

Arroyo Agricultural Issues Work Group Meeting

Meeting Summary – April 14, 2005, 10:00 – 12:00pm

Attending Work Group Committee Members – 4/14 Meeting

- Juan Anciso – TCE
- Ni-Bin Chang – TAMU, Kingsville
- Brad Cowan – TCE
- Laura De La Garza – Citizen
- Dustin Dickerson
- Andy Garza – TSSWCB
- Roe Gawlik for Ray Prewett - TCM
- Arturo Ibarra – NRCS
- Earlene Lambeth – TCEQ
- Jaime Longoria – Hidalgo SWCD
- Osvaldo Longoria – USDA-NRCS
- B. Eduardo Mendez – TSSWCB
- Roger Miranda – TCEQ
- Ronnie Ramirez – TSSWCB
- Randy Rush – EPA
- Jesse R. Russell – Farmer
- Larry Skloss – Hidalgo SWCD
- Kevin Wagner – TSSWCB
- Jeff Walker – TWDB

Welcome and Introductions – Andy Garza:

Mr. Garza welcomed the group and introductions were made.

Watershed Action Plan Status & Timeline – Laura De La Garza:

The Work Group will need to have a good draft watershed protection plan by the next meeting (July) so that affected farmers and other stakeholders will have something to review. By October or November 2005, the Work Group will need to have its final draft completed.

Education of BMPs in the Arroyo Colorado Watershed – Brad Cowan:

The TCE §319(h) project proposal was distributed to the Work Group and discussed. An effective educational effort is essential to make the needed changes in the Arroyo. Educational efforts have been going on for years.

The proposed project will use the TCE network as its backbone. Task 2 outlines proposed meetings where BMP discussions can be incorporated. The soil testing campaign component encourages nutrient management. Options available to producers will be discussed at educational meetings.

There has been good participation in the ongoing soil testing campaign, but there's room for improvement with 20-40 producers participating. There is support for soil testing through the Rio Grande Initiative. The Rio Grande Initiative focuses more on water quantity than quality.

The proposed project will be coordinated with efforts of the Education/Outreach Work Group. TCE is on the Education/Outreach Work Group which will help in the coordination. Also, Laura De La Garza has met with all the TCE Agents to help coordinate educational efforts. To assist in the educational efforts, TCEQ has granted an additional \$70,000 to the Watershed Coordination project for conducting a Watershed Outreach Campaign using the *Getting in Step* Guide. Through this effort, an assistant for Laura will be hired to do market surveys and obtain stakeholder feedback.

The proposed project will also work closely with SWCDs. SWCDs have played a large role in the ongoing soil testing campaign as a result of their good network with local producers.

Finally, it was discussed that sugarcane grower meetings and Harlingen growers association meetings would provide a good venue to educational outreach.

Assessment of Agricultural NPS Pollution in the Arroyo Colorado – Dr. Chang:

The Texas A&M-Kingsville §319(h) project proposal was then discussed by the Work Group. The proposal originated from discussions with the TCEQ-TMDL Team and TSSWCB-Harlingen Regional Office. It is speculated that the drainage ditch system may have mitigating affects on agricultural runoff. Because base flow accounts for only 10% of the flow in the Arroyo (based on values reported in literature), it's important to examine the drainage system, and thus forms the basis of the proposed project. If funded, results of this project will be disseminated through the proposed TCE Education project.

On a field survey in March 2005 with the TSSWCB-Harlingen Regional Office, Texas A&M-Kingsville selected 2 potential sites in Hidalgo County and 2 potential sites in Cameron County. These sub-watersheds are predominately agricultural with cotton, grain, sugarcane, and vegetables being grown. The potential sub-watershed sites are as follows:

- Harding Ranch Road – Cameron County
- FM-ABD Road – Cameron County
- Donna, TX at Military Highway and FM 491 – Hidalgo County
- South Mercedes – Hidalgo County

The Harding Ranch Road site is a ½ mile from the river and has lots of sugarcane. The FM-ABD Road site is off of one of the main canals and has lots of water hyacinth on it. A previous study on these agricultural sub-watersheds in Cameron County showed that these were contributing only low concentrations of nutrients. The Donna, TX site is currently being cleaned out and should provide a good look at how vegetation reestablishes in these ditches and the affects of this on water quality. The Hidalgo County agricultural sub-watersheds range from 2000 to 5000 acres.

Efforts to outline the watershed have been completed. Flow will be measured and samples will be collected on a quarterly basis. Monitoring of the North Floodway and other ditches that drain to the Laguna will not be included in the project.

WQMP Implementation Assistance in the Arroyo Colorado Watershed – Kevin Wagner:

The Hidalgo and Southmost SWCDs §319(h) project proposal was then discussed by the Work Group. This project will provide a full time technician in the Southmost SWCD and a part time technician in the Hidalgo SWCD to assist landowners with the development and implementation of WQMPs. At least 78 WQMPs will be developed through the project. In addition, 144 status reviews of WQMPs will be conducted and 300 soil tests will be collected. The proposed 60:40 cost-share rate was a concern to the Work Group as a result of rising production costs.

Committee Input On Watershed Action Plan – Laura De La Garza:

The agenda for the Watershed Steering Committee Meeting was distributed and briefly discussed. The Work Group then went over the watershed action plan components.

- The identification of the causes and sources of pollution is complete. The sources that need to be addressed are urban point sources, urban nonpoint sources and agricultural nonpoint sources.
- Load reductions for agricultural BMPs implemented will be estimated utilizing TIAER data, TAES data, literature that TCEQ put together for the HSPF model and newer data.
- The criteria for assessing load reductions will be verifying the BMPs that are implemented in the short-term and monitoring results over the long-term.
- The Texas A&M-Kingsville §319(h) project proposal will address the immediate, short-term monitoring needs; however, long-term monitoring strategies and funding is greatly needed. During recent watershed tours, TCEQ observed agricultural runoff directly entering the Arroyo and recommended that such areas be targeted for future monitoring.
- The management measures to be implemented are included in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide.
- Partnering of funding from 319, SB503, EQIP, SRF, NGOs, and COGs will be used to provide the technical and financial assistance required to implement the management measures.
- The educational component wasn't discussed further since it was discussed earlier in the meeting.
- The implementation schedule was discussed. In the short term, activities being implemented with current funds would be reflected. Medium and long-term activities still need to be outlined.
- Finally, possible milestones were discussed.
- It was recommended that at least an outline needed to be prepared prior to the next Work Group Meeting. The proposed projects, if funded, will be initiated on September 1, 2005.

Other Business – Andy Garza:

The Work Group recommended that increased costs for fuel and PVC be taken into account for the cost-share program. It was determined that SWCDs already do this when they update their cost lists each year.

Monitoring was also discussed further. Currently, the monitoring is concentrated on the zone of impairment and the upper portion of the watershed isn't well monitored. Nitrates, phosphates, biological demand, dissolved oxygen, and sediment are the primary focus of monitoring. The Work Group also expressed concern over salinity.

The cost-effectiveness of various BMPs was briefly discussed. EPA stated that watershed planning efforts, such as the one in the Arroyo, is a direction that Washington wants EPA, NRCS, and States to go to direct restoration efforts and bring cooperation. In order to justify continued Congressional funding for EQIP, NRCS, and 319, a better quantification of water quality successes was essential.

Finally, the TWDB discussed to possible use of State Revolving Funds, Ag Conservation Loans and Ag Conservation Demonstration funds to assist in the Arroyo.

Discuss Next Meeting Date and Topics – Kevin Wagner:

The Work Group will plan to meet in July 2005 to review an outline of the watershed protection plan and again in October 2005 to review the final draft.. Reminders will be sent both one month and again one week in advance of the meetings.

Adjourn – Andy Garza:

The meeting adjourned at 12:00.