

Arroyo Colorado Education and Outreach Workgroup

July 17, 2007
Meeting Summary

ATTENDANCE:

Laura De La Garza – Watershed Coordinator, TWRI
Don Hockaday – University of Texas Pan American
Brianna K. R. Carlson – Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Tony Riesinger – Texas Cooperative Extension, Cameron County
Elizabeth Heise – University of Texas Brownsville
Christie Jo Lugo-Waldron - City of Weslaco
Marcie Oviedo – Lower Rio Grande Development Council
Ludy Saenz – Lower Rio Grande Development Council
Paul H. Bergh – Coalition to Save the Arroyo Colorado

Via Teleconference:

Cory Horan – Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
Kevin Wagner – Texas Water Resource Institute
Cecilia Wagner – Texas Water Resource Institute
Megan Meier – Texas Water Resource Institute
Jason Pinchback – Texas Watch, Texas State University System
Eric Medelman – Texas Watch, Texas State University System

Meeting

Laura De La Garza called the Education and Outreach work group meeting to order at 4:10 pm. The meeting was held in the Texas Cooperative Extension Conference Room in the Texas A& M Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Weslaco, Texas with out of town members participating via conference call.

Introductions were made and the first order of business was to review the education and outreach goals outlined in the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan (ACWPP). An update on the WPP implementation status was provided by Laura for the education and outreach, and habitat work groups while Kevin Wagner provided the update for the agricultural workgroup.

Christie Jo (City of Weslaco) discussed the progress of the compost project (p103 of the ACWPP).

- Purpose for project is to teach community about composting since it conserves water, requires less fertilizer use and contributes less nutrients to runoff
- Have demonstration projects on athletic fields and urban areas
- Has 31 workshops scheduled that are open to the general public
- Project is involves the Cities of Weslaco, Brownsville, Alton and Brownsville, TCEQ, and EPA
- Laura suggested including the compost project in the newsletter

- The group suggested presenting the data collected thus far at a meeting in a few months
- Cecilia suggested creating/using fact sheets like with the TCEQ project with TWRI at compost.tamu.edu
- Brianna Carlson asked about private composting

Laura provided update on physical watershed model for Sky Lewey, which is fulfilling Strategy 5 of O&E component of the ACWPP.

- Nueces RA through the Clean Rivers Program provided funding for the model
- Paul Bond, from Texas State University, is the modeler
- UTB provided engineering services for model development
- Model should be finished by September 15th
- Elizabeth Heise described model: it is 3 ft X 8 ft X 6 in; water can actually be used on it as it has a plastic coating; had to paint on levees because would look like mountains if drawn to scale
- Laura asked the group how and where the model should be used.
 - Tony Riesinger said Master Naturalists are interested in using it as well as TCE agent using it in schools
 - UTB also has plans to use it
 - Jason Pinchback with TexasWatch has experience using models like this and offered assistance

Jason Pinchback with TexasWatch (Strategy 5) provided an update on their activity in the Arroyo Colorado watershed.

- Overall mission is to support components of ACWPP and maintain sustainable network of volunteer monitors
- Currently working with over 9 different Valley organizations
- Includes volunteer monitoring component
 - Over 32 trained volunteers on assessing stream health and monitoring E. coli at 14 sites across entire watershed
 - Measure oxygen, secchi depth, etc.
 - Cory from TCEQ asked about additional supplies for monitors and the response was yes, additional kits for universities, high schools and master naturalists are needed because the effort on the Arroyo is very intense
 - Jason suggested using Laura's office as hub for providing supplies to volunteers, Laura suggested the San Benito TCE office because of a space limitation
 - Elizabeth Heise from UTB had several students trained; might discuss with Cory about using the YSI meters purchased using TCEQ funds for another to provide more in-depth monitoring
 - Eric at TexasWatch suggested using YSI as providing quality control for TexasWatch kits
 - Had 2 trainings in the last few months with one more training in the fall
- Includes education and outreach component
 - Sent out announcement to teachers (about 112) in the watershed and will possibly participate at in-services to educate teachers

- Including information about Arroyo Colorado watershed and how training/monitoring helps
- Possible opportunity to include ACWPP/Arroyo Colorado pamphlets with TexasWatch materials for targeted audiences
- Discussed upcoming regional meeting (meeting on 9-22 in Weslaco; which is World Water Monitoring Day)
 - TexasWatch has been in coordination with several partners on getting agenda set-up for educating general public and associated partners on ACWPP
 - Need to include storm water task force group cities
 - TexasWatch would appreciate feedback on what to include in the meeting like specific agenda items
 - Tony suggested including monitoring results and comparing to historical data; C. E. Bryan has publication from 1960s on fauna in the Arroyo
 - Brianna Carlson also suggested acquiring water quality data from TPWD; requested a flyer from Texas Watch to distribute to fishermen
 - Rocky also has a database available
 - Mark Lingo (TPWD) has conducted recent surveys to compare to historical data
 - Laura directed everyone to the graph on page 42 of the ACWPP that shows some improvement in dissolved oxygen in the past few years; these results may be from efforts of TCE working with farmers, as Tony suggested
 - Elizabeth said with her experience that the public would like to see results, whether good or bad, because they are curious and would just like to see something happening
 - Maybe entice people to attend by using door prizes or a meal; also Elizabeth will offer extra credit to students for attendance

Laura covered the storm water task force activity and implementation schedule.

- The task force has sponsored events over the last few years and the Partnership is planning on partnering with them over the next few years (especially with CHARM grant; p149 of plan; smart growth task)
 - Cory said strongest way to insure funding for CHARM would be for it to contribute to ACWPP
 - Need to look for money to develop PSAs in Spanish
 - partner with Alan Watt at TCEQ as he has funding for PSA development

Laura outlined the CMP Rio Hondo project pre-proposal and the regional wetland study.

- Rio Hondo will provide match in the form of land associated with their new wastewater treatment plant and adjacent to the Arroyo Colorado
- Tony thought it was a great idea
- Suggestion to add a boat ramp
- Don suggested monitoring that location
- Cecilia suggested giving work group a deadline to provide comments on all pre-proposals (end of August)
- Laura will schedule for group to visit the potential site and meet with city manager (before end of August)

Megan outlined Pesticide Education project pre-proposal.

- Basically using the pesticide education already established by TCE
- Providing funding for supplies and travel; match is TCE agents salary

Don Hockaday reported on NSF grant related to public education and will take the lead; informal science education program.

Megan covered various education and outreach funding opportunities.

- Work with Elizabeth Heise on Gulf of Mexico Grant
- Work with Don, Tony, and Briana for Endangered Species Grant

Laura discussed other business

- Kris Shipman expressed interest to work on proposal draft for VISTA volunteers
- Next meeting before grants are due; August 14th from 4-6 pm
- Cecilia suggested Laura sending contact information of workgroup to facilitate further discussions between group members between meetings.

The meeting ended at 6:10 pm.