

Pecos River Ecosystem Advisory Committee

December 15, 2005

*Monahans Convention Center
400 East 4th Street
Monahans, Texas
1:30 PM*

Attendance:

Cindy Breiten	Upper Pecos SWCD #213
Michael McCulloch	Pecos County WID #3
Alan Zeman	Reeves County WID #2
Greg Huber	Pecos Valley RC&D
J. W. Thrasher	Pecos River Compact Commissioner
Bill Roberts	Trans Pecos Water Trust
Philip Dickerson	Texas Parks & Wildlife
Aaron Curbello	Carlsbad SWCD
Ray Keller	Bureau of Land Management
Will Hatler	Texas Cooperative Extension
Tina Hagy	Senator Madla's Representative
Mike Mecke	Texas Cooperative Extension
Ty Bryson	Carlsbad BLM
Harlan Hopper	Loving County
Derek Scasta	Texas Cooperative Extension – Ward County

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Michael McCulloch.

Mr. Mike Mecke is with the Texas Cooperative Extension out of Ft. Stockton. He is a water program specialist and is here today to discuss a Pecos Basin Symposium that is going to be held in March of 2006. Through a grant with EPA, a watershed plan for the Pecos Basin is being designed and a symposium is being planned in order to bring in experts that can help develop this watershed plan. A tentative title for the symposium is "The Pecos River in Texas: Historical and Present Status of the Basin, the River, Vegetation and Aquatic Life." The dates set are March 1st and 2nd of 2006 and is being sponsored by the Pecos River Basin Assessment Program and funded by the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and EPA Agencies also cooperating are the USDA-NRCS, Pecos River Compact Commission, Rio Grande Basin Initiative, Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, Texas Cooperative Extension, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, Texas Water Resources Institute and possibly the Texas Water Development Board. The objective is to discuss how the Pecos River can become a healthier river and improve water resources. There will be speakers such as Madla and Gallego as introductory speakers for the beginning of day one and day two. Other speakers will be discussing Texas water issues such as:

- What is the Pecos River Basin Project?
- Overview of Pecos River Basin History and Geography
- Historical Vegetation of the Pecos River Basin

- Salinity of the Pecos River – Past, Present & Future
- Geology of River Basin and How it Affects Water Resources
- Hydrology & Water Resources of the Basin
- Importance of Planning for the Pecos River Watershed
- Pecos River and It's Impact Upon Amistad Reservoir and the Lower Valley
- Pecos River Compact Commission
- History & Operations of Red Bluff Lake for Irrigation
- Population Trends, Water Use and Water Planning for the Future of the Pecos River Basin
- Benefits of a Healthy Pecos River and Watershed
- Key Aquatic Invertebrates in the Pecos – Golden Algae Status
- Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of the Pecos River
- Pecos River Riparian Vegetation
- Recent & Present Status of Vegetation in Basin
- Endangered-Threatened Species in the Pecos Basin & Managing for Biodiversity
- Game Birds, Big Game & Waterfowl: How Does Watershed Health Affect Them?
- Importance of Improved Pecos River Water Quality and Watershed to Texas – The Big Picture

Then public comments and discussion will be welcome. The extension agents in the Pecos Basin counties, as well as SWCD and NRCS offices will be getting the word out and there will be news releases. A planning committee is still in the process of organizing, so additional planning will be in the works and final agendas will be distributed when ready. Charlie Hart has the mailing lists for all of the landowners so they will be notified also.

Ty Bryson, with the Carlsbad Bureau of Land Management and Aaron Curbello, with the Carlsbad Soil and Water Conservation District are here today to give a presentation on the salt cedar debris burn on the Pecos River in New Mexico. They have formed an alliance committee and will check into participating in the Pecos Basin Symposium and may be able to do a power point presentation. There is also a website for this program which is www.nmda.nmsa.edu.

Ty is a fuel specialist with the Carlsbad BLM and showed his slides to the group of the Pecos River burn. They have 21 miles to burn and started on the river fifteen miles southeast of Carlsbad. They used hand held drip torches and a heli-torch. The cost of the helicopter is \$675.00 per hour. In three hours they were able to burn six to seven river miles and determined that their fire prescription for best results is 75 degrees, 20% humidity and winds at eight miles per hour. The first day they were at 63 degrees, 24% humidity and southeast winds at three to four miles per hour. Their experience showed that the debris burns better after the freeze, but it just depends on other environmental factors. They also found that live salt cedar would not burn that was directly beside the dead salt cedar that did burn. They were able to burn twelve river miles in two days and are going to start again in February. Cost determination after the burn came to \$34.50 per acre except that the Bureau of Indian Affairs provided the heli-torch so that was not included in the cost. Their goal is to burn 525 acres. They found that the sacaton stayed green even after burning the debris on top of it and there was a lot of discussion regarding river bank vegetation. They also found that they favored the heli-torch after experiencing several different situations. They have several different extraction projects going including mechanical and chipper equipment. They hope to have from Avalon Reservoir to Red Bluff completed by

this time next year. Several different committee members had questions for Ty, Aaron and Ray and this has been a very interesting and informative presentation. We really appreciate these guys taking the time to attend our meeting and giving us the benefit of their experiences and expertise. Philip Dickerson had some questions about the wildlife situation and then we discussed the EPA Grant application. Last year each of our projects submitted proposals to the EPA. Our project has been very interested in working out a joint proposal with the New Mexico project to submit for the next opportunity. They are very interested also. Aaron Curbello and Judy Bock worked on their application last year and we need to set up a meeting for further discussion with Aaron, Judy, Charlie Hart, Larry Brown, Cindy Breiten, and Michael McCulloch. Cindy will work on getting a meeting set for sometime in January.

On the subject of the monitoring and costs, support is going to be needed from all of the irrigation districts. Red Bluff has opted not to cooperate in this effort. If we can get this support, we can go with USGS or a private company, but we would need a permit if we were to go with a private company. The cost of the equipment is information needed, the installation would cost about \$3,000.00 and the yearly maintenance would cost approximately \$30,000.00. J. W. Thrasher will find out who to contact about the equipment cost. A letter to the irrigation districts will need to be drafted and will need to include all of these costs so that each district can have as much information as possible to enable a decision.

A request has been submitted to the Corps of Engineers requesting a study to be done on the Pecos River. A preliminary rehabilitation study was done in the 80s and we may be able to get this done by reactivating our previous authority. There is a lady from Albuquerque that would be the one to talk with. J. W. will find out her name and advise.

The Intrastate Stream Commission has a one hour presentation about the quality of water in the river and J. W. Thrasher was requesting a date to schedule this. This presentation may be able to be worked into the Symposium which is already planned and scheduled for March 2006. Mike Mecke will see where he can fit this into the agenda and contact will be made between the parties regarding this scheduling.

The Plan of Action has been prepared by Larry Brown and presented to the Upper Pecos SWCD board during their regular board meeting on December 6, 2005. Charlie Hart attended that meeting and the Plan was discussed further. The board and Charlie agreed that some additional long term management planning should be included. We have a copy of the Long Term Management Plan that the New Mexico Project uses and this will be a useful tool in making some additions to ours. Larry Brown and Charlie Hart are going to work on this and then it will be distributed.

The letters to the water districts requesting pledges for future grant applications have been sent and the Upper Pecos is waiting on the responses. The verbal response has been positive and written responses will be made after the appropriate board meetings have been conducted. Cindy Breiten will try and see about receiving all of them before the next meeting in January 2006.

A letter was received by Diane Regas, Director of the Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds, U. S. Environmental Protections Agency, acknowledging the Pecos River nomination to be designated a Targeted Watershed in the EPA's Targeted Watersheds Grant Program. The letter was an official notification that the PREP EPA grant application was not recommended for funding this year, but encouraged us to reapply next year and acknowledged the importance of our project. Also, she provided some information about a website that has many avenues to federal funding opportunities. The website address is

<http://www.epa.gov/watershedfunding>. She thanked the organization for our efforts to improve our nation's water resources and expressed appreciation for the amount of work that has been put into the Pecos River project. Another website that can be accessed is <http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/initiative>.

Also, Greg Huber, with the Pecos Valley RC&D provided a list of grant opportunities for us to review. A copy of this list will be forwarded to Larry Brown and to the board of directors for the Upper Pecos SWCD.

Cindy Breiten had some information to provide from the Upper Pecos SWCD board meeting that was held on December 6th. The board decided that her time spent on the project should come from the funding that is in the Pecos River Ecosystem bank account. The Upper Pecos's budget is very low and they feel that it is time to have the project pay for her services. Discussion was held on where the funding comes from to pay her salary with the District. The money comes from technical assistance funding provided by the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and that money does not last all year long. The remainder of her salary comes from building rent revenue. The Upper Pecos board feels that they have paid for her time spent on the project since its inception in 1998 and can no longer afford to pay her for the project duties. The group discussed filing a 501C, which would allow for additional grant funding opportunities and the committee would be creating its own entity. There will be many advantages to having the 501C and Larry Brown will be contacted so that work on this can begin. He will be compensated for this work separately from the contract he currently has with us. Also, Bill Roberts with the Trans Pecos Trust, has some experience with 501Cs and can assist with the by-laws and other information as needed.

Additional discussion regarding the symposium was held. J. W. Thrasher suggested that Mike Mecke attend each water district meeting and invite them to the symposium. Cindy Breiten will compose a list of all of the districts with board members, addresses, and meeting dates and forward it to Mike.

The meeting was adjourned. The next meeting will be on January 19, 2006.

Minutes Prepared by Cindy Breiten