

# Red Bluff discusses tree burn, rain proposals

By JON FULBRIGHT  
Staff Writer

Fire and rain again were topics for the Red Bluff Water Power Control District Board, during their meeting on Tuesday in Pecos.

Board members heard from the operator of a Fort Worth-area company about continuing a burn project for dead salt cedar trees along the Pecos River that was started by the Texas Forest Service, and were presented an updated plan by the owner of a company seeking to target heavy rains over the Red Bluff basin in northern Reeves, Culberson and Loving counties. But action on both items was delayed at least until the board's meeting in December.

Larry Weaver of Texas Fire Resources in Granbury, discussed the salt cedar burn project, which is designed to solve the problem of dead salt cedars clogging the Pecos from Red Bluff Lake to Imperial Reservoir. The dead trees along the river pose a threat to bridges, dams and gates downstream in the event of a major flood, but a three-year program to burn the trees by the Texas Forest Service only covered a fraction of the area between Red Bluff Dam and Imperial Reservoir.

"We work with the federal government quite a bit. We've worked with them in Kansas, and we've done some work burning trees up at Lake Meredith," Weaver said. He added that the burning could be done at any time during the year, as long as the weather conditions were right.

"Between now and March would be the best time, because now you're not releasing (water)," said

Gary Bryant, water management specialist for Texas AgriLife Extension, who was also at Tuesday's meeting.

Weaver said he had worked with Bill Davis of the Texas Forest Service in the past, and has talked to him about the Pecos River project. "Bill's offered to show me some of the work already done," he said.

"A couple of the examples I looked at have got a lot of fire fuel out there mixed with the salt cedars. They'd be very conducive to burning," he told the board.

Members said they would prefer starting in areas close to Red Bluff Lake and move downstream instead of starting in the Imperial area, so that any rains upstream wouldn't sweep dead trees into the fire-cleared areas.

"Keep in touch with us, and when it comes time to make a decision, we'll let you know," said board member Jay Lee, while Bryant said Weaver could get the maps of the existing burn areas and fire lines from Davis sometime during the next month.

"If he comes up with an area he could burn during January-February, he could make a proposal for y'all during the December meeting," Bryant told the board.

December is also when David P. Kutchinski, president of SciBlue, hopes to get an OK from the Red Bluff board to begin his 'targeted weather' demonstration program in the Red Bluff basin. Kutchinski was making his second appearance before the board in as many months, and updated members on the system he said his Colorado Springs, Colo.-based company has that can direct

clouds with the potential for rain into the area from almost 1,000 miles away, and then release that water into the proscribed areas.

Bryant said in October that the system is being vetted by Texas AgriLife Extension. On Tuesday, Kutchinski said the plan would be to do one 'test rain' in the area to narrow down the zone, and then follow up with two rainstorms he said could produce 4-5 inches of rain apiece.

"You've got high cirrus clouds coming across Mexico that are drying out," he said. The project would increase the moisture in the clouds to produce rain in the area, and Red Bluff wouldn't be charged for the work until rain actually falls or flows into the reservoir from the target area.

"You don't pay us anything until you've got proof," he said. "Use your (rain) gauges as the standard."

Kutchinski said last month SciBlue has used the process in Australia and in the Middle East, but that this would be the first time it's been tried in the United States. He also told board member Ava Gerke that the target area could be narrowed to the point that it

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has gotten way out of hand.

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wouldn't cause excess rains south of the lake that could dislodge the dead salt cedar trees, and that he would let area officials know when the rainmaking efforts would occur.

Kutchinski said he would meet with former State Rep. Gary Walker, head of the South Plains Weather Modification Board, next Friday to discuss getting approval to use their permit for a three- to six-month window for the demonstration program in the Red Bluff area.

"In theory, if I get the OK on the 19<sup>th</sup>, I'd be able to get started that night, and get something in by Thanksgiving," he said, but interim managing director Robin Prewit said another project approved by the district in October, the replacement and securing of flood control gate brackets at the Red Bluff spillway, was still underway.

"They've already got it all fabricated, but they still have to get the equipment to install them in there," she said.

Board member Jay Lee added he would like the district's local attorney, Robert Scoggins of Kermit, to look at the contract before any agreement is signed. The board said Scoggins and Kutchinski's attorney, Paula K. Price of Mission, could go over the contract during the next month, and if the brackets were in place by next month, the board could approve the agreement in December.

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