

Arroyo Colorado Habitat Work Group

August 14, 2008

2:00 pm - 4:00 pm

MEETING SUMMARY

ATTENDEES

Kim Jones, TAMUK
Tony Reisinger, Texas Sea Grant Extension
Laura de la Garza, TWRI
Jim Tabak, Valley Land Fund
Chris Hatcock, TPWD
Martin Ramiez, S&B Infrastructure, Ltd
Patrick Conner, Nature Conservancy
Don Hockaday, UTPA

Tom Whelan, UTPA
Kendall Keyes, TPWD
Ruben Saldana, AgriLife Extension
Jennider Buratti, TCEQ*
Megan Meier, TWRI*
Cecilia Wagner, TWRI*
*Phone called into meeting

Welcome and Introductions Tony Reisinger, Texas Sea Grant Extension

- Opened meeting at 2:15 p.m.
- YardWise handouts available
- Good Arroyo Colorado awareness

Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan

Protection Plan Implementation Highlights.....Laura De La Garza, TWRI

- August 7 Arroyo Colorado (AC) Ecotourism Luncheon a great success; four state representatives present along with many local elected officials
- Proceeding with road sign project to mark “Entering Arroyo Colorado Watershed”
- Proceeding with storm drain labeling project; working with LRGV Storm Water Task Force
- Announced upcoming Ag Work Group Meeting
- Recent state CIAP grant submittals to be discussed later in meeting

Trace Metals in Waters of the AC and LLMDr. Thomas Whelan, UTPA

- Pollution issues in the Lower Laguna Madre (LLM) related to AC
- **Presentation on what was found in recent study (to be posted on AC website)**
- Ultimate goal to protect seagrasses or “we get a mud lake”
- Interest in preserving seagrasses
- Arsenic data shows chemical problems at mouth of AC; arsenic possible indicator of extent of inorganic contamination; if arsenic present, other pollutants likely present
- Toxic levels may not be present in water but could accumulate in seagrass resulting in death of seagrasses
- 16 sample locations in study
- Sources of arsenic include drainage canals (ag and urban NPS); highest levels in the three AC sample locations versus other 13 north and south of mouth of AC
- “Pin fish” are great indicators heavy metal toxicity
- More studies needed; detection of specific chemical compounds suggests specific upstream source; example, benzene suggests gasoline leak

- How is the AC affecting the seagrasses? Why do any more studies?
- By knowing the extent of the contaminants in the LLM we can monitor changes over time to see if we are doing some good upstream in the AC
- A need to analyze water, sediments, seagrasses and fish quarterly at 25 locations in the lower AC and LLM/Green Island area for 3 years for volatile organic compounds (VOCs), semi-volatile organic compounds, and trace metals
- “We love seagrass and want to keep them healthy”
- Jim Tabak asked if other entities doing AC studies
 - Texas Department of State Health Services testing for fish toxicity; health advisory for small-mouth buffalo and long-nose gar caught in AC
 - TCEQ recent listing; mercury and PBBs in edible tissue
 - Texas Sea Grant testing for mercury in fish
 - TPWD doing periodic fish counts and water quality monitoring
 - TCEQ and Nueces River Authority doing water quality monitoring in AC at 12 locations
- Valley under-funded in this area
- Tony Reisinger reiterated that more funding is needed in this area (testing for metals and VOCs)
- **AC Habitat Workgroup in support of Dr. Whelan’s study proposal**
- Tony stated need for a Catan fish toxicity study; a need to know possible affect on local population
- Jennifer Buratti stated that the AC and LLM are on the priority list of impaired waterbodies; asked if anyone was on the mercury advisory group, an initiative to address mercury; lots of state waterbodies listed; will send invitation letter to join advisory group; Tony recommends AC representation on that committee
- Laura suggests that Dr. Whelan apply for Willacy County CIAP funds
- Dr. Jones brings up issue of the need for a nelac certified lab; confirmed

Project Updates and Discussions:

Regional Wetland StudyDr. Kim Jones, TAMUK

- Shows locations (attached); sites in Harlingen and San Benito
- Laura explained why LRGVDC selected to submit CIAP grant for Partnership
- Dr. Jones acknowledges AC grant writing team for good job done on application
- Proposal includes modeling sites
- There will be permit issues; implications to pulling water out of the AC and putting it back in; need for a water right; potential congressional item
- Uses important in conservation easements
- need to prepare conceptual models
- most nutrient reduction/benefit to AC from pulling water out of AC and treating it
- Jim Tabak asks about downstream affects of Rio Hondo and Arroyo City on water quality
- Laura explains that “Phase I” evaluated and planned for improvements upstream of the zone of impairment; need to look and plan for improvements in the downstream part of the AC watershed

- **Habitat Workgroup supports studies and planning for the improvement of the lower section of the AC**

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

- Proposal submitted to study and improve regional storm water detention facilities in the city of McAllen
- Proposal accepted by EPA and TCEQ
- Dr. Jones principal investigator in study

Valley Land Fund's Role in ACWPP Implementation..... Jim Tabak, VLF

- Gap in water and land sustainability in the Valley; Valley underfunded in this arena
- Jim approached the Valley Land Fund (VLF) Board with a proposal to adopt action items listed in the ACWPP
- VLF Board approved the motion to “Authorize Jim Tabak to explore the feasibility of adoption of some or all of the 10 action included in the (habitat component) of the ACWPP”.
- Jim distributed and reviewed “purpose and objectives” listed in the VLF’s articles of incorporation and discussed how they are compatible with the goals and objectives of the Arroyo plan
- Jim distributed a list of land types that other land trusts protect including wetlands, river corridors, watersheds, and farmland/ranchland
- Jim asked the workgroup if they thought the VLF could be involved on a permanent bases
- Jim referred to pages 75 and 76 of the ACWPP to discuss adoption of strategies so the VLF could be a permanent member
- VLF is funded by endowments; ability to continue into perpetuity supporting permanent staff; VLF has many ideas for sources of funding; not looking to build an empire; have benefits to the community; can act as a catalyst, facilitate training
- Tony Reisinger suggested that the ACWP and the VLF develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) acknowledging the VLF’s “adoption” of ACWPP action items 1,2,9 and10
- **The Habitat Workgroup unanimously supports the drafting (Jim Tabak volunteered to draft MOU) of a MOU between partnership and VLF for the VLF’s permanent participation in the implementation of the ACWPP**
- Tony stated that we are fortunate to have Jim Tabak and the VLF as part of this effort to improve the Arroyo Colorado Watershed; all in attendance agreed

Available Grants/Potential Studies Cecilia Wagner, TWRI

-

Other Business.....Laura De La Garza, TWRI

-

Next Meeting Date/Adjourn.....Dr. Kim Jones, TAMUK

- November 13, 2008