

Water quality-related financial incentives available to qualifying Plum Creek Watershed landowners

There are financial incentives through the local water district for Plum Creek Watershed landowners who develop a water quality management plan that includes approved water quality protection practices. One such practice might be providing alternative watering facilities for cattle to keep them away from riparian areas. Research shows cattle may be a source of nonpoint pollution of rivers and streams, and that producers may reap financial advantages from providing cattle with water from an alternative, "off-stream" source. (Texas AgriLife Extension Service photo)

AgriLife TODAY
Sharing Stories of Everyday Solutions

LOCKHART – With the prolonged drought conditions throughout Texas, residents of the Plum Creek Watershed area who own livestock would be well-advised to plan and implement alternative watering facilities that meet water quality management plan criteria, said area water conservation professionals.



An alternative watering facility is a permanent or portable off-stream water supply that can be a trough, pond or similar system providing an adequate quantity and quality of drinking water for livestock and/or wildlife. Some alternative water facilities may require drilling a well and/or the use of an electrical or solar pump or windmill to bring water to the surface.

According to B.J. Westmoreland, district technician for the Caldwell-Travis Soil and Water Conservation District, residents of the Plum Creek Watershed can apply for financial assistance through the district to defray much of the cost for approved water quality protection practices such as alternative watering facilities.

“We’re hoping to further encourage water conservation in Plum Creek by making residents aware of the availability of financial incentives to implement some water quality management practices, especially alternative livestock watering facilities, which are vital given the prolonged drought,” he said.

Westmoreland said the Caldwell-Travis Soil and Water Conservation District, Hays County Soil and Water Conservation District and Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board have partnered to provide technical assistance and financial incentives to ranchers and farmers that will help reduce bacteria and nutrient levels in Plum Creek through the implementation of best management practices on agricultural lands.

“The financial assistance portion of approved water conservation practices typically covers 60 percent of implementation costs and can apply for approved practices costing up to \$15,000,” he said. “Plum Creek area landowners can request, free of charge, a water quality management plan for their property through their local soil and water conservation district. This plan would include water conservation practices eligible for financial assistance, including alternative watering facilities.”

Costs differ based on the type and quality of materials used for alternative water facilities, Westmoreland said. He will be available to answer landowner’s questions, help provide cost estimates and identify the best opportunities to get financial assistance with a project.

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service estimates, a watering trough can cost \$450 to \$7,600, depending on size and materials. An electric water pump can cost \$2,000 to \$4,000, depending on size, and a solar water pump \$5,700 to \$12,000, depending on well depth. Additionally, the agency estimates the cost of a windmill at between \$8,200 and \$17,800, depending on fan diameter.

“Nonpoint source pollution is a major problem in many Texas watersheds and reducing the time that livestock spend near creeks, streams and other water sources can significantly reduce the amount of sediment,

nutrients and bacteria, especially E. coli, entering the water body,” said Nikki Dictson, Texas AgriLife Extension Service program specialist and Plum Creek Watershed Partnership watershed coordinator.

Dictson said studies have shown that bacteria levels can be reduced by 50 percent to 85 percent when an off-stream watering facility is made available to livestock. She also noted that recent studies have shown cattle spend 43 percent to 57 percent less time in streams when given an alternative watering source.

Results from other research have shown: 1) that cattle provided alternative water sources spend more time drinking from troughs than streams, 2) calves gain more weight from cows that drink trough water, and 3) off-stream water supplies can increase the annual grazing capacity of cattle.

Westmoreland said another benefit of a watering facility may be a reduction in foot disease and physical injury among livestock as a result of mud and unstable footing around riparian areas.

“The water quality management plan program can greatly reduce the material and labor costs of implementing water conservation practices,” Westmoreland said. “And improving water quality in Plum Creek is in the long-term best interests of all landowners and citizens in the watershed.”

Additional practices eligible for financial incentives include cross fencing, rangeland planting, riparian herbaceous and forest buffers, pasture and hayland planting, grassed waterways, field borders and filter strips. Technical assistance and financial incentives are available through a Clean Water Act 319(h) nonpoint source grant from the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

For general information on watering facilities and available financial assistance programs, contact the NRCS office at the local USDA Service Center.

For information on the approved watering facilities and conservation practices eligible for financial incentives in the Plum Creek Watershed area, contact Westmoreland at 512-398-2121, Ext. 3 or bradford.westmoreland@tx.nacdnet.net.

For more information on water quality and conservation efforts in the Plum Creek Watershed, go to <http://plumcreek.tamu.edu/> or contact Dictson at 979-458-3478 or n-dictson@tamu.edu.

-30-

Contacts

Nikki Dictson, 979-458-3474, N-Dictson@tamu.edu

B.J. Westmoreland, 512-398-2121, Ext. 3, bradford.westmoreland@tx.nacdnet.net

[Environment Water](#)