



## Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan Implementation

### December 2011 Newsletter

#### Implementation Program ends 2<sup>nd</sup> year

The Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan Implementation Program has ended its second year with progress made on accomplishing the goals set forth in the river's watershed protection plan, according to Gary Bryant, Pecos River watershed coordinator.

Two programs currently underway to implement portions of the watershed protection plan (WPP) are being funded by the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and U.S. EPA through Clean Water Act Section 319(h) grant funds. The two projects are *Implementing the Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan through Invasive Species Control (Saltcedar)* and *Providing Technical and Financial Assistance to Reduce Agricultural Nonpoint Source Pollution* and *Implementing the Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan through Continuous Water Quality Monitoring and Dissolved Oxygen Modeling*.



Bryant said the program's accomplishments include:

- spraying 2,642 acres of saltcedar in the watershed

- certifying five Water Quality Management Plans (WQMPs) across the watershed
- establishing three Tunisian Saltcedar leaf beetle sites in the watershed
- installing the Continuous Water Quality Monitoring Stations, one above Red Bluff Reservoir and one near Girvin. The upper station will record the water quality entering Texas from New Mexico. Both stations will give continuous water quality readings as the water passes this impaired section of the river. These readings will help project members better understand changes in water quality such as normal, daily fluctuations in dissolved oxygen or salinity. These two strategically placed gages will be a great advantage to determining the improvements to the river.

Other accomplishments include:

- Additional burning of debris on the Pecos River below Girvin is scheduled for spring 2012. Several landowners have already signed up for burning and will be contacted by Ty Allen and the Texas Forest Service for site prep during January. If you have not been contacted and want your sprayed saltcedar below Girvin burned, contact Ty Allen in the Ozona office.
- Substantial progress is being made at Malaga Bend. Operation of the salt reduction from Malaga Bend may begin in 2012. Read more about this project on page 4.
- Two Watershed Steward programs held in Pecos and Iraan over the summer were well attended. People said the information was right on target and very informative.
- Extension programming is continuing across the watershed on a monthly basis. The programming is designed around what is need-

ed in that county. For information on what is upcoming in your county, please contact your local county AgriLife Extension agent.

Financial assistance is still available for landowners to participate in water quality management plans. These landowner-driven conservation plans are developed by local soil and water conservation district (SWCD) technicians and include best management practices that are designed to improve their property and the quality of water running into the river, he said.

A landowner is eligible for up to \$15,000 in financial assistance provided through the Pecos River WPP Implementation Project. Additional financial assistance to implement best management practices outlined in a WQMP is available through various USDA Farm Bill programs.

Interested landowners should contact Amy Porter, or Ty Allen. See contact information on the back page of the newsletter.

### **Saltcedar beetles establishment continues**

Texas AgriLife Extension Service scientists have established three new Tunisian saltcedar leaf beetle sites and released additional beetles at six other sites in the Pecos River over the last year as part of the Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan Implementation Program.

Dr. Mark Muegge, AgriLife Extension entomologist at Fort Stockton, said the three established sites are near Iraan, Imperial and Leon Springs. He said about 75,000 beetles were collected from the Iraan and Rio Grande sites and released throughout the watershed at the following sites:

- 29,000 near Pecos
- 10,000 near Imperial
- 10,000 near Grandfalls
- 3,000 near Mentone
- 10,000 near Toyah
- 13,000 in Howard County

“Hopefully, this spring we’ll see overwintering success at all the release sites,” Muegge said.



Although they have worked with both the Crete and the Tunisian beetles, the scientists have found that the Tunisian beetle from Northern Africa survives better in the southern portions of the Pecos and the Rio Grande.

Over the last year, the Tunisian beetles defoliated about five river miles at the Iraan site, all the saltcedar in approximately 800 acres at the Imperial site and about 50 acres at the established Leon Springs site, Muegge said.

The successes at the Leon Springs site was actually a surprise, Muegge said. The program started at Leon Springs in the summer 2010 where 100 Tunisian beetles were placed in each of three large cages.

“About one week after releasing the beetles a storm came over the area and blew all the cages out, releasing the caged beetles,” he said. “To our surprise Tunisian beetles were found at several sites at this location in 2011.”

Since the saltcedar beetle program began in the Pecos watershed in 2006, more than 30 river miles have been successfully defoliated by the Crete or Tunisian beetles.

“Late next spring, once the beetles get through the overwintering, AgriLife Extension will once again start moving beetles to new locations across the watershed,” said Gary Bryant, Pecos River watershed coordinator.

If you have a site that you think could be used to help establish a beetle colony, contact Ty Allen in Ozona or Amy Porter in Pecos.



## Other activities/projects in the Pecos Watershed

### Camelthorn invades Pecos watershed

The Texas portion of the Pecos River watershed is seeing a new plant invade its riverbanks and a combined effort is underway to eradicate the pest before it is established, according to Gary Bryant, Pecos River watershed coordinator.

Bryant said camelthorn, an invasive plant native to the Mediterranean region and western Asia, is moving into the Texas portion of the Pecos watershed from New Mexico. The green, hairless plant has spiny branches with pinkish purple to maroon flowers and grows from 1.5 feet to 4 feet tall.

Camethorn forms a briar thicket that can keep animals from getting into areas to graze. Bryant said the plant can also grow among crops such as hay, resulting in thorns in the hay when it is harvested.



Bryant said he is contacting and working with interested individuals, irrigation districts, counties, municipalities, oil, power and railroad companies, and the Texas Department of Transportation to organize the Camelthorn Eradication Program, which will work on eradicating the plant.

"We believe this plant can be eradicated instead of just controlled because the plant was eradicated in an area in California, so we think we can be successful in Texas," Bryant said.

If landowners have any camelthorn on their property, they should contact Bryant at 432-336-8585 or [glbryant@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:glbryant@ag.tamu.edu).

### Water Quality Coalition benefits Pecos

State Senator Carlos Uresti (District 19) and State Representative Pete Gallego (District 74) have been working to improve water quality in the Pecos River and established the Pecos River Restoration Coalition. The Coalition's goal is to reduce salinity concentrations and impacts to increase usable water supplies for agricultural, urban and environmental purposes. The Coalition is working in both the Texas and New Mexico portions of the Pecos River watershed. The *Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan* is participating in the efforts of the Coalition in Texas.

By bringing counties, soil and water conservation districts, irrigation districts and others together with state and federal agencies, resources are leveraged to benefit the landowners of West Texas. Engaging the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and state agencies from New Mexico has allowed an effort to begin exploring methods to intercept and neutralize key sources of salinity across the Pecos River basin.

"One of the challenges we have had in the past is knowing about all the activities and studies being conducted on the Pecos River by all the state and federal agencies," said Gary Bryant, Pecos River watershed coordinator. "This collaboration is allowing the different agencies to better understand the concerns of local landowners, as well as, share information on the existing work that is occurring."

One of the accomplishments of the Coalition is successfully guiding a resolution through the Texas Legislature. Authored by Senator Uresti and Representative Gallego, SCR 2 was passed by the Legislature during the 82<sup>nd</sup> Regular Session in May 2011. This resolution recognizes the work done to develop the *Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan* in emphasizing that the Pecos River disproportionately contributes nearly 30% of the salt loading to the International Amistad Reservoir. Further, this resolution urges Congress to appropriate funds to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to solve the salinity problems in the Rio

Grande Basin, including the Pecos River watershed.

“The challenges faced by landowners in the Pecos River watershed are daunting. Extended drought, wildfire, invasive saltcedar are just a few,” said Representative Gallego. “Our constituencies elected us to ensure we protect their interests. This includes bringing attention and resources to help solve the salinity problems in the Pecos River watershed.”

The Coalition is looking forward to continuing efforts that support implement of the *Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan*. The Coalition hosted a Summit in October 2011 in Austin; to see a video and presentations from that meeting, go to <http://www.carlosuresti.com/pecos-river-salinity-coalition-102111>. If you are interested in attending any of the Coalition meetings or want to know what is happening with the group, contact Bryant for the latest developments.

To see a video and presentations of the Oct. 21, 2011 meeting, go to <http://www.carlosuresti.com/pecos-river-salinity-coalition-102111>.

### **Malaga Bend well to become operational**

A well that formerly pumped the salty waters of the springs at Malaga Bend, about 20 miles north of Red Bluff Reservoir in New Mexico will soon be operational again, lessening the large amounts of salt flowing into the Pecos River and greatly improving its water quality.

Brine intrusion from natural salt formations at Malaga Bend has historically caused a drastic increase in the salinity of the Pecos River and significantly impacts the quality of water received by irrigators below Red Bluff.

In the mid-1900s, the U.S. Department of the Interior–Bureau of Reclamation drilled a well that intercepted the springs to prevent the salty water from flowing into the river. However, the project was discontinued for various reasons.

J. W. Thrasher, former Texas Pecos River Compact

commissioner, and Rick Rylander, current Texas Pecos River Compact commissioner, have worked diligently to find a salt company that would operate the well, pumping it for the salt produced. They found a company and with the assistance of the Red Bluff Power and Water Control District, a cooperative agreement has been reached.

The well will begin pumping again in early 2012. It will take a few years before the well is pumped at full capacity, but while the well is pumping, the water quality will double upon delivery to Red Bluff Reservoir. This is a historic turn of events because it represents a change from a scientific study funded by taxpayers to a private business operating profitably and continuing for a long time as well as yielding much less salt in the water deliveries to Texas.

The goal is a better quality of water for Texas and a self-perpetuating operation which can run at no cost to the taxpayer.

### **Need Information?**

For information on project happenings and other meetings in and around the watershed, please visit our website at: <http://pecosbasin.tamu.edu/> or contact :

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