

August 2nd and 3rd, 2011 Landowner Meetings

Minutes

On August 2, 2011 two landowner meetings were held. The first meeting was at 8:30 am at the Pecos Community Hall in Pecos and the second meeting was at 6:30 pm at the Buena Vista's School Cafeteria in Imperial. On August 3, 2011 two additional landowner meetings were held. The first meeting was at 1:30 pm at the Ozona AgriLife Extension Office and the second meeting was held at the Scout Hut in Iraan at 6:30 pm. All four meetings covered the same material and are summarized in the minutes presented here.

The meetings were called to order by the Pecos River Watershed Coordinator, Gary Bryant. Amy Porter, Upper Pecos Soil and Water Conservation District Technician, and Ty Allen, Crockett Soil and Water Conservation District Technician, gave presentations on Water Quality Management Plans, Saltcedar spraying, and Saltcedar burning. Amy gave the presentations in Pecos and Imperial while Ty gave the presentations in Ozona and Iraan.

The presentations highlighted the fact that the Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan is a process to restore water quality, supplement water quantity, improve watershed health and support landowners' management goals. The watershed landowners have the opportunity to participate in Water Quality Management Plans (WQMP). These are landowner requested, site specific plans developed through the local SWCD with free technical assistance for pollution prevention and abatement. These plans are certified through the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and can be an avenue for obtaining financial assistance to implement items included in the WQMP. Through Pecos River WPP Implementation efforts, 60% of the cost of the best management practices to a maximum of \$15,000 is being provided for WQMPs on properties along the river utilizing project funds from the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB). The other 40% is the responsibility of the landowner.

Practices eligible for financial incentives are cross fences for grazing management, livestock watering facilities, nutrient management plans, pipelines, pumping plants, range plantings, riparian herbaceous buffers, riparian forest buffers, and water wells. Other funding mechanisms were addressed such as USDA-NRCS, USDA-FSA and TWDB. Currently there have been 5 plans certified and 6 more are under development. To date, \$52,530 is obligated toward the cost of best management practices. A balance of \$247,470 remains for additional eligible practice implementation. Practices installed include 6.5 miles of fence, 1 water well, 8 water storage facilities and 8,000 feet of pipeline.

Chemical control of saltcedar is available at no cost to the landowner. The first round of treatment will be conducted this fall. If you are interested and own the land between the New Mexico state line and Girvin, contact Amy Porter; and if you are interested in having your saltcedar sprayed and own property between Girvin and the Val Verde county line, contact Ty Allen.

If you have standing dead saltcedar which has been sprayed in the program in the past and it needs to be burned, contact your appropriate Conservation District Technician. Burning will commence once the weather conditions improve.

Dr. Mark Muegge gave an update on the control of saltcedar with the use of saltcedar leaf beetles. The beetles were late coming out this past spring. Many of the Crete beetles have not been seen this year. It is evident that this last winter was extremely detrimental to this particular beetle. The Tunisian beetle has come out further south and has been quite prolific this year. The Tunisian beetles are doing very well at the Iraan site and have produced enough offspring to be captured and released at other sites. Also the Tunisian beetles are doing very well on the Rio Grande and they are being transferred to other sites along the Pecos River.

Based upon the effect of the extremely cold weather upon the Crete beetles, the current management plan is to relocate only Tunisian beetles. Relocating saltcedar beetles to your property is completely free to the landowner and the best person to contact is your SWCD Technician. The saltcedar beetle is still the primary long term management hope for the continuous, low cost, control of saltcedar.

Lucas Gregory, Project Manager with TWRI, reported on the use of the CWQM stations. These stations give continuous, real time water quality data for the Pecos River. There are two new stations currently being installed: one above the Red Bluff Reservoir in New Mexico and one at the Highway 67 bridge near Girvin. The station above the Red Bluff Reservoir has been installed and will be operating in the very near future. The station at Highway 67 is to be installed in the near future. All of the water quality information can be downloaded from the internet. A demonstration of how to access the data was given at the meeting and can be found on the project website as well.

<http://twri.tamu.edu/resources/swqmis-instructions>

Mr. Gregory also addressed the meeting with an update of the Dissolved Oxygen modeling being conducted by Dr. Larry Hauck with the Texas Institute for Applied Environmental Research. Dissolved oxygen is the only official impairment on the Pecos River, yet the source of the impairment is not clear. Dr. Hauck is studying the cause of the impairment. The existing data from the water quality monitoring stations and water release data from Red Bluff Power and Water Control District are being analyzed to determine the cause and subsequent control of the impairment. These data do not indicate any particular cause at this time. Dr. Hauck is scheduled to give the preliminary findings of his study during this next spring at the landowners' meetings.

Mr. Gregory then gave insight into the next proposal being submitted to TSSWCB. The next proposal is for a Time-Domain Electro-Magnetic Survey. This study will give the salinity content of the Pecos River and the soils beneath. The study is currently being planned to take place on the Pecos from the Interstate 20 Bridge to Girvin at Highway 67 Bridge. This study is designed to identify areas of salt increase on the river. Ultimately, the determination will be made as to the practices which can be implemented to nullify the increased salinity of the river.

The floor was opened for questions and concerns from the public and the meetings were adjourned.

Q&A:

Q: Do wildlife watering facilities qualify for a WQMP?

A: No, but check with NRCS. Their programs do not have that restriction.

Q: Are there similar programs in other areas, for example Terlingua Creek?

A: Pecos River watershed specific programs are not available at Terlingua Creek since it is outside of the Pecos River watershed; talk with NRCS though. They may know of programs available in that area.

Q: What qualifies as a tributary?

A: See map on page 6 of the WPP for advice. That said, on-site determinations will be made to ID spray areas feasible for treatment. Bottom line is to sign up if you are interested in having saltcedar sprayed; doesn't guarantee that your land will be sprayed, but gets you on the list.

Q: Will other areas be sprayed?

A: For now we must focus on what is included in the WPP.

Q: What species of the beetle fed on Athel trees last year?

A: The Tunisian species. USDA knew that Athel would be eaten, it is also a species of saltcedar and is also invasive.

Q: Are beetle releases limited to the watershed?

A: Through this project, yes. There are also federal limitations due to Southwestern Willow Flycatcher habitat. The number of beetles available also limits our ability to move beetles. If interested, contact your SWCD technician and we can discuss releasing on your property.

Q: Does saltcedar seed production decline when beetles feed on the trees?

A: It certainly seems to, but research is needed to verify that seed production actually does decline.

Q: What are the natural enemies of the beetles?

A: There are quite a few, namely ants, birds and other small critters that feed on insects.

Q: In evaluating areas to spray, will regrowth areas be quantified?

A: Not at this point in time.

Q: What types of grasses have been seen coming back in the burned areas?

A: Inland saltgrass (not to be confused with alkali sacaton) and showy chloris.

Q: Is saltcedar spraying improving the salt content of the water?

A: Can't say for sure due to annual variability in streamflows, irrigation water releases and other factors; current water quality monitoring in the watershed is helping to illustrate these changes over time.

Q: Do beetles only feed on saltcedar?

A: Yes, Athel is also a saltcedar tree.