



Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board

Quarterly Program Update: Summer 2020

TSSWCB Announces 2020 Conservation Award Winners

Each year the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) and the Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts (ATSWCD) recognize and honor individuals who dedicate themselves to the conservation and management of renewable natural resources.

The Texas Conservation Awards Program began in the late 1970's to recognize conservationists and the vital role they play in managing Texas' natural resources. The purpose of the program is to acknowledge, recognize, and honor individuals that dedicate their time and efforts to the conservation of natural resources. The program provides an opportunity for competition and incentives to expand and improve conservation efforts as well as the wise utilization of renewable natural resources. Categories recognized through the Texas Conservation Awards Program are: Poster Contest and Junior and Senior Essay Contests, Conservation Farmer, Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District, Conservation Rancher, Friend of Conservation, Conservation Teacher and Wildlife Conservationist.

The subject for the 2020 Poster Contest was "Where Would We BEE Without Pollinators?" Carli Burger from Inez and the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) #336, was chosen as this year's winner. The poster will advance to the National Association of Conservation Districts Poster Contest in December 2020. "Where Would We BEE Without Pollinators?" was also the topic for the 2020 Essay Contest. Wyatt Terrell, of Menard and the Menard County Soil and Water Conservation District #215, took first place in the Junior Division of the essay contest. Ty Cornelius, of Crosbyton and the Rio Blanco Soil and Water Conservation District #107 won first place in the Senior Division.

Below is a list of the 2020 Conservation Award Winners:

Conservation Farmer – J&K Whatley Farms, San Patricio SWCD #324

J&K Whatley Farms located in Odem, Texas is owned and operated by Jon and Kelly Whatley, along with their two sons Payne and Jackson. The Whatley Family has been farming in the Coastal Bend area since the early 1900's, making Jon and Kelly the 4th generation of the Whatley family to farm in South Texas. For more than twenty years, the Whatley's have utilized conservation programs provided by the San Patricio SWCD and the USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service. Jon and Kelly have always been aware of the significance of implementing conservation plans and practices; and have participated in several programs over the years. Through these programs, they have implemented an extensive conservation plan consisting of multiple soil and water conservation practices such as conservation tillage, controlled traffic farming, crop rotation, pest management, terraces, grassed waterways and surface roughening. Through the implementation of these conservation practices there is increased water infiltration, decreased soil erosion and increased yields along with savings in labor and fuel cost. As trends in agriculture continue to change, the Whatley family is always looking to the future and how they can advance their operation with conservation in mind.

Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District – Upper Sabine SWCD #530

Bill Buchanan, Chairman

Mike Hogge, District Director

Carla Martin, District Director

Kenneth D. Thornton, District Director

The Upper Sabine Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was originally established on June 23, 1941. The purpose of the SWCD is to protect and enhance the natural resources of Hunt County through financial and technical assistance as well as educational support to local citizens and the infrastructure of the county. Upper Sabine SWCD is active in the TSSWCB Flood Control Program through addressing maintenance and repair needs for the 19 flood control structures within the county. The SWCD is passionate about educating landowners and the younger generation, they are proud to host many educational workshops and field days throughout the year. Their goal is to ensure the availability of natural resources for future generations so that all Texans' present and future needs can be met in a manner that promotes a clean, healthy environment and strong economic growth.

Winners Announced Cont.

Friend of Conservation – Kenda Mahaffey, Anderson-Houston SWCD #421

Kenda Mahaffey began work as a District Clerk with the Bedias Creek SWCD in 1991, she then joined Freestone County SWCD in 2009 and finally Anderson-Houston SWCD in 2018 for a total of 29 years of work in soil and water conservation. Over the years, she has been an integral part in facilitating many contests and field days for students to further their knowledge of the importance of conservation. Mahaffey has worked diligently to ensure the success of SWCD programs through working with landowners to put conservation efforts on the ground in Anderson, Freestone, Grimes, Houston, Leon and Madison counties. Mahaffey is an admirable advocate for land stewardship, youth and natural resource education. She has left a legacy of conservation for many generations to follow.

Conservation Rancher – Charlesworth Ranch Company, Big Bend SWCD #227

The Charlesworth Ranch Company lies in the Chihuahuan Desert within Brewster and Presidio Counties near Marathon, Texas. Brent and Leslea Charlesworth along with their two daughters, Colee and Emilee are proud to call the ranch their home. The ranch has been cooperators with the Big Bend SWCD and USDA-NRCS since 2014 putting conservation on the ground. Their main focuses are stocker steers with a few cows and calves as well as hunting. With the average annual rainfall on the ranch ranging from 10-14 inches, conservation practices are a top priority. Extensive conservation planning went into designing the plan that fit the ranch best. The Charlesworth Ranch Company incorporates a variety of conservation practices such as Pronghorn friendly fence, brush management, prescribed burning, livestock water pipeline installation, upland wildlife habitat management and prescribed grazing have all been utilized successfully. The Charlesworth family has done an outstanding job in being dedicated stewards of the land and will continue to set a fine example for others to follow.

Conservation Teacher – Lisa Johnson, Cochran SWCD #149

Lisa Johnson is a teacher at Whiteface ISD in Muleshoe, Texas. She began her professional teaching career a little over 30 years ago, managing the swimming pool and teaching kids how to swim. That quickly morphed into acquiring canoes and teaching kids about exercise and outdoor water safety. Later, she took over the Elementary Physical Education Program at Whiteface ISD and developed an Outdoor Education Program for students in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades. In order for her students to develop a deeper understanding of our natural resources and the importance of conservation, she strives to engage students with experiential learning by getting them outside. Johnson takes her students on three outdoor education field trips every year visiting the National Wildlife Refuge in Muleshoe, Palo Duro Canyon and the Chihuahuan Desert near Carlsbad, New Mexico. Over the course of her 30-year career in education, Lisa has dedicated herself to sharing her passion for land stewardship and conservation with her students and those around her. Lisa is a leader in teaching our future generations the importance of conservation and stewardship.

Wildlife Conservationist – Dr. Michael Baird, Red River County SWCD #423

Dr. Michael Baird is a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine and works at the Dekalb Animal Hospital. He purchased his first 100 acres of family land located in Red River County in 1997. Through the years he has purchased additional plots as it is become available. Baird and his wife, Melissa now own 650 acres in Red River County and 150 acres in Bowie County. Baird has been a cooperator with Red River County SWCD since 2011. He has utilized a variety of programs to implement conservation practices on their land which are great providers of food, shelter, and habitat for wildlife. Michael is constantly looking for additional ways to improve the land and his own land management skills. His vision is for the land cannot be done in his lifetime, he hopes the future generations of the Baird family will carry on his legacy of land stewardship as well as wildlife preservation. The dedication to conservation and education demonstrated by the Dr. Michael Baird is widely admired and appreciated.

More information about the Texas Conservation Awards Program is available at: <https://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/programs/public-information-and-education/texas-conservation-awards-program>

Program Updates

• TSSWCB AGENCY UPDATE

- All TSSWCB offices are open and staff is available, and accessible by phone, email, and appointment. TSSWCB programs continue without disruption in service.

• BUDGET & ACCOUNTING

- The TSSWCB will be suspending SWCD Information Technology Assistance and SWCD Audit reimbursements for Fiscal Year 2021 as a result of state agency budget reductions.

- The SWCD Budget Request for Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023 is due by July 31st. A link to the SWCD Budget Request Application, instructions, and reference materials are located under Financial Forms on the SWCD Resources Page on the TSSWCB website. Please contact your field representative for questions on completing your budget request.

Important End of Year Dates and Deadlines for Fiscal Year 2020

The state has not given notice to agencies of any extension to end of year requirements for state appropriated funds, therefore the following deadlines remain unchanged for fiscal year end. Should we receive notice of an extension, we will let everyone know.

- **July 1st** was the deadline for submitting Fiscal Year 2020 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Quarter Mileage and Per Diem claims. Payments for claims received after the deadline are being delayed until year end.
- **August 31st** is the deadline for submitting Fiscal Year 2020 regular and supplemental Matching Fund claims.
- **August 31st** is the deadline for submitting Fiscal Year 2020 Conservation Activity Program (CAP) claims.
- **September 1st** is the deadline for submitting the Fiscal Year 2020 Financial Statement/Audit Notification Form.
- **September 30th** is the deadline for submitting Fiscal Year 2020 Conservation Implementation Assistance (TA) regular and supplemental claims.
- **September 30th** is the deadline for submitting Fiscal Year 2020 SWCD Information Technology Assistance claims.
- **September 30th** is the deadline for submitting Fiscal Year 2020 4th Quarter Mileage and Per Diem claims and the return of unused advance funds.

Please note the SWCDs resource section on the TSSWCB website contains documents, forms and important updates to SWCDs in conducting their daily business operations. Please continue to check the resources section for additional updates related to COVID-19 and for any changes with end of year requirements.

• FLOOD CONTROL PROGRAM

At the July 2019 board meeting, the State Board approved \$4,935,000 for dam operation and maintenance (O&M) grants for fiscal year 2020. Watershed sponsors are encouraged to submit proposals for O&M work that they are ready to implement and provide the local 10% share of cost. Work on funded proposals must be completed within 90 days of Purchase Order date. TSSWCB received a supplemental appropriation of \$150 million from the Economic Stabilization Fund (ESF) in fiscal year 2019 for dam repair, rehabilitation, and upgrade. This funding must be obligated by June 5, 2021. Staff are currently contracting with sponsors for construction of 25 dam repairs. TSSWCB is also contracting with engineering firms and NRCS for design of 29 additional dam repairs and 20 dam upgrades, as well as construction inspection of 22 dam repairs. Applications for additional dam repair and dam upgrade may be submitted if sponsors are ready to fund the local share of the project cost (5% for dam repair; 1.75% for dam upgrade). TSSWCB has also contracted with engineering firms for development of federal rehabilitation plans on 9 high hazard dams and assessment of 60 high hazard dams. Additional federal construction funding was received on seven high hazard dams that are currently being designed. Currently, \$138 million is needed to repair about 188 flood control program dams in Texas, and \$2.0 Billion is needed to upgrade and rehabilitate about 500 high hazard dams where downstream urban development has resulted in public safety issues.

• CARRIZO CANE ERADICATION PROGRAM

The TSSWCB issued a Request for Proposals to treat carrizo cane on June 11, 2020. Proposals were due by June 26, 2020 and a contractor was selected to conduct the work.

Program Updates Continued

• COMMUNICATIONS

ANNUAL MEETING OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT DIRECTORS

As you may know, concerns about COVID-19 pandemic have been on the rise and we have been monitoring the situation closely with the Governor's office. After carefully weighing the emerging facts as well as our duties to our Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Conservation Partners, meeting attendees and the local community, we have made the difficult, but necessary decision to cancel the 80th Annual Meeting of Texas Soil and Water Conservation District Directors that was scheduled to take place on October 26-28, 2020 at Moody Gardens in Galveston. Protecting the health, safety and well-being of our Soil and Water Conservation District Directors and Conservation Partners is our top priority and we are committed to providing a safe environment to those dedicated to protecting our natural resources.

In lieu of an in-person Annual Meeting, we will be taking a virtual approach with a few aspects of our Annual Meeting during the last week of October. Please be on the look out for more information as we develop our plan!

• WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN PROGRAM

With the enactment of Senate Bill 503 (73rd Regular Session - Sims / Counts) 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. For FY2020 as of June 30, 141 WQMPs have been certified on 72,063 total acres.

• NONPOINT SOURCE GRANT PROGRAM

Implementing Conservation Practices and Conducting Watershed Outreach Improves Water Quality in Attoyac Bayou

High levels of bacteria prompted the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to add Attoyac Bayou to the 2004 Clean Water Act (CWA) section 303(d) list of impaired waters for not supporting the primary contact recreation use. The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) partnered with local stakeholders, Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI) and Angelina and Neches River Authority (ANRA) to develop a watershed protection plan (WPP) to address the bacteria impairments in the Attoyac Bayou watershed.

Project partners TSSWCB, TWRI, ANRA, Nacogdoches Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Piney Woods SWCD, Rusk SWCD and the Shelby SWCD, U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)) used CWA section 319(h) grant funds and Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding to voluntarily implement agricultural and conservation best management practices (BMPs) and conduct public outreach and education.

Water quality monitoring data showed that the bacteria levels in Attoyac Bayou (Assessment Unit 0612_01) decreased and it was removed from the 2016 CWA Section 303(d) list.

"We would like to thank the stakeholders of the Attoyac Bayou watershed for their dedication and tireless efforts to make this effort a success. The delisting of this watershed is a direct result of the voluntary efforts of stakeholders within the watershed," said Mitch Conine, TSSWCB Nonpoint Source Project Manager.

This success can be attributed to conservation practice implementation, repaired or replaced failing on-site sewage facilities, and increased stakeholder awareness due to the watershed planning process.

Water quality monitoring continues to measure the interim progress of implementing the management measures outlined in the Attoyac Bayou WPP to ensure this restoration effort remains a success.