

Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan Implementation

Minutes from March 15th and 16th Public Meetings

On March 15th and 16th, 2011 the Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) Implementation Team conducted meetings with Watershed Landowners in Pecos, Imperial, Iraan and Ozona. These meetings were held to update watershed landowners on current WPP implementation activities occurring in the watershed and to provide information to landowners about technical and financial assistance offered through the Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP) program and currently available to them for implementation on their properties.

In Pecos and Imperial, Amy Porter, Upper Pecos Soil and Water Conservation District Technician, discussed the benefits associated with obtaining a WQMP. In addition, she described the practices eligible for financial incentive through a WQMP. These practices are: Fencing, Watering Facilities, Pipelines, Wells, Rangeland Planting, Riparian Herbaceous Buffer, Riparian Forest Buffer, Nutrient Management, and Pumping Plants. The financial incentive is made available through the Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan funding provided by the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Ty Allen, Crockett Soil and Water Conservation District Technician, explained the same programs in Iraan and Ozona.

Amy and Ty also explained the saltcedar spraying and burning programs that are currently available to the landowner at no cost. Saltcedar in areas along the river that have not been previously treated can be sprayed with Imazapyr applied aerially. Landowners must sign up with Amy or Ty to have saltcedar on their property treated. Saltcedar burning is available at no cost to the landowner in areas along the river south of Girvin which were sprayed at least three years before the projected burn date. It takes up to three years for the saltcedar to completely absorb the chemical and die.

Gary Bryant, Pecos River Watershed Coordinator, gave an update on the progress of the saltcedar beetle releases. Beetles have been released at eight new sites in the Pecos River Watershed. This gives us a total of nine sites in the watershed now. The Pecos site grew exponentially during 2010 and is now covering more than 14,000 acres. Beetles provide a low cost, long term control for the saltcedar; however current populations are not able to keep saltcedar under control. It is unknown what effect the hard winter will have on the beetle population, but it is not expected to have much of an adverse effect upon the population as the beetles do exist in Kansas and survive winters up there. It is unknown if we will be able to move any beetles this year due to concerns the Mexicans are having with the beetle. The beetles typically emerge just after tax day and will begin eating the saltcedar once again. In 2011, the expansion of the beetle populations will be monitored. Other scientific studies include the effect of

saltcedar beetles on the saltcedar blooms and the reproductive cycle of the saltcedar and evaluating revegetation under saltcedar as it is defoliated by the beetles year after year.

Lucas Gregory updated the landowners on the progress of the new continuous water quality monitoring station planned for implementation near Girvin. The new station should be installed before the summer and will provide continuous monitoring of the water quality at Girvin. The installation of this station will allow for a clearer understanding of the effects of water quality and its relation to streamflow in the Pecos River from Imperial to Girvin.

Aaron Hoff gave a presentation of water quality data collected by existing continuous water quality monitoring stations and illustrated recent water quality trends in the Pecos River from 2006 to 2010. The conclusion of the data analysis is that water quality trends are variable. As expected, weather plays a key role in the water quality of the Pecos River. Additional years of data from the continuous monitoring stations will provide a better idea of the real trends in water quality of the Pecos River.

Lucas Gregory discussed the other studies being conducted on the river and the proposed activities in the watershed. Currently a project is getting underway to model the dissolved oxygen in certain reaches of the Pecos River. This project will help identify the reasons for the low dissolved oxygen in the river. Once the causes of the low dissolved oxygen are identified, solutions can then be considered.

Another project is being proposed to help identify isolated salinity sources along the river. This project will hopefully identify salinity "hotspots" in the river between Pecos and Girvin thus refining knowledge of what specific sources of salt are contributing to the salinity of the Pecos. Once salt sources are identified, solutions can be evaluated for later implementation thus improving the water quality of the Pecos.

Upcoming activities are a Riparian Workshop and the Texas Watershed Steward program. The riparian workshop is being conducted by the Nueces River Authority and the Nature Conservancy. It will be held March 18th from 9 am to 4 pm at the Independence Preserve.

The Texas Watershed Steward program will be presented Jun 28th in Pecos, Texas and June 29th in Iraan, Texas as a part of WPP implementation efforts across the watershed. This is a one-day educational workshop that focuses on providing general information on water quality and watersheds. A variety of continuing education units are available through the program and you can register by phone at 979-458-3478 or online at: <http://tw.s.tamu.edu>.

Questions and Answers

- Q: Is there going to be any more burning on the upper portion of the Pecos River?
A: Red Bluff Power and Water Control District is getting agreements together to burn the upper portion of the Pecos River. Their contact is Robin Prewitt, 432-445-2037.
- Q: How far off of the river will fencing be if a landowner chooses to include this in a WQMP?
A: Keeping the fence out of the flood plain is the main goal, so this will vary by location.
- Q: Are exterior fences allowed?
A: No, with the exception of fencing adjacent to the river to protect the riparian area.
- Q: If a landowner does fence off the river, can it still be grazed?
A: Through this program, it is requested that the area not be grazed.
- Q: What does the chemical used to spray saltcedar kill and how does grass respond following treatment?
A: Imazapyr is a non-selective herbicide that will kill almost any plant it touches. Unfortunately, juniper and mesquite seem to tolerate the chemical well.
- Q: Will upland saltcedar stands be sprayed?
A: Funding is currently allocated for riparian spraying only; however, upland treatment is a long-term project goal.
- Q: When will saltcedar debris burning begin?
A: Burning will begin once landowner agreements have been completed, burn prescriptions are developed and conditions fit the prescription.
- Q: How far off the river will be burned?
A: It depends. Burning will largely be limited to the sprayed area, but if equipment cannot get to the edge of the burned area, more land may be burned.
- Q: Do we need a watershed steering committee or committees now?
A: We have had the steering committee in the past which pointed out these activities needed in the Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan. As we get these items concluded, we will need to meet again to assess the course to proceed next.
- Q: What do we do about hunting cabins which release raw sewage onto the watershed?
A: We will find the contacts at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to handle the issues.
- Q: What can we do about the oil field pits being located 600 feet from the River?
A: We will check with the Railroad Commission of Texas to determine if this is within the regulations and if anything can be done to move the pits further from the river.