

*Pecos River Ecosystem Project
Workshop
August 23, 2005
Pecos County Civic Center, Ft. Stockton, Texas*

9:00 A.M.

Sponsored by the Pecos County Commissioners Court and Pecos Valley RC&D

In Attendance:

Judge Joe Shuster	Pecos County Judge
Oscar Gonzales	Pecos County Commissioner
Dr. Michael McCulloch	Pecos County WID #2
Mike Muegge	Texas Cooperative Extension – Ft. Stockton
Tina Hagy	Senator Madla Representative
Brenda Rue	Texas Cooperative Extension – Ft. Stockton
Calvin G. Gerke	Upper Pecos SWCD #213
George Riggs	Pecos Valley RC&D
Dean McCorkle	Texas Cooperative Extension – Ft. Stockton
Arnold Braden	Upper Pecos SWCD #213
Cindy Breiten	Upper Pecos SWCD #213
Dr. Charles Hart	Texas Cooperative Extension – Ft. Stockton
J. W. Thrasher	Pecos River Compact Commissioner
Darrel Brown	Guest – Bandera County
Mike McMurry	Texas Department of Agriculture
Charles E. Brandenburg	Ward County WID #2
Larry Brown	Consultant
Charlotte Brown	Consultant
Dan Harrell	City of Grandfalls
Bill Davis	Texas Forest Service
Randal Hartman	Red Bluff
Jay Lee	Red Bluff
Gregory Huber	Pecos Valley RC&D
Marvin Ensor	Texas Cooperative Extension – Ft. Stockton
Alan R. Zeman	Reeves County WID #2
Charlie Wilcox	Ward County WID #2
Charlotte Wilcox	Red Bluff
Monica Hernandez	Congressman Henry Bonilla Representative
Brad Newton	City of Ft. Stockton
Willie Arnwine	Terrell County
Zhuping Sherg	TAMU
Alyson McDonald	Texas Cooperative Extension – Ft. Stockton
David Geurin	Ward County WID #2

Will Hatler	Texas Cooperative Extension – Ft. Stockton
S. Miyamoto	Texas Cooperative Extension
Sarah McMahon	Texas Cooperative Extension
Bill Thompson	Texas Cooperative Extension
Bard Reid	Pecos County WID #2

Judge Joe Shuster welcomed the group in attendance today. The purpose of our meeting is to try and bring the county governments together from the counties along the Pecos River. Developing and restoring the Pecos River should be our common goal. Focusing on the big picture is the subject for discussion today, as well as gaining input on what we all can do to reach these goals.

Judge Shuster introduced Dr. Michael McCulloch. Dr. McCulloch welcomed the group on behalf of the Upper Pecos SWCD #213 and the Pecos River Ecosystem Advisory Committee. He provided some background on the Committee and the work that is being done. The Committee meets the third Thursday of each month in Monahans and welcome and encourages interested citizens to attend.

Dr. Charles Hart provided some background on the Pecos River Ecosystem Project and the current projects and activities going on in the Pecos River Basin. Current projects besides the Advisory Committee are the Pecos River Assessment Program and the Rio Grande Basin Initiative Program. There are 400 miles of Pecos River that runs through the State of Texas before it flows into the Rio Grande River. The invasive species called salt cedar is a major concern for our river since one mature tree consumes approximately 200 gallons of water per day. The Pecos River Ecosystem Advisory Committee was started in the summer of last year and the purpose is to advise on how to accomplish our mission, which is to improve the water quality and water quantity, improve wildlife habitat and improve agricultural practices unique to the river through the development of a long term plan. Larry Brown and his wife Charlotte have been retained by the committee as a grant writer and consultant to assist with the long term plan.

The Pecos River Management Plan

- Herbicide Application
- Debris Removal – Prescribed Burning
- Long Term Management Including Biological, Spot Spraying, and Native Restoration

Project Application Concerns

- Herbicide Contact – Limiting Off-Target Contact
- Accurate Spraying
- Precise Application – Less Drift and Drips
- Re-Invasion and Seedlings Issues

Funding

- 1999-2000 Red Bluff and Irrigation Districts
- 2001 State of Texas and Irrigation Districts
- 2002 State of Texas
- 2003-2004 EQIP

There have been over 12,000 acres treated on 9,684 river miles and is 64.9% complete. There are 1830 acres left to treat which is an 84% completion of the initial phase. There are 11,500 total estimated acres on the Pecos main stream. Future funding will be by EQIP and in anticipation of a grant proposal that has been submitted to EPA. The application was nominated by the Governor of Texas and we are still waiting to hear if the application is going to advance to the next level. The next phase of the project which is the debris removal by prescribed burning is part of the budget in this grant application. Once this debris is removed, the natural grasses will be more prevalent. They are already showing underneath the dead salt cedar.

The Pecos River Basin Assessment Program is a multi-agency program funded by the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board through the EPA 319 Program. The need for this project is huge since the Pecos is the largest U.S. river sub-basin flowing into the Rio Grande. The agencies involved are:

- Texas Extension Service
- Texas Ag. Experiment Station
- Texas Water Resources
- IBWC

Project Objectives

- Task #1 Basin Assessment
- Task #2 Educational Programming
- Task #3 Monitoring Program
- Task #4 Watershed Management

Bill Thompson reviewed the survey results. The respondents were landowners, farmers, ranchers and recreational users. The responses were separated by counties and asked questions about farming practices and the river and rangeland conditions and the river. Also asked on the survey was to what extent non-native invasive species affect the river and does the general public benefit from public funds to control salt cedar. Water uses were ranked and ecological preservation was the main landowner response. The survey results are available on the website: [http:// pecosbasin.tamu.edu](http://pecosbasin.tamu.edu).

Questions that were addressed by participants were the following:

1. Has there been any salt change in the part of the river that has been treated? There has not been a significant amount of change.
2. Have there been any changes in the river itself? There has been a lot of change resulting from the salt cedar treatment and the rains.
3. Has there been efficiency in water flow? As of yet, the water flow has not been significant since there is a lot of debris that needs to be removed.
4. What would the impact of the Pecos River in Texas be if the Pecos River in New Mexico was not treated? The impact would be significant since the river in New Mexico would be a seed source.
5. Would dams affect the level of the river? Dams would probably be beneficial, but this needs to be studied and they would need to be strategically placed. A lot of research will need to be done in order to know for sure. There are dams in place that are not being utilized.

After a break, there are several questions that were put to the group. Public input is very important to the project and the reason we are all here today. Allyson McDonald, Kris Edwards and Cindy Breiten recorded notes for this part of the meeting.

How does the health of the Pecos River affect counties within its basin?

- Economy of the area
- Fish and Wildlife
- Recreation
- Mosquitoes
- Adjacent counties
- Quality of water going south
- Water quantity
- Economic development
- Tax base
- Public access

If the water flow of the river is not increased, then none of the above will happen. A broader base of issues can help secure funding and political interest. Also, with a healthier river, populations could increase as well as land values.

What are practical goals that the Project could strive for?

Goals for the Pecos River need to be looked at from a salinity standpoint since the Pecos is a salt river.

- Future municipal uses
- Community pride
- Fresh water trees
- Agriculture – promoting smaller operations
- Grasses and vegetation
- Education
- Livestock

What obstacles must be overcome for complete restoration of the Pecos River?

- Money – Funding
- Salinity
- Lack of communication
- Need intergovernmental agreements
- Time
- Lack of population density
- Lack of cooperation of landowners
- Political power
- Lack of public education
- Personal opinion
- Lack of common goals
- Lack of clear vision
- Lack of public involvement

How can county governments become involved and assist the Pecos River Ecosystem Project and how can the Project improve communications?

- Include the Pecos River in county budget allocations
- Increase public access for county recreation
- Include in regional water plans
- More community involvement from the state down south
- Political clout comes from a unified voice
- Pursue county governments coming together
- Pursuing economical and environmental issues
- Show public benefit
- Private landowners becoming more involved

Lunch Break – The Pecos River Ecosystem Project Advisory Committee appreciate all of the hard work and the lunch provided by the sponsors.

Mr. Miyamoto's Presentation on Salinity

Mr. Miyamoto discussed the salinity issues on the Pecos River and why the salinity levels are a source of concern. The high salinity levels can lower economic values, reduce biodiversity, affect aquatic species and bank vegetation. Differences of the soil salinities of the river banks of the Pecos and the Rio Grande were also discussed. The Rio Grande has a higher content of salinity that has built up over time. The Pecos River contributes 26% of the salts and 9% of the flow into the Amistad Reservoir. Studies of the salinity fluctuation of the Amistad Reservoir between 1952 and 2002 were revealed as well as changes in salinity, flow and storage. The Permian Basin was once under the ocean and the drying left evaporates, gypsum, halite and esonite. Mr. Miyamoto discussed specific objectives of salinity studies, water balance measurements, water balance inflows, outflows, and losses between 1959 and 2001. Salinity levels and the reasons why these need to be lowered was discussed by the group with Mr. Miyamoto.

Mr. Miyamoto's presentation was very interesting and informative and very much appreciated. The Upper Pecos SWCD #213 and the Pecos River Ecosystem Advisory Committee thank everyone for attending today's workshop.

The meeting was adjourned.

Minutes by Cindy Breiten and Kris Edwards