangeland health.

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 September 1, 2015, U.S. District Judge Robert Junell (Western District of Texas, Midland) ruled that the USFWS failed to take into consideration the on-going state conservation efforts before listing the lesser prairie-chicken as threatened under the ESA and he granted summary judgement vacating the USFWS's listing decision. USFWS will now have to re-examine the status of the lesser prairie-chicken. It is anticipated that this ruling will be appealed. TSSWCB will continue with efforts working with landowners to develop lesser prairie-chicken conservation plans with the understanding that their efforts to provide suitable habitat may prevent future re-listing of the lesser prairie-chicken.

More information on the LPCI is available at <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/infoed/lpci>.

### **TSSWCB Facebook and Twitter**

Be sure and check out our Facebook and Twitter. We have had an increase of nearly 500 likes which brings our total for TSSWCB to 764 likes. We highly encourage districts to join the social media movement.

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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.

FY2015 Water Quality Management Plan Program results:

- 359 Water Quality Management Plans certified on 219,967 total acres
- 613 acres on average per WQMP
- 20,519 acres of cropland
- 33,161 acres of pasture/hayland
- 157,849 acres of rangeland
- 9,300 acres under irrigation management
- 8439 other

On September 10, 2015 the regional offices conducted a ranking exercise to rank all FY2016 request for cost-share incentive funding. Regional office staff is currently working with those producers who ranked out, to develop a certified WQMP. Once the WQMP is certified an application for Cost-Share Incentive funding is completed. This application obligates funding to that producer to be used to implement Best Management Practices. More information on the *Water Quality Management Plan Program* is available at <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/en/wqmp>

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## POULTRY WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLANS

Highly pathogenic avian influenza [HPAI] outbreak in several Mid-West states since December 2014 has affected 223 farms with almost 50 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.

The Texas Poultry Federation hosted a meeting on September 2, 2015 in Bryan, TX on preparation for the potential of an avian influenza outbreak in Texas. Representatives from USDA-APHIS, Texas Animal Health Commission, Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory, and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service gave presentations. Topics discussed included biosecurity protocols, disposal of mortality, and methods for reducing potential spread of HPAI. TSSWCB staff [Mark Cochran & Rusty Ray] attended the meeting.

All poultry staff continue to update existing WQMPs [current statewide total = 1213 poultry 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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## 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 \$7.8 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 – FY2015 State Grant Status**

There are currently 18 on-going projects addressing an array of agricultural and silvicultural NPS issues. Unliquidated state funds for these on-going projects total approximately \$1.4 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

### **Texas Groundwater Protection Committee**

Established by the Texas Legislature in 1989, the Texas Groundwater Protection Committee (TGPC) bridges the gap between State groundwater programs, improves coordination between member agencies, and works to protect groundwater as a vital resource; the TSSWCB is a statutorily-authorized member of the TGPC.

The Texas Water Code sets non-degradation of the State's groundwater resources as the goal for all State programs and asserts that groundwater be kept reasonably free of contaminants that interfere with its present and potential uses. The TGPC implements the State's groundwater protection policy which:

- Requires that pollution discharges, waste disposal and other regulated activities not harm public health or impair current or potential groundwater use;
- Recognizes the variability between aquifers;
- Acknowledges the importance of water quality;
- Balances the protection of the environment and the long-term economic health of the state; and,
- Recognizes the use of the best professional judgment of the responsible state agencies to implement the policy.

The TGPC develops, implements, and updates a comprehensive *Texas Groundwater Protection Strategy* and an annual *Joint Groundwater Monitoring and Contamination Report*.

On September 10, 2015, TSSWCB SRM staff [Ashley Wendt] attended a TGPC Public Outreach and Education Subcommittee meeting in Austin. Meeting attendees discussed further revisions to the TGPC tri-fold brochure and made several changes to website Frequently Asked Questions.

More information on the TGPC is available at <http://www.tgpc.state.tx.us/>.

## **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 September 3, 2015, TSSWCB SRM staff [Brian Koch] attended a GBC Water and Sediment Quality Subcommittee meeting in Houston. This meeting was held to review and select projects for FY16. These projects focus on water quality protection and improvement in and around Galveston Bay and will go to the GBC for approval. All projects are dependent on availability of funding.

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.

## **Southeast and South Central Texas Regional Watershed Coordination Steering Committee**

The Southeast and South Central Texas Regional Watershed Coordination Steering Committee (WCSC) is composed of about two dozen water quality monitoring and improvement partners, including other state and federal agencies, river authorities, national estuary programs and councils of governments. The WCSC is tasked with providing guidance to TSSWCB SRM staff on watershed planning activities in 47 counties across southeast and south central Texas.

On September 10, 2015, TSSWCB SRM staff [Brian Koch, TJ Helton] hosted a Southeast and South Central Texas Watershed Coordination Steering Committee meeting in Columbus. This meeting featured a presentation by TCEQ staff on their goals and objectives for watershed planning in Southeast and South Central Texas. Then a roundtable discussion was had on watershed planning and water quality issues around the

state. The next WCSC meeting will be held March 10, 2016, in Columbus.

More information, including meeting materials, is available at <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/cwp>.

## **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 August 25, 2015, TSSWCB SRM staff [Brian Koch] attended a stakeholder meeting for the Lower Nueces River WPP in Corpus Christi. This meeting was held to review chapters of the WPP and to get stakeholder comments on the draft chapters. This WPP is expected to be submitted to EPA for consistency review in the next few months.

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.

## **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 September 9, 2015 in Rancho Viejo. Over 60 people attended the workshop that was sponsored by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service 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 the Brownsville-Resaca

watersheds. Attendees also learned about community-driven watershed protection and management. More information on the Texas Watershed Steward Program is available at <http://tws.tamu.edu/>.

Project: “Statewide Delivery of Riparian and Stream Ecosystem Education Program”, Texas Water Resources Institute/Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources; Federal \$317,486/External \$207,973

On September 3, 2015, a Riparian and Stream Ecosystem workshop was held in Georgetown. Over 90 people attended the workshop that was sponsored by the TWRI and TSSWCB, in coordination with the City of Georgetown and Williamson County AgriLife Extension service. The training focused on water quality issues relating to the San Gabriel River Watershed, including the key riparian areas plays to help improve and protect water in the area. Topics covered included: the definition of a watershed and riparian area, riparian vegetation ratings, how to photo monitor, and local resources for landowners. The training also involved a field tour of a local riparian area, San Gabriel River, and a chance to see a recovering riparian area and evaluate the vegetation within it. More information on the Riparian and Stream ecosystem educational program, please visit <http://texasriparian.org/>.

Project: “Statewide Delivery of the Beef Cattle, Dairy Cattle, Poultry and Horse Components of the Lone Star Healthy Streams Program”, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service; Federal \$370,941/External \$247,324

Lone Star Healthy Streams Program workshops took place on August 20, 2015 in Edna and September 1, 2015 in Seguin. Over 60 people attended the workshop’s that were sponsored by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and TSSWCB. The workshop’s included an overview of water quality law and policy, sources of bacteria in Texas waterways, bacteria fate and transport, benefits of voluntary conservation

practices, sources of financial and technical assistance, and livestock-specific BMPs that are designed to reduce bacterial contamination of runoff. For more information about this project, visit <http://lshs.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

On September 4, 2015, a Feral Hog Management Workshop was held in Bryan. 130 people attended the workshop that was sponsored by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and TSSWCB. The workshop 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.

#### Upcoming Public Meetings

- September 17, 2015 – Mud Creek RUAA Meeting (DeKalb)
- September 22, 2015 – East and West Forks San Jacinto River I-Plan Meeting (The Woodlands)
- September 29, 2015 – Galveston Bay Council Budget and Priorities Subcommittee Meeting (Houston)
- September 29, 2015 – Wetland BMP Coordinating Committee Meeting (Waco)
- October 8, 2015 – Tres Palacios Stakeholder Meeting (Palacios)
- October 13, 2015 – Double Bayou Watershed Partnership Meeting (Double Bayou)
- October 28, 2015 – Galveston Bay Council Meeting (Houston)
- October 29, 2015 – Mission/Aransas I-plan Meeting (Refugio)
- October 29, 2015 – Sheldon Lake State Park Wetland Field Day (Houston)
- October 29, 2015 – Arroyo Colorado Steering Committee Meeting (Weslaco)

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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, which was co-authored by Senator Judith Zaffirini. SB1734 was signed by the Governor on June 10, 2015; the statute was 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. 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 and water user groups in South Texas.

TSSWCB is currently in the 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 September 9, 2015, TSSWCB staff met with TPWD staff in Austin to discuss details of proposed management practices for the Rio Grande Carrizo Cane Eradication Program.

On September 11, 2015, the Texas Invasive Species Coordinating Committee met in Austin. A presentation on the Rio Grande Carrizo Cane Eradication Program was given by TSSWCB staff at the meeting.

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 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature continued funding for the WSEP by providing \$2,638,413 in general revenue funds to the TSSWCB for FY2016.

WSEP staff activities (from August 29, 2015 to September 18, 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, Upper Nueces-Frio SWCD #238, Caldwell-Travis SWCD #304, and Gonzales County SWCD #338.

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, complete performance certifications, and close-out all FY2013 contracts.

On August 3, 2015, the request for proposals (RFP) for water supply enhancement projects seeking funding in FY2016 to conduct brush control closed. TSSWCB received 48 applications requesting a total of \$6.53M in cost-share funds. However, after consulting with project applicants, 18 applications were either withdrawn or determined to be not eligible; there are 30 eligible applications requesting a total of \$4.86M in cost-share funds. 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.

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 was 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/plan/2016/IPP.asp>.

On August 31, 2015, the Upper Llano River WPP Coordination Committee held a meeting in Junction. The Coordination Committee met to review progress by Texas Tech University in developing the computer model of the watershed and to discuss management measures and implementation goals for the WPP. One focus of discussion during the meeting was on revised results from the model related to brush control and water supply enhancement. Based on revised implementation goals, the model predicts that after conducting brush control and follow-up grazing management, evapotranspiration decreases by 75,000 ac-ft/yr and annual sediment

loads decrease by 41%. Once completed, the model will be used to produce a WSEP brush control feasibility study for the North and South Llano Rivers. More information is available at <http://southllano.org/>.

In August 2015, TSSWCB and HDR Engineering, Inc. finalized the project final report *Brush Management in Gonzales County as a Water Management Strategy*; the report is available on the program webpage. This study was conducted by HDR with funding from the TSSWCB WSEP, as suggested by the San Antonio River Authority, in order to link the Gonzales County Brush Control Feasibility Study (McLendon et al. 2012) to the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer Groundwater Availability Model (TWDB) in Gonzales County in order to evaluate brush management as a water management strategy for potential inclusion in the *2016 South Central Texas Regional Water Plan* (Region L). The model scenarios show that implementing a brush management program in Gonzales, Caldwell, and Guadalupe Counties could potentially increase the groundwater levels and the subsequent modeled available groundwater in these counties by 1,370 to 13,910 ac-ft/yr depending on the landowner participation levels. With 100% landowner participation, the modeled available groundwater could increase by 25%. This level of participation is probably impracticable; however, 30% landowner participation may be attainable and would increase the modeled available groundwater by 4,631 ac-ft/yr.

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

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## TEXAS INVASIVE SPECIES COORDINATING COMMITTEE

The Texas Invasive Species Coordinating Committee (TISCC) was established by the 81<sup>st</sup> Texas Legislature in 2009 (Senate Bill 691) and administratively attached to the TSSWCB. The member agencies of the TISCC are the Texas Department of Agriculture, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the TSSWCB, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, the Texas A&M Forest Service, and the Texas Water Development Board.

The TISCC provides a forum for developing interagency strategies and policies for invasive species control. Its member agencies cooperate through an orderly exchange of information, jointly held meetings, and the appointment of sub-committees and working groups in order to facilitate development of effective and timely state responses to invasive species and to make recommendations to the leadership of state departments and agencies regarding research, technology transfer, and management actions related to invasive species control.

Many of TSSWCB's programs support the State's invasive species management goals and contribute to achieving the goals and objectives of the TISCC.

On September 11, 2015, the TISCC met in Austin and reviewed the status of invasive species work ongoing and planned for FY2016. The Committee heard presentations on zebra mussels, carrizo cane, emerald ash borer, and *Echium vulgare*. The Committee re-elected Mel Davis (TSSWCB) as Chairman and elected Earl Chilton (TPWD) as Vice Chairman for the coming year. The Committee plans to meet again either in December 2015 or January 2016.

For information about invasive, non-native carrizo cane (*Arundo donax*), see the section *Rio Grande Carrizo Cane Eradication Program*.

More information regarding the TISCC is available at <http://www.tiscc.texas.gov/>.

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## INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE ON ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

The Interagency Task Force on Economic Growth and Endangered Species (Task Force) was established by the 81<sup>st</sup> Texas Legislature in 2009 (Senate Bill 2534). The Task Force is composed of the Comptroller, the Commissioner of Agriculture, the Executive Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Executive Director of the Texas Department of Transportation, and the Executive Director of the TSSWCB.

The purpose of the Task Force is to establish a mechanism for state agencies to provide policy and technical assistance regarding compliance with endangered species laws and regulations to local and regional governmental entities and their communities engaged in economic development activities so that compliance with endangered species laws and regulations is as effective and cost-efficient as possible.

The TSSWCB contributes to the Task Force's objectives by improving coordination between local SWCDs and other partners on endangered species laws and regional economic development interests.

On May 21, 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposed revised regulations regarding changes to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) petition process for listing or delisting species. USFWS proposed the revised rule in order to improve the content and specificity of petitions and to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the petitions process. The revised regulations provide greater clarity to the public and states as to what information would most inform the evaluation of the status of a species and provide for coordination with States and use of their data in that evaluation. These proposed regulations would require petitioners to coordinate with State fish and wildlife agencies prior to submitting their petitions to USFWS. In addition, the proposal would limit a petition to a single species, as opposed to previous acceptance of multi-species petitions. The public comment period was extended to September 18, 2015. More information is available at [http://www.fws.gov/endangered/improving\\_ESA/petition-regulations.html](http://www.fws.gov/endangered/improving_ESA/petition-regulations.html).

On September 14-15, 2015, the Task Force held Work Group meetings in Austin on the Spot-tailed Earless Lizard, Sprague's Pipit, the Monarch Butterfly, and Freshwater Mussels to review efforts underway to gain better data on the status and distribution of these species.

For information about the lesser prairie-chicken, see the section *Conservation Plans for the Lesser Prairie Chicken*.

More information regarding the Task Force is available at [http://keepingtexasfirst.org/task\\_force/](http://keepingtexasfirst.org/task_force/)

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## FLOOD CONTROL DAM PROGRAMS

The 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. All FY2013 funds have been utilized.

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 \$404,534 that still needs to be spent before the June 2017 deadline.

On July 31, 2015 a guidance document and program forms were sent to all eligible sponsors, notifying them of the changes to the way the Flood Control Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Grant Program will be run in fiscal year 2016. Starting August 1, 2015 sponsors could begin submitting proposals for approval. To date a total of 14 proposals have been received. Nine proposals have been approved to complete O&M activities in the amount of \$204,112.00, leaving a remaining balance of \$745,888.00.

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 contracted with the McCulloch SWCD to conduct repairs on Deep Creek, Site 8, in McCulloch County using \$362,000 of FY2015 funds. All needed repairs on this dam have been completed and the project ended September 16, 2015.

The TSSWCB has contracted with the Ellis-Prairie SWCD to complete needed repairs on Chambers Creek site 5, in Ellis County using \$741,648.00 of FY2015 funds.

The TSSWCB has also contracted with Wise County to complete needed repairs on Denton Creek site 17, in Wise County using \$222,948.00 of FY2015 funds. A site showing was conducted August 26, 2015 and bids were opened September 3, 2015. The county is reviewing the bids and will be selecting a contractor soon.

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.