

Coordinated Watershed Protection in Southeast and South Central Texas

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Update from Regional Watershed Coordinator

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Hello everyone, and welcome to the third newsletter. Since our last issue, I have been busy attending various meetings and other activities within the Wharton Region service area. The Dickinson Bayou Watershed Partnership Land Use workgroup held their meeting in Texas City on April 3, my involvement in the workgroup pertains to agricultural nonpoint source issues on the remaining pasture and cropland within the watershed. On April 5, Carter Miska attended the Clear Creek TMDL for bacteria; TCEQ is in the process of sampling, which will be completed in August of 2006, to help pinpoint the sources of bacteria. On April 6, Jeff Cerny, Lawrence Brown, and I traveled to the Welder Wildlife Refuge in Sinton to assist with the Region III Wildlife Alliance for Youth (WAY)

Wildlife Judging Contest, where 28 teams consisting of FFA and 4-H clubs from Southeast Texas competed. The WAY contest offers opportunities for 4-H and FFA students to display their knowledge of the outdoors, while offering scholarships to contest winners. The TSSWCB is the lead agency in

WCSC Meeting Schedule

June 8, 2006
 September 7, 2006
 December 7, 2006
 March 8, 2007



Dickinson Bayou Watershed Partnership Meeting. Photo by Brian Koch.

sponsoring and organizing the contest. Other partners include the Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts, NRCS, TPWD, Cooperative Extension, and the Texas Education Agency.

Also on April 6, Jeff Cerny and I attended the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District annual awards banquet in Edna, where they awarded local students and teachers alike for their commitment to conservation. Awards were given for the coloring, poster, and speaking contests, which make the students aware of agriculture and the role agriculture plays in their lives. The winners will be selected to compete in regional and state contests also sponsored by TSSWCB and the SWCD's.

The Sabine River Authority held their annual Clean Rivers Program Steering Committee Meeting in Orange on April 18 where they

introduced the draft 2006 Basin Highlights report which provides a summary of water quality for the basin, their drought contingency plan, and the water quality monitoring schedule, this was one of three meetings that covered the entire basin, the others were held in Longview and Greenville. Also, on April 18 there was a meeting for the Lower San Antonio River TMDL advisory group in Goliad, this TMDL is for bacteria.

On April 19, Nikki Dictson and I attended meetings of the Galveston Bay Council and the Dickinson Bayou Watershed Partnership. The Galveston Bay Council meeting was held at the Armand Bayou Nature Center, the meeting included updates on their current projects, along with two presentations, and sub-committee reports. Linda Shead from Trust for Public Land (TPL) presented an overview on the Conservation Assistance Program and their purchase of land on Galveston Island for restoration and Greenprinting. TPL is also involved with the Armand Bayou Watershed Partnership. The second presentation was on Envision Houston, given by Lily E. Wells from the Houston-Galveston Area Council.

The Dickinson Bayou Watershed Partnership held their meeting in Dickinson. Those present filled out surveys on what they know about Dickinson Bayou and the group voted on concerns. An update on the current Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for dissolved oxygen was given by Roger Miranda from TCEQ. They are currently reviewing the modeling to get the TMDL completed.

The Orange County TMDL meeting for Adams and Cow Bayous was held on April 25 in Orange where modeling results were given along with an update on the project. On April 26 in Rockport a meeting on the Copano Bay TMDL for Bacteria in Oyster Waters was held, there was follow-up from the February meeting on addressing concerns for wastewater plants, feral hogs, and cattle loading. The results from the modeling indicated wastewater plants were not a significant problem, feral hogs added a significant loading contribution, and cattle were still large contributors.

The Peach Creek 319 project held a kickoff meeting in Gonzales on May 12 to bring cattle raisers together to discuss implementation cost share opportunities to reduce bacteria loadings from cattle. This project supports voluntary implementation activities in the Peach Creek Watershed that impact the proposed TMDL.

For more information on the Regional WCSC, including meeting summaries and presentations please visit http://www.tsswcb.state.tx.us/programs/wharton_wcsc.html For more information on these other programs visit any of the following:

Dickinson Bayou Watershed Partnership
www.dickinsonbayou.org

Sabine River Authority
www.sra.dst.tx.us/

Galveston Bay Council
www.gbep.state.tx.us/

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
www.tceq.state.tx.us

Trust for Public Land
www.tpl.org/

Houston-Galveston Area Council
www.h-gac.com/

Update from Plum Creek

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In April, we held our first three Plum Creek Watershed Partnership meetings, the first of which was held on Lockhart on April 10, where we had great attendance, and great response and questions from those present. Also, additional meetings were held in Kyle and Luling. Combined attendance for the three meetings was around 100. Surveys were distributed asking questions about amount of land owned, awareness of the water quality



Randy Rush from EPA Addresses the Importance of Watershed Planning at the PCWP Steering Committee Meeting. Photo by Brian Koch.

issues in Plum Creek, if the individual wanted to be involved and what their level of involvement would be, meaning steering committee member, workgroup participant, or meeting participant. Each of these meetings contained the same agenda as they were the “kick-off” for the partnership, to begin discussing the plan to draft and implement this WPP.

On May 9, we held our first steering committee meeting in Lockhart, where around 50 stakeholders attended. Discussions at the meeting included steps in watershed planning and implementation, ground rules for the steering committee, additional stakeholders not currently represented on the Steering Committee, such as row crop farming, developers, oil and gas production, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and more city employees or councilmen. Also, pollutants of concern and their potential sources, workgroup formation, and proposed workgroups were discussed.

The workgroup formation and proposed workgroup discussion led the steering committee to have five workgroups: 1) Urban Stormwater-NPS, 2) Agricultural NPS, 3) Wastewater Infrastructure, 4) Outreach and Education, and 5) Water Quality and Habitat.

A proposal for additional water quality monitoring including seasonal sampling at 20 locations within the watershed, along with two more routine sampling locations was discussed. This additional monitoring would support a better understanding of pollution sources, and assist in targeting the most effective locations for implementing BMPs.

The next PCWP Steering Committee meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 20, at the Lockhart State Park, from 6-8:30 pm. For more information on this project, please contact Nikki or Brian or visit: <http://pcwp.tamu.edu>.

Irrigation systems provide much-needed water for rice farmers, other users

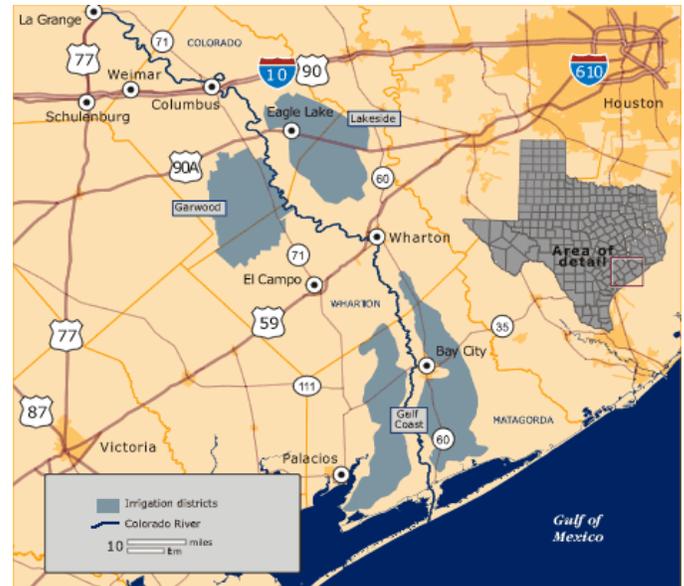
Network of canals offers reliable water supply to Gulf Coast counties

Article by Lower Colorado River Authority
www.lcra.org

Rice farming and other agricultural operations are a critical part of the economy in the Gulf Coast Region of Texas. In the lower Colorado River basin, rainfall is too little and too unreliable to guarantee a good harvest, so

irrigation has been the solution for more than a century. Coastal rice farmers began using the waters of the Colorado River in the 19th century, more than 40 years before the Highland Lakes were created.

LCRA today operates nine major pumping plants that supply water through a 1,100-mile network of irrigation canals in portions of Matagorda, Wharton and Colorado counties. The facilities, organized into four service areas — Gulf Coast, Lakeside, Garwood and Pierce Ranch — are capable of transporting water to 91,500 acres annually.



Map of Irrigation Areas, Provided by LCRA.

Texas among nation's top growers

Texas usually ranks as the nation's fourth or fifth highest producing rice-growing state, producing about 7 percent of the nation's supply. Most Texas rice is grown near the Colorado River in Colorado, Wharton and Matagorda counties. Texas rice farmers count on this water to irrigate land along the Gulf Coast. In addition to rice farmers, customers include a significant number of row-crop farmers, turf grass growers, industries and commercial operations.



An Irrigated Rice Field in Wharton County. Photo provided by LCRA.

Over the years, LCRA acquired three irrigation systems from private operators: Gulf Coast in 1960, Lakeside in 1982 and Garwood in 1998. Through these acquisitions and the purchase of the Pierce Ranch

water rights, LCRA holds senior water rights for direct diversion of water from the Colorado River.

The water rights allow the operations to pump water from the river without calling upon LCRA to release water from storage. Often, in the height of the growing season, river flows are insufficient and LCRA makes up the deficit by using water stored in the Highland Lakes. This is sometimes difficult to understand for Central Texans wanting to enjoy recreation on the lakes.

State laws, historical factors

Why does LCRA release stored water for agricultural irrigation if it may interfere with recreation on the Highland Lakes? LCRA has longstanding responsibilities to deliver water to rice farmers for two basic reasons:

First, Texas law declares that the state must give preference to certain types of water uses when granting water rights. LCRA's practice of giving preference to downstream rice farmers when distributing interruptible stored water — a water supply that is curtailed during water shortages — is consistent with the Texas Legislature's directive. The contracts for this water are negotiated during development of the LCRA Water Management Plan, which is subject to state approval.

Second, According to state water law, first in time is first in right. Downstream rice farmers were given first water rights in the Colorado basin, and these rights are senior to LCRA's water rights for the Highland Lakes. In fact, without the support of the rice farmers, the Highland Lakes and dams might never have been built. Rice farmers were among the strongest supporters of building the Highland Lakes and dams in the 1930s. They recognized the value of the dams in easing flooding and making water available during droughts.

The demand on the Highland Lakes for stored water for irrigation varies greatly from year to year, based on rainfall and the amount of acreage planted. The amount of acreage planted each year also can vary a great deal, depending on national and global trends. World market prices and production trends, domestic consumption, and price and trade policies all greatly affect the Texas rice industry — and its demand for water.

TSSWCB would like to thank LCRA for permission to use this article.

Forestry Best Management Practices – A Way to Protect Your Land

Shane Harrington, BMP Forester, Texas Forest Service, Lufkin, Texas sharrington@tfs.tamu.edu

It is documented that well managed forests provide us with clean water. They also absorb rainfall, refill aquifers, slow and filter stormwater runoff, reduce floods, and provide habitat for fish and wildlife. Forestry operations, if done improperly, can negatively impact these benefits. Forestry Best Management Practices (BMPs) were developed to prevent these impacts from occurring.

Forestry BMPs are a set of guidelines that involve the application of conservation practices that effectively prevent or minimize the amount of nonpoint source pollution (NPS) generated during forestry operations. They help protect your soil and water, two key elements necessary for growing a healthy, sustainable, and productive forest. BMPs can include such measures as leaving a buffer zone of trees next to a stream, installing a culvert to cross a stream, or establishing grass on forest roads to prevent erosion.

The Texas Forest Service, with cooperation from the forestry community, monitors the implementation of these guidelines by evaluating randomly selected forestry operations. Compliance with the non-regulatory BMPs has steadily risen to 92 percent, according to a 2005 survey by the Texas Forest Service. Computer models have estimated that over the past 15 years, BMPs have prevented over 100,000 tons of soil per year from eroding off East Texas forests, enough to cover a football field, end zone to end zone, 35 feet deep. These practices also kept over 12,000 tons of soil per year out of lakes and reservoirs.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY PROPERTY?

- Leave a 50 foot strip of trees along streams after harvesting your timber to help prevent sediment from entering streams and provide wildlife habitat.
- Install appropriate water control structures along roads to allow water to drain quickly. Stabilize and retire roads no longer in use.
- Avoid crossing streams when possible. If this is not possible, cross streams at straight sections and at right angles. Remove all temporary crossings and

logging debris from channel and stabilize stream banks.

- Make sure the ground is stable enough for heavy equipment so rutting does not occur.
- Conduct operations on the contour of the land.
- Read and follow manufacturers' labels before applying silvicultural chemicals.
- Properly dispose of all oil and trash associated with the operation.
- When harvesting your timber, use a professional forester and choose a logger that has been trained in BMPs.
- Try to become familiar with BMPs and include them in your timber sale contract.



Streamside Management Zones (SMZs) prevent sediment from entering streams and provide shade helping maintain cool water temperatures. Photo Provided by Texas Forest Service.

In Texas, if we demonstrate *voluntarily* that we can maintain or improve our water quality while harvesting or site preparing our timber-land, we may avoid the pain of mandatory restrictions. We strongly urge you to use BMPs on your operations to protect water quality. With your help we can continue our water quality improvements and ensure the sustain-ability of our forests for all Texans to enjoy. For More Information:

Texas Forest Service
PO Box 310
Lufkin, TX 75902-0310
(936) 639-8180

<http://texasforestservicetamu.edu>

Texas Forestry Association
PO Box 1488
Lufkin, TX 75901
(936) 632-8733

www.texasforestry.org

June Water Quality Meetings in South East and South Central Texas

WCSC Meeting in Columbus,
Thursday, June 8, 2006 10:00-12:00

Tres Palacios Harbor Dissolved Oxygen TMDL
Thursday, June 8, 2006 at 5:30-7:00 pm.

Texas Instream Flow Program Workshop
Thursday, June 15, 2006 at 8:30-4:30pm

Houston Ship Channel Dioxin TMDL
Stakeholder Group Meeting
Friday, June 16, 2006 1:00-4:00 pm

Lower San Antonio River Bacteria TMDL,
Monday, June 19, 2006 at 1:30-3:30 pm.

Plum Creek Watershed Partnership Meeting
Tuesday, June 20, 2006 at 6:00 pm

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