

**Arroyo Colorado Habitat Issues Work Group – Formed Under The
Arroyo Colorado Watershed Steering Committee**

July 24, 2007

Meeting Summary

ATTENDANCE:

Tony Reisinger - Texas Sea Grant
Kim Jones - Texas A&M Kingaville
Laura De La Garza – Watershed Coordinator, TWRI
Paul H. Bergh – Coalition to Save the Arroyo Colorado
Mary Lou Campbell – Sierra Club
Lisa Williams – Texas Nature Conservancy
Heather Harris – CH2M Hill
Brad Lamb – EPA Region 6
Fred Moore – EPA Region 6
Elizabeth Heise - UTB
Ernesto Reyes – USFWS
Amy Spaulding – Valley Land Fund
Chris Hathcock – TPWD
Aaron Wendt – TSSWCB
Pamela Casebolt – TSSWCB
John D. Wallace – USFWS/LANWR
Martin Alcala, Jr. – TAMUK
Fritz Jaenike – Harlingen Shrimp Farms
Kevin Wagner – TWRI
Cecilia Wagner – TWRI
Abel Garza – TAMUK/STEI
Kim Jones – TAMUK/STEI

Welcome and Introductions

Tony Reisinger, Co-Work Group Leader called the Habitat Issues work group meeting to order. The meeting was held in the Rio Red Classroom of the Texas A&M Kingsville Citrus Center. Self-introductions were made. Special guests included Brad Lamb and Fred Moore from the US EPA Region 6.

Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan

The first order of business was to review the 10 strategies listed in the habitat component of the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan (ACWPP). Dr. Kim Jones outlined the 10 action items for water quality and habitat restoration derived from the 3 main objectives listed in the Habitat portion of the ACWPP concentrating on wetland systems.

-Need to focus on the process needs in order to accomplish these broad items

- Laura said focus needs to be on regional wetland and expand on Alan Plummer study
- Kim: we need to clarify what a regional wetland is...need to analyze other similar wetlands (like in California) but need to make it specific for the conditions in the Arroyo
- Potential sites include Port of Harlingen, San Benito, Rio Hondo Oxbow, sand pit near La Feria, Laguna Atascosa for shrimp farms discharges

Laura provided an update on the implementation status of the ACWPP including a review of education and outreach work group activities and projects. Laura reviewed O&E projects including the development of a physical watershed model of the Arroyo Colorado watershed. That the model was 3' x 7' x 6" high and that it would show the Rio Grande flowing into the Gulf of Mexico and the Arroyo Colorado flowing into the Lower Laguna Madre. She acknowledged funding provided by the Nueces River Authority through the Texas Clean Rivers program, project direction by Sky Lewey, and the engineering provided by Dr. Jude Benavides and Anthony Reisinger, Jr. of UTB.

Laura briefly discussed the TCEQ/EPA funded compost demonstration project managed by the City of Weslaco, Texas Watch activities and the current grant writing activities. She discussed the development of two Coastal Management Program grant proposals. Aaron Wendt discussed agricultural issues and BMP implementation.

There was a discussion on Cameron county LIDAR data and it was agreed that that information is essential for locating suitable wetland sites. Tony Reisinger agreed to contact the Cameron County regarding that data.

Laura stated that the tidal section of the Arroyo Colorado has just recently been listed for high bacteria levels. She also stated that data may have been skewed as a result of increased rain events. -Tony said that fisherman have been catching large tropical species in the tidal segment of the Arroyo Colorado and that this is a possible indicator of good habitat.

Project Updates

Laura briefly reported on the individual 4 cities wetland project, that permitting issues have been addressed acknowledging the work done by the cities of San Benito, La Feria, Mercedes, and San Juan. She also acknowledged EPA Region 6 for their support of the project.

Chris Hatcock presented the TPWD Estero Llano Grande drainage ditch stabilization project.

- 2 mile drainage ditch flowing through Estero Llano Grande World Birding center.
- The ditch flows into the Arroyo Colorado
- The drainage ditch contained steep 1:1 slopes
- APAI conducted a bio-engineering study and proposal
- TPWD looking at possibility of using California bullrush for sediment trapping

Project Discussions

Dr. Heise and Dr. Kim Jones discussed the Coastal Management Program pre-grant proposal; that there is ongoing work to develop the full grant proposal due October 10, 2007.

- Dr. Heise discussed site suitability for the wetlands

Dr. Jones then discussed the development of a regional wetland system and gave an overview of the different potential sites for regional wetland development.

- First focus was Llano Grande area
- Dr. Jones commented that there is a need to incorporate engineering ideas (to control flow and remove nutrients) with ecology to ensure habitat is created and not just monoculture of cattails
- a challenge in getting a regional wetland project on the ground is “knocking on the right doors”
- Dr. Jones present two existing regional wetlands, Loma Alta Shrimp Farm wetland and Imperial Valley, California Wetland
- Martin A. (TAMUK graduate student) discussed bio-retention cell technology using compost and it was decided that a demo project should be implemented at one or two site on the Arroyo ZOI and specifically at the facilities where dry fertilizer off-loaded.
- Rio Hondo/Port of Harlingen Oxbow was discussed- Paul H. Bergh said that a possible low cost way to deal with the pumping issue was the Sterling engine
- San Benito site expansion discussed as a possible regional wetland system
- La Feria Sandpit identified as a possible location
- Goat Island Resaca worth looking at
- Laguna Atascosa discussed as a potential site for permitted discharges from shrimp farms – it was agreed that although this was not in Phase I of the ACWPP that certain coastal wetland grants would be appropriate and that the option of the wetland system in this area could be pursued
- It was recommended that 3 sites be identified for the feasibility study
- Dr. Jones said there is a need to determine who will maintain the wetland systems; that that will be part of the feasibility study
- Nueces River Authority feasibility study for Cameron County colony was reviewed
- Need to determine land availability, ground-truth the sites, cost estimation, conceptual model, partnership/support, permitting, monitoring, modeling, and ownership
- Need to consult with Dr. John Day

Discuss/Prioritize Future Funding Needs and Sources

Cecilia Wagner reviewed the forecasted grant table. She said there was a need to develop scopes of work for the different RFPs. In regards to the Gulf of Mexico grant, she said that we are not going to pursue due to deadlines, small amount of funds and 1:1 match requirement. She highlighted the National Wetland Restoration Development (NWRD) grant with the August 10, 2007 deadline and the Estuary Habitat Restoration Program grant due August 20, 2007. It was noted that the NWRD grant could only be awarded to a NGO. Amy Spaulding of the Valley Land Fund said that she would see if her organization could be the lead agency and submit the application.

The meeting adjourned at 4:40 pm.