

Arroyo Colorado Habitat Work Group

January 24, 2008

2:30 pm - 4:30 pm

MEETING SUMMARY

ATTENDEES

Heather Harris, CH2M Hill
Brunilda Fuentes-Capozello, USFWS
Cory Horan, TCEQ
Amado Salinas, MHWSC
Alex Nunez, TPWD
Jim Tabak, VLF
Amy Rangel, TWRI

Laura De La Garza, TWRI
Cecilia Wagner, TWRI
Tony Reisinger, Tx Sea Grant
Kim Jones, TAMUK
Ouina Rutledge, City of McAllen
Venki Uddameri, TAMUK

Welcome and Introductions Tony Reisinger, Texas Sea Grant

Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan

Watershed Protection Plan Implementation Status Laura De La Garza, TWRI

- Have been discussing long-term sustainability of the Partnership

O&E:

- Demonstrating physical watershed model; finalizing a “script” for demonstration
- Working with TAMU in the development of an O&E evaluation form to gage effectiveness of O&E activities,
- Texas Watch continues to support volunteer monitors. Will have a training next Saturday, February 2nd if anyone interested. Half of monitors are collecting data,
- Will be working with Valley “storm water” cities in a storm drain marking campaign,
- Laura introduced Ouina Rutledge; she talked about her background and some of McAllen’s “green” programs including “Save the Greens”, brush collection and their compost project. The O&E group have been partnering with the city of McAllen on projects, compost on home lawns, curriculum improvement. Also, City of McAllen working to require compost socks or berms (to replace silt fences) for erosion and stormwater control on construction sites.

Ag:

- Begin collecting water quality samples for the Ag NPS assessment program; Ag BMP education continues; begun work on SWAT model; 77 water quality management plans (WQMPs) in place since start of project.

WWI:

- Working with the city of Alamo and MHWSC on a TWDB grant proposal.

Project Updates:

Four Cities Wetland Project Laura De La Garza, TCEQ

- Good turn-out for December 17, 2007 meeting
- Permitting amendments created cost and time issues

- Each city making progress on permits; City of San Juan hopes to begin construction mid-spring; La Feria and San Benito working of preliminary designs; Mercedes waiting on permit amendment for facility expansion.
- Good information provided by Dr. Kim Jones, Dr. John Day, and Chris Hathcock; ecological engineering allows for self-design; importance of plant diversity; important to consider/design in flood pulse; advantages of deep and shallow ponds within one wetland.
- Planning a field trip this spring to the EnVista facility in Victoria to see wetland designed and installed by CH2M Hill. Working with Heather Harris to arrange trip in Spring.

Regional Wetland Study Kim Jones, TAMUK

- Did not get CMP funding for site suitability analysis or Rio Hondo wetland study
- Again, work group is looking at potential locations for regional wetland systems for habitat and water quality improvement
- Site selection process is complex; TAMUK looking at plug channel-flow treatment
- In general, need to look at areas where wetland can be used to clean-water and enhance habitat. Tony suggested looking at smaller drains; move away from channel and handle trouble sites
- Updated land use data will be helpful (Ground-truthing required; hydrologically, how to prioritize sites?) Group suggested study and obtain more data
- Kim said that agricultural non-point source runoff needs to be targeted
- Kim said Martin (TAMUK graduate student) will continue to work on wetland issues
- Potential sites:
 - Oxbow near Rio Hondo is not a bad site
 - Cory asked about the volume of water that could be treated at that site
 - Kim said that was a good question and suggested that we include such calculations in a work plan; that maybe we should stop saying feasibility study
 - Llano Grande site not looking promising due to land acquisition issue
 - La Feria Sandpit. Laura needs to contact land owner
 - Shrimp farm/Laguna Atascosa has many issues
 - Elizabeth said, FYI, a pond from one of the shrimp farms was donated to UTB; Its currently in the hands of the lawyers; plans for the site is unknown, but deed restrictions on property say it must be used for farming;
 - Shrimp farms operate as many individually owned inactive ponds
 - Goat Island is not promising as TPWD does not want to mess with something already wet and already has habitat value.
 - Port of Harlingen area. Upstream of the Port is an approximate 50 acre site. Kim said that this is his favorite site.
- The group discussed and narrowed the potential sites to the following:
 - La Feria Sand Pit
 - Port of Harlingen (on N bank Southwest of Port)
 - San Benito (expansion of existing site)

319 Regional Detention Facility Study Proposal.....Dr. Kim Jones, TAMUK

- TCEQ provided positive feedback and likely to fund project; additional information is needed

- Funds will go to enhancement of RDFs with additional wetland plants and study water quality into and out-of facility

Project Discussion:

Drainage Ditch Study/319 Proposal.....Kay Jenkins, TPWD

- TPWD has withdrawn proposal due to several issues:
 - Drainage district could not guarantee that the study would not be interrupted given a pending flood event; the potential to remove vegetation
 - TPWD could not come up with the matching funds
- Alex Nunez said that TPWD has restitution money and that a plan could be submitted to the spills and kills program; Alex to email grant application

Natural Area Inventory (NAI)Laura De La Garza, TWRI

- First step in achieving preservation is to conduct a natural inventory map.
- By creating a NAI, can then map where green space connections can be made and work with Partners to preserve and connect open space.
- We have a start; map of wildlife refuges and other land in conservation. Not complete, need to include lands in conservation easements.
- Laura has met with HCMPO, and Harlingen/San Benito MPO. Their focus is on transportation planning; required to map sensitive/critical environmental features. MPOs are interested in working with us and USFWS on the wildlife corridor.
- This is the first step in SmartGrowth; next step is to prioritize natural areas in which should be preserved first.
- Finally, there must be a plan for actual acquisition or setting aside of properties.
- Anyone interested in forming a sub-task group to push this forward?

Introduction to Wetland Mitigation BankLaura De La Garza, TWRI

- See attached slide from EPA webcast powerpoint presentation consolidated by Laura.

Discuss/Prioritize Future Funding Needs and SourcesTony Reisinger, TX Sea Grant

Amy Rangel, TWRI
Cecilia Wagner, TWRI

- See attached grants table
- Laura said she met with GLO CIAP representatives and that they are interested in our watershed protection project. She has been invited to Austin to meet with them to discuss what is need in order to submit a strong application
- Will review EPA Region 6 Wetland Program Development Grants and the NFWF Five Star Restoration Grant
- Jim Tabak said that Google Map Pro Plus had available grants; the Valley Land Fund has a Google planning grant for their 8 county areas. They will have the capability to monitor land with conservation easements by satellite.
- Elizabeth said that UTB is cleaning up county LIDAR data.

Next Meeting Date/Adjorn.....Tony Reisinger, TX Sea Grant

- Next meeting on April 24, 2008.