

The Plum Creek Current

A Newsletter of the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership

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Our First Newsletter!

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *The Plum Creek Current*, a new way to keep the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership informed on area events! This newsletter will be published electronically on a quarterly basis and will contain updates on project activities, watershed news, and upcoming events. The Plum Creek Watershed Partnership was formed in 2006 to protect and restore water quality in the Plum Creek Watershed. Through community outreach and collaboration with local entities, the Partnership works to reduce water pollution and ensure Plum Creek is a clean, valuable resource for all to enjoy. Stay tuned and keep up to date!

Town Branch Clean-Up

On September 19, the Partnership cooperated with the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority, several local groups, and Lockhart residents to conduct the 2nd Annual Lockhart Town Branch Clean-Up. Fanning out from City Park to 5 other parks, 325 volunteers removed trash, debris, and invasive plants from Town Branch and the surrounding landscape. During the event conducted through a grant from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, over a mile of this Plum Creek tributary was cleaned up. Participants removed 500 pounds of trash and 260 pounds of recyclable materi-

als, which posed a threat to human safety, ecology, and water quality. To demonstrate the importance of picking up pet waste, volunteers flagged and removed pet droppings in the parks. Hundreds of flags showed the potential harm of neglecting to pick up after your pet. Each marked a source of nutrients, bacteria, and other pathogens, which pollute water and pose a health threat to people and pets. Pet owners are encouraged to use pet waste stations to dispose of dog droppings when they walk their dogs. In addition to cleanup activities, volunteers painted outdoor murals, participated in an environmental fair, and received lunch



Volunteers search for trash and debris to be removed from Town Branch.

provided by local sponsors. With its headwaters northwest of the city center, Town Branch is a tributary of Plum Creek. Near U.S. Highway 183, numerous springs contribute flow, and this water enters Plum Creek just over one mile east of Lockhart City Park.

Rains Return to the Watershed

After months of exceptional drought, a series of heavy rainfall events has brought some much-



Recent rains have meant more runoff and more potential for water pollution.

needed relief to Caldwell and Hays Counties. Rising soil moisture and streamflow are great news for both the agricultural and urban sectors, but they also present their own unique concerns. The majority of water pollution in Plum Creek occurs when rains generate runoff. As this water flows over the land, it picks up contaminants like *E. coli* bacteria and nutrients and transports them to Plum Creek Watershed streams. As water levels rise

and runoff events become more frequent, pay special attention to your actions around your home and place of work. Being aware of the importance of clean water and the consequences of everyday activities can help prevent additional pollutants from being washed into Plum Creek and its tributaries. Help protect water quality in the Plum Creek Watershed and make choices that will make a difference!

Feral Hog Activity on the Rise



Feral hog observed near U.S. Highway 183, directly adjacent to Plum Creek.

As rains return to the Plum Creek Watershed, it is likely that feral hog sightings and reports of their damage will also increase. Due to the prolonged absence of soil moisture and lack of significant plant growth, feral hogs have been restricted to habitats directly adjacent to streams and drainages. With the increase in

plant growth resulting from rainfall, expect feral hogs to move out into pastures, fields, and even parks and lawns as they root for food in newly softened soil. These invasive animals can be very destructive, causing serious damage across the landscape and even contributing to water pollution, affecting rural and urban areas alike. Extension Assistant Chancey Lewis with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service is working in the Plum Creek Watershed to support the Partnership's efforts to address pollutant loads from feral hogs. Using the online feral hog reporting system developed for the Partnership, Mr. Lewis responds to reports of animal sightings and damage done by hogs. By engaging landowners through providing information, offering technical assistance in the development of a management strategy, and assisting

in the installation of traps, this effort hopes to enable landowners to effectively reduce feral hog numbers and prevent damage on their own property, all while removing potential sources of bacteria and nutrients from the Plum Creek Watershed. In the coming months, AgriLife Extension, with the help of the Partnership, will unveil a new series of feral hog management publications developed for the Plum Creek Watershed. These will be made available online at the Partnership website, Caldwell and Hays County Extension Offices, and through Chancey. If you see feral hogs or evidence of their activity, please contact Chancey at (979) 393-8517 or file a report online at

<http://plumcreek.tamu.edu/feralhogs>.

Oil Spill Clean-Up

On September 15, Lee Gudgell of the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority discovered a 2-inch pipe spraying oily water into Salt Branch near Caldwell County Road 128/Salt Flat Road while conducting routine water quality sampling efforts north of Luling. As a result of the spill, the stream bottom and both streambanks for at least 30 feet downstream were coated with a thick deposit of oil, and water appeared very dark and cloudy. Water quality analysis revealed acidic conditions and very high levels of total dissolved solids at the site. Lee quickly contacted the Railroad Commission of Texas, the agency charged with regulating oil pipelines across the state. Railroad Commission personnel identified the responsible party and provided oversight during pipe repair and pumping to remove pol-

luted water from the area. Additional field analysis of water samples at the time of initial response indicated very high levels of chloride (salt) in the stream. However, when Lee revisited the site after one week, the spill had been cleaned up, and there was no evidence of oil contamination, either from the spill itself or additional leakage since the accident. Thanks to the ongoing efforts of the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership, the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority, and cooperating project partners, the effects of this spill were minimized quickly. If not for the water quality sampling program, this spill may have gone unnoticed for a longer period, impacting water quality downstream to Plum Creek, in addition to the site of the spill itself. Instead, the spill site was cleaned up immediately before



A damaged pipe discharges oily water to Salt Branch near Luling.

heavy rains returned to the Plum Creek Watershed, preventing spilled oil from being washed away and causing additional damage to the stream and surrounding landscape.

Technical and Financial Assistance for Agricultural Producers

To support the goals of the Watershed Protection Plan, the Caldwell-Travis Soil and Water Conservation District has hired B.J. Westmoreland as District Technician to provide technical assistance to landowners to develop and implement Water Quality Management Plans on agricultural lands. These site-specific plans are tailored to the needs

of each individual operation, with management practices intended to reduce and prevent water pollution and soil erosion. These include nutrient management, pesticide management, conservation cropping sequence and residue management for cropland, grazing management for rangeland, and watering considerations for forage produc-

tion. These and other management practices can help reduce bacteria and nutrient loads in Plum Creek waterways. Financial assistance is available to help landowners implement components in the WQMP. For more information or to request planning assistance for your operation, contact B.J. Westmoreland at (512) 398-2121.

BMP Spotlight: Soil Testing

Whether you live on acreage outside of town or in a city subdivision, consider conducting a soil test this fall. If you plan to grow any crop, from grains to livestock forage to garden flowers or vegetables to sod grass, a soil test provides critical information on pH, nutrient content, and composition of the soil, which helps save time and money. Different plants require different conditions, and these vary over time and from place to place, even in the same field. Testing takes the guesswork out of nutrient application and helps maintain optimum fertility year after year. Consulting test results can save money by eliminating unnecessary fertilizers, reduce time spent on fertilizer application, and

protect the environment by cutting back on excess nutrients that can be leached or washed into Plum Creek and local groundwater supplies. Soils naturally change over time and ideally should be tested every year. This fall, the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership is cooperating with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service to provide free soil tests to watershed residents in Caldwell and Hays Counties through a grant from the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Now is the perfect time to conduct a soil test. Contact your County Extension Agent in Caldwell County at (512) 398-3122 or in Hays County at (512) 393-2120 for more information. The



Conduct a soil test to ensure proper soil chemistry and optimum nutrient levels.

campaign will run from November 2 to November 24, concluding just before the Thanksgiving holiday.

PCWP on Facebook

If you have not already signed up, consider following the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership on Facebook, a global social networking website. Browse watershed photos, find local news stories related to watershed management, review upcoming events, and stay in touch with other members of the Partnership. Become a fan today!



Facebook social networking website

Upcoming Meeting

The next Plum Creek Watershed Partnership meeting will be from 6-9PM on November 12, 2009 at Lockhart State Park.

Snacks will be provided before the meeting.

Lockhart State Park is located at 4179 State Park Road/FM 20 west of U.S. Highway 183 in Lockhart.

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