



Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board

Quarterly Program Update: Winter 2020

Implementing Conservation Practices and Conducting Watershed Outreach Improves Water Quality in the Navasota River Watershed

The Navasota River is one of many rural water bodies listed as impaired on the 303(D) List due to elevated levels of Escherichia coli (E. coli) bacteria. The Navasota River was first listed in 2002 and Cedar Creek, a tributary of the Navasota River, was listed in 2004. The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) utilized Clean Water Act Section 319(h) funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and partnered with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI) and Texas A&M AgriLife Research to host numerous educational events for stakeholders to learn about their local water quality issues. These events also focused on the management of feral hogs, riparian areas, septic systems, livestock and water wells. The TSSWCB and TWRI worked with local stakeholders to develop a watershed protection plan (WPP) to address the impairments and other water quality concerns. Through these efforts water quality was improved and two assessment units of the Navasota River and Cedar Creek were removed from the state's list of impaired waters.

The TSSWCB, TWRI, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and Texas A&M AgriLife Research have been hosting education and outreach programs in the Navasota River watershed since 2007. These programs focused on water quality, feral hog management, riparian area protection, livestock management, septic systems management, and protecting water wells. Field days to demonstrate best management practices (BMP) to landowners were also held with some of the events. The TSSWCB partnered with the Brazos County, Bedia Creek, Navasota, and Robertson County SWCDs, to develop and implement six water quality management plans (WQMP) in the watershed. Most of the WQMPs were on poultry animal feeding operations that included grazing, covering over 3,666 acres. These plans included alternative water sources, prescribed grazing, cross-fencing, animal mortality facilities, composting facilities, nutrient management and waste utilization. In addition, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) worked with landowners in both subwatersheds to implement conservation practices on over 4,200 acres using Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding.

Water quality monitoring data show that the long-term E. coli geometric means meet the state water quality standard for contact recreation in portions of the Navasota River in 2012 and 2018 and for Cedar Creek in 2014. Consequently, portions of the Navasota River and Cedar Creek were removed from the 303(d) list in the 2012, 2014, and 2018 Texas Integrated Report of Surface Water Quality. The success of this effort can be attributed to increased stakeholder awareness due to educational programs focused on improving water quality, the watershed planning process, and conservation practices being implemented in the watershed. Conservation practices continue to be implemented in the watershed since the delisting of the Navasota River and Cedar Creek. Water quality monitoring continues to track and measure interim progress to implement the WPP and ensure this restoration effort remains a success.

Over \$28,000 in U.S. Environmental Protection Agency CWA section 319 funds (provided by the TSSWCB), combined with more than \$250,000 in non-federal funds from TSSWCB, TWRI, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and Texas A&M AgriLife Research, supported the delivery of the educational programs and development of the WPP. The Brazos County, Bedia Creek, Navasota, and Robertson County SWCDs worked with landowners to voluntarily implement conservation practices to reduce the impact of livestock and poultry operations in the watershed. The TSSWCB and the NRCS worked through the SWCDs to provide approximately \$34,250 in state funding and over \$327,000 in federal Farm Bill funding to landowners as financial incentives to implement BMPs and provide technical assistance in the Navasota River watershed.

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 has suspended SWCD Information Technology Assistance and SWCD Audit reimbursements for Fiscal Year 2021 as a result of state agency budget reductions.

Important End of Year Dates and Deadlines for Fiscal Year 2020

- December 30th is the deadline for submitting Financial Statement, Reviews, and Audits prepared by a CPA.
- The Important Dates and Deadlines for Calendar Year 2021 will be released in February.

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.

• FLOOD CONTROL PROGRAM

The State Board approved \$4,460,519 for dam operation and maintenance (O&M) grants for fiscal year 2021. 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 have contracted with sponsors for construction of 40 dam repairs. Twelve dam repairs have been completed. TSSWCB is also contracting with engineering firms and NRCS for design of 14 additional dam repairs and 20 dam upgrades, as well as construction inspection of dam repairs currently in construction. 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 29 high hazard dams. Additional federal construction funding was received on seven high hazard dams that are currently being designed. Currently, \$125 million is needed to repair about 174 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.

• 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 November 30th, 163 WQMPs have been certified on 77,935 total acres.

• NONPOINT SOURCE GRANT PROGRAM

November 16- November 20, NPS staff participated in the 2020 National Nonpoint Source Management Virtual Training Workshop. Over 500 participants took part in a combination of daily live sessions and pre-recorded sessions, as well as poster sessions. The training workshop consisted of EPA, States and tribal nations discussing water quality issues from across the country. The poster session presented information on innovative tools, communication and hazard mitigation pilot projects. During the conference there was an opportunity for attendees to talk one on one with experts to ask questions and hear about the latest information about EPA tools, resources and systems supporting NPS efforts in the US.

Program Updates Continued

• CARRIZO CANE ERADICATION PROGRAM

The TSSWCB issued a Request for Proposals to treat Carrizo cane by drone in November of 2020. Staff discussed potential erosion concerns with landowners from Cameron and Hidalgo counties. Staff visually inspected Carrizo Cane that was originally treated in 2016 and 2017 in Maverick and Val Verde counties to determine the effectiveness of the initial treatment. Staff participated in a virtual training session with Border Patrol personnel in Edinburg on the State's Carrizo Cane program. The Carrizo Program treated a total 6,047.2 acres of cane, totaling \$903,838.35, in FY 2020.

• FERAL SWINE CONTROL PILOT PROGRAM

The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) is working in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute, and the Texas Wildlife Damage Management Association to administer the Feral Swine Control Pilot Program in the Canadian River Watershed, Upper Leon River Watershed, and the Upper Red River Watershed project areas that encompass Hartley, Oldham, Potter, Eastland, Comanche, Erath, Hardeman, Wilbarger, Wichita, and Clay Counties in Texas. The project period runs through September 30, 2022. Total federal funding received is \$1,466,950, and non-federal funds in the amount of \$488,984 are being used to provide 25% matching component. TSSWCB is working with 9 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts to establish a smart trap loan program for farmers, ranchers, and landowners. Education and outreach activities will be provided by Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute (NRI). TSSWCB is also partnering with Texas Wildlife Damage Management Association (TWDMA) to support 6 Wildlife Damage Management Specialists hired through Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Cooperative Wildlife Service Program. Current status of the program can be found below:

- SWCD smart trap loan program: All nine of the SWCDs in the project areas have fully executed agreements with TSSWCB. These SWCDs are currently in the process of purchasing 60 smart traps collectively to be loaned out to landowners.

- Hiring of six Wildlife Damage Management Specialists: The agreement between TSSWCB and TWDMA has been fully executed, and three Wildlife Damage Management Specialists have been hired (two in the Upper Leon project area, and one in the Canadian River project area), and applications are currently being accepted in the Red River Project area.

- Outreach and Education: Interagency agreement between TSSWCB and Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute has been fully executed. Web-based education and outreach activities are expected to begin as SWCDs purchase and receive smart traps, and they are available to loan to landowners.

• COMMUNICATIONS

SWCD DIRECTORS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

With the health and safety of our conservation family in mind, we have made the difficult decision to cancel the 2021 District Director Training scheduled for March 2-3, 2021 in Temple.

CONSERVATION AWARDS PROGRAM

Area qualifying entries must be postmarked by February 1, 2021. Please contact Molly Christensen at 254-228-7881 or by email at mchristensen@tsswcb.texas.gov with any questions.

• HUMAN RESOURCES

TSSWCB currently has 1 position open, a Natural Resources Specialist III for the Mount Pleasant Regional Office. For more information visit: <https://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/contact-us/employment>