

## Forest Service vows to resume Pecos River salt cedar burning

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Staff Writer

Burning of salt cedars along the Pecos River fell well short of the projected total by the Texas Forest Service during the three-year life of a state-sponsored project. But officials with the agency hope to work out agreements with Red Bluff Water Power Control District and its seven sub-districts to resume burning of dead trees along the Pecos River next year.

The trees were killed off starting in 1999, as part of a project to remove the non-native salt cedars from the Pecos River. But the dead trees left behind by herbicide spraying presented a potential threat to bridges and dams downstream in the event of a major flood, and work was begun last year by the Texas Forest Service, under an agreement with the Upper Pecos Soil and Water Conservation District, to burn off the trees.

That project began in 2008, but a combination of problems,

said the increase was needed to

including both drought and too much rain, resulted in only 30 miles of the river being burned before authorization for the project ended in August. Bill Davis, with the Texas Forest Service, was in Pecos on Tuesday to meet with Red Bluff Water and Power District board members to discuss both continuing the project next year, and how to refund about \$114,000 in unused funds to Red Bluff and its seven sub-districts.

"Texas Forest Service is committed to finishing the project," Davis said. "We will have to enter into an MOU (memo of understanding) with each district on the river and continue burning that way."

He said of the areas burned the Forest Service removed about 95 percent of the dead trees. "That will continue to be our goal, all the way down to Girvin," Davis told the board.

"I can't see any of the districts  
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not giving you the MOU," board member Ava Gerke said.

Board members were told the 30-miles of burning, which was concentrated in the area just south of Red Bluff Dam and to the northwest of Mentone, cost \$26,422. Red Bluff had contributed \$75,000 towards the project, while six of the seven sub-districts put in an additional \$65,000.

The initial plan by the Upper Pecos District was to take some money out of each sub-district's contribution, but the Red Bluff board decided to refund the full amount contributed by the sub-districts, with Red Bluff picking up the cost out of its \$75,000 contribution.

"If we're the ones who benefited, I see the other districts down there being very unhappy and wanting their money back," Gerke said.

"I agree with Ava. The districts are going to be upset if they don't get their money back," added board member Jay Lee.

Along with Davis, Jeff Gore, the new assistant chief of the Texas Forest Service's Far West Texas region was at Tuesday's meeting. He said the agency was ready to help Red Bluff and the other sub-districts with their tree removal issues or other problems related to the Forest Service's work.

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