

Arroyo Colorado Education and Outreach Workgroup Formed Under The Arroyo Colorado Watershed Steering Committee

Meeting Summary – November 8, 2005

ATTENDING WORK GROUP COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Paul Bergh
Don Hockaday
Laura De La Garza

Video-conference Attendees from the TCEQ in Austin
Roger Miranda
Kris Shipman
Karen Ford
Susan Poag
Cathy Schechter

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

Laura De La Garza called to order the eleventh meeting of the Education and Outreach work group at 5:15 pm. The meeting was held in Classroom 157 of the Texas A&M Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Weslaco, Texas. Video conferencing was established with the TCEQ offices in Austin, Texas.

Introductions were made and Laura informed the group that the summary notes for the previous meeting would be sent out for comment. Next Laura referred to the agenda for the list of recent outreach efforts. Susan asked what kinds of responses are received from the presentations. Laura discussed recent presentations to groups in McAllen and Edinburg and stated that the presentations are well received with lots of interest in project; that often new members are recruited who want to be kept informed of the progress.

Laura stated that at the presentation in Edinburg, one citizen contented that there are no more colonias in the valley. Roger stated that the current law prohibits new colonias unless there is proper infrastructure and that the TWDB maintains a list and website for existing colonias in RGV through 2003.

Paul asked about colonias in his neighborhood and asked how many houses are required to be considered a colonia (ex. 5 houses). Roger stated that there are colonias near Los Fresnos, and within the CCN area around Weslaco, Donna, Mission, McAllen, Alamo and Progresso.

Laura stated that during her presentation to the McAllen Rotary Club, someone asked about the Harlingen weir/aeration project and that she informed the group of the current status; that the USACE general permit was granted, and 2 years earlier, the preliminary IBWC permit

(hydraulic) had been issued. Licensing through the IBWC is the next step. There was question if the weir project is part of WPP and whether it should be incorporated into the E&O part of the plan. Don Hockaday stated he heard that the weirs would be ineffectual, but supports it if not hurting anything. He asked Roger if the TCEQ would support it. Roger stated that there was no supporting documentation and that if TCEQ were to support it, data would be needed. In regards to the weir structures near Mercedes, no long range effects on DO levels have been demonstrated. Paul stated that even though we don't have technical data, their efforts should be applauded. The work group favored the project and agreed that it should be incorporated in the WPP. TCEQ does not oppose and the Arroyo Partnership can support despite TCEQ position.

NRS Engineering has not provided any technical analysis on the amount of aeration from weir structures. Laura expressed concerns over potential habitat destruction but agrees the project should be supported as it could help with aesthetics. A small lake might be created making it a positive place to recreate. Laura stated that NRS is open to design suggestions to address concerns. It was suggested that this project be added as an agenda item for the Steering Committee and discussed as whether the weir/aeration project should be incorporated in to the WPP. The Valley Sportsman, the Port of Harlingen, and the City of Harlingen were identified as long time supporters.

Karen Ford identified the opportunity for feedback from Laura's presentations to groups. She stated that they could create a post-presentation survey (5-6 questions) to get public response and ideas on what the general public can do.

Signage throughout the watershed was proposed to let citizens know they are in the Arroyo Colorado (AC) watershed. Signs could be placed every time a roadway crosses the AC watershed. Signage could be pre-tested during the focus groups.

Susan asked if there was a general lack of awareness or lack of awareness concerning the remediation efforts. The answer is both and that this is something that can be quantified in the survey. The reason for the impairment is complicated, part education, what it is, what the roles are, why it is important, and why it needs to be repaired. Don stated that if the AC meets the criteria, it will be good for fishing and birding. Paul reminded the group that the AC's effect on the Lower Laguna Madre (LLM) is important to highlight as we will get more attention if talk about the LLM vs. the Arroyo. Important message to test: the effect and importance of the AC on the LLM. Don suggested that another message be tested: the AC is the watershed and not just looking at a stream.

There was question as to whether or not dramatize the issue of bacteria; again, something to be tested in the focus group meetings.

Susan asked who the primary audience is. Voters were identified. What is the biggest problem and who do we need to address? It was earlier stated that the TCEQ needed help in compliance issues. Once the problem is identified, can come up with a solution and this will dictate action. What and who are the priorities? Karen suggested focusing on the influencers and then come up with a plan.

REVIEW OF WORKPLAN

Next the attached two page work plan was discussed. As part of step one, the group focused on developing a list for the one-on-one interviews. Ultimately, the consultants will conduct 20-25 one-on-one interviews with key community stakeholders and/or influencers in the region. The

following is a list derived from the group discussion and from the commitment of Laura to review and confirm the list, and provide contact information for interviewees:

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- Kenneth Jones, Executive Director LRGV Development Council
- Terry Lockamy, Regional Program Director, Agriculture and Natural Resources South Region, Texas Cooperative Extension
- Kevin Wagner, Project Manager, Texas Water Resources Institute (ex Soil & Water Conservation)
- Roel "Roy" Rodriguez, General Manager McAllen Public Utility (ex Harlingen PU)
- Fred Sandoval, City Manager, Pharr
- Anthony Covacevich City Manager, Weslaco
- Steve Bearden, Ag, President/CEO Rio Grande Valley Sugar Growers
- Sam Simmons, Ag, President Cotton Growers Association
- Amado Salinas, General Manager, Military Highway Water Supply Corp. Includes Progresso; on steering committee, knows border politics
- Julio Cerda, City Manager, Mission
- Keta Caballero, Coordinator, Colonia Initiatives Program, Office of the Secretary of State, knows colonias situation
- James Matz or Laura Maxwell, Valley Proud Environmental Council, environmental/beautification group
- Pete Moore, Member Valley Sportsman Club, on the Board of Directors 956-761-7537
- Solomon Torres, in Rep. Hinojosa's office
- Richard Moore, sportsman/wildlife photographer/writer, 956-399-9675
- Valley Interfaith, name? (will get back to you)
- Joe Vera, City Manager, Hidalgo
- Commissioner Edna Tamayo, County Commissioner, Cameron County Pct. 4
- Cassandra Garcia, Environmental Education Coordinator, McAllen
- Karen Chapman, Environmental Defense
- Victor Trevino, City Manager, San Benito
- Gabriel "Gabe" Gonzales, Interim City Manager, Harlingen 956-427-8701
- Joe Hinojosa, Environmental Services Director, Brownsville, also on the LRGV Storm Water Task Force

Possible Focus Groups

It was acknowledged that final focus group designation will result from the one-on-one interviews.

1. Agriculture community, include farmers and the Valley Texas Cooperative Extension Agents
2. Recreationists/Environmentalists (Valley Sportsmen, CCA)
3. Public citizens (voters)

Possible Target Group(s) for Interim Outreach/Short term Promotion

It was acknowledged that the audience for short term promotion of AC/WPP will be identified as result of one-on-one interviews and focus groups; it may be recommended that one focus group be conducted to test short-term promotion messages and creative materials.

1. Voters, macro, too large
2. Influentials
3. Cities with proximity to Arroyo Colorado Segment 2201 (Rio Hondo, San Benito, Harlingen)

4. Hidalgo, Alamo, Progreso (2202)
5. Non-compliance cities: San Benito, Harlingen, Donna, Progreso, Alamo

ACTION ITEMS

WHC TEAM:

1. Provide a list of questions that Laura can use as audience survey after her presentations to citizen groups by end of 11/14 week.
2. Prepare draft discussion guide for review by client team to be deliver by Nov. 23.
3. Continue to review background information and begin inventory of existing materials and messages to test.

WATERSHED COORDINATOR (LAURA)

1. Review list of potential one-on-one interviewees above and confirm, delete or add to the list. Provide contact information for those not on the master list of AC stakeholders.

No next meeting was discussed. The meeting was adjourned at 7 PM.