Restoring the Pecos, a Little at a Time

Through the years, the Pecos River and its watershed have seen more than their fair share of hardship. From recurring drought to salinity, to the increasing problems with invasive species, such as salt cedar or giant cane, the Pecos River watershed commonly faces natural resource issues that affect livestock, people and wildlife. Changes in available habitat and water resources are two such challenges being met head-on.

The Pecos River Ecosystem Project began efforts to address both habitat and water quality issues in 1999 by treating salt cedar with aerially applied herbicides. In six years of this project, 13,497 acres of salt cedar were treated throughout the watershed. Taking restoration efforts a step further was the Pecos River Basin Assessment Program. This program was funded by the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board to assess aquatic life and habitat in the river, quantify water savings resulting from salt cedar control, identify and characterize water quality in springs and tributaries across the watershed, and assess the salt sources impacting the Pecos River. Using information from these program components, the Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) was developed, and it outlines a plan for restoring water quality in the Pecos River.

With watersheds being nature’s primary filter protecting in-stream water quality, the Pecos River WPP logically includes management recommendations that promote improved habitat through restoration and proper resource utilization. These management measures align with goals and objectives of many landowners throughout the watershed, who are voluntarily implementing management measures, including salt cedar control, debris removal, rotational grazing and establishment of alternative water supplies. When implementation efforts began, landowners had the option of choosing between biological or chemical controls to reduce salt cedar and promote habitat restoration. Chemical application was completed in September 2011, when 2,642 acres were treated. Salt cedar leaf beetles are the biological control tool available in the watershed, and their populations are rapidly expanding. Through repeated defoliation, the salt cedar leaf beetles will eventually kill the trees and will suppress seed production each year they are defoliated.

Furthe...
TWA CONSERVATION INITIATIVES:

Pecos River Watershed by HELEN HOLDSWORTH

TWA MEMBERS have a long history of working with landscape conservation and being a part of the solution for those issues which affect a broad area. One of those issues of concern is the Pecos River Watershed. The Pecos River Watershed encompasses over 44,000 square miles in New Mexico and West Texas. The river flows into the Rio Grande at Del Rio.

Long-time TWA Member and Director Dr. Michael McCulloch, D.V.M., of Midland has been deeply involved in the issue of salt cedar control on the Pecos for many years. His father implemented mechanical control on their property back in the 1950’s.

Dr. McCulloch believes a comprehensive plan to control the salt cedar, which includes treatment, debris removal and re-vegetation is needed throughout the watershed. He initially opposed the introduction of the beetle for biological control, but after seeing the positive effects on the vegetation, he is pressing for additional releases.

Dr. McCulloch is also active in the start-up of the Trans-Pecos Native Plant Material Initiative. Although a separate project, it will have impacts on the Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan as native plants for re-vegetation are identified and made available to land owners and land managers.

Dr. McCulloch is a prime example of TWA members who care; educating others and creating conservation action to better our wildlife and natural resources for the future generations.