

Arroyo Colorado Habitat Work Group

June 25, 2009

10:30 am - 12:00 pm

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendees:

Tony Reisinger, Cameron County Extension
Brunilda Fuentes Capozello, USFWS sitting
in for Ernesto Morales
Chris Hathcock, TPWD
Darla Jones, City of La Feria
Loretta Mokry, APAI

Mikki McCarthy, City of San Juan
Jaime Flores, TWRI
Laura De La Garza, Comite Resources
Jim Tabak, Valley Land Fund
Dr. Kim Jones, TAMUK
Cecilia Wagner, TWRI

Welcome and IntroductionsDr. Jones, TAMUK

Valley Land Fund UpdateJim Tabak

- They have been asked for funding to support aeration structures;
- There is a property that is currently for sale and is in the process of changing hands (2,900 acres on the North bank of Arroyo City) and have asked VLF to assess property to allow for development yet conserve/preserve the most environmental sensitive areas of the property to ensure that the areas that drain into the AC do not impact the AC. Assist in developing areas for conservation easement for available environmental incentives. APAI suggested a Low Impact Development concept for the property to ensure the wildlife/habitat corridor is preserved and you can better plan water/sewer treatment. Jim Tabak is wanting assistance in biological / ecological assessment and wants to know if there is interest from the habitat workgroup as to the fate of the land. Habitat workgroup expressed interest.
- Palo Alto Battlefield (FM 511) owned by natural parks service. Texas Conservation group came to VLF to assist with the project 1200 acres owned by 4 developers. 800 acres for development 400 acres owned by parks services. They have surplus arsenic from old barrels that needs to be dealt with. Some work has been done, but more work needs to be done if they plan to develop the property. There is a delineated wetland on the property, which means that under section 404 of CWA, they have to have permit to do any dredge/fill activity on the property or perform mitigation activity to work in the area. if it stays in nonprofits hands, then the land
- Military Highway – TxDOT released its plans for a highway from Mission to the beach (re routed plan to be a more direct route to allow for faster speed). Again, this is an interest of the Habitat workgroup to remain involved and assist with bringing this information to the public eye and in

Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan

ACW Protection Plan Implementation Jaime Flores, TWRI

Project Updates and Discussions:

4-Cities Wetland Update Jaime Flores, TWRI

- Mikki McCarthy (San Juan Project) – initiated construction on March 25, 2009. Have had several issues that they had to remedy (debris on site that was not identified

during design phase). They are on the EPA/TCEQ grant timeline so they are being flexible with how they move forward in that they've expanded some cells and got rid of a few cells, which just changes the amount of time that the water will be in the cell, but they are still treating the same amount of water.

- Also had issues with permeability with the soil and have had to go back and add clay (line each cell with 6" of clay), which increased their costs. They submitted a budget amendment to TCEQ, but that was rejected so San Juan had "pertinent allowance" which they used to purchase the clay. So now they are trying to decide if they will have pertinences or not since they had to use those funds for other costs.
- Timeline is to get majority of the project complete by August.
- Need support in landscaping area and in maintenance issues as well

- Darla Jones (La Feria) 88 acres, 3 constructed wetlands (4.09, 4.02 and 3.04 acres each). Broke ground in February 2009. They have final inspection tomorrow (June 26, 2009). They have plants in the wetlands and are ready
- More plants were recommended than actually went in; But due to budgeting and availability of plants, they increased spacing of the planting during implementation
- Also shares maintenance concerns that San Juan has.

- San Benito is in a holding pattern waiting for funding. This is a quote from Martha McClain "We really do not have anything new to report. The City of San Benito submitted design plans to TCEQ for review and approval in December 2008, and we are awaiting their approval. Arthur Talley, our TCEQ contact, has told us that due to cost overruns with the San Juan and La Feria projects, they are holding off on their approval. He told me that he expected to reactivate our project sometime in the next month or so. So we are just waiting to begin the project. Hope this is of help."

- Need a maintenance workshop for these new wetland managers (Something for ACWP to cosponsor/host)
- Develop a plaque or certificate in recognition of the cities efforts to develop these wetlands so that we can raise awareness of there efforts to their city councils
- Write a story highlighting the efforts of these cities and the great birding, habitat, ecotourism that they will be providing for our region.

Harlingen Aeration StructuresLaura De La Garza, Comitee Resources

- Alan Johnson called Jim Tabak to bring this up again as folks still want this project to happen.
- This will improve aeration on a small scale, but more so, it will expand and raise awareness
- This is not a weir, rather creating a riffle zone
- We almost received an IBWC permit for these structures, but when TPWD went in to do an assessment for the permit, there was an error in the locations and the TWPD-El Paso Office rejected the permit. So, IBWC needs to re-run the model. TPWD main concern was that they wanted to make sure the structure was passable to fish and kayaks. This was addressed and the structure is ok for that.
- So they need about \$7,500 to \$10,000 to re-run the model for IBWC.

- Roger Miranda suggested an alternative structure to pursue, which is still an option.
- Habitat workgroup is in favor of moving forward with pursuing an aeration project in the Harlingen area for enhancement of the Arroyo Colorado? Project would aerate, provide habitat, raise awareness and add aesthetics to the Arroyo.

Rio Grande Region M Water PlanLaura De La Garza, Comitee Resources

- The Habitat Work Group agreed to include the Partnership in the Region M planning. The Partnership can be the environmental voice for Region M planning.
- We need a summary of the goals/milestones that the Partnership has completed since 2007 to the present date to submit to Region M.

Levee Improvement CommentsLaura De La Garza, Comitee Resources

- The Partnership submitted comments put together by Roger Miranda (TCEQ).
- The Habitat workgroup did not have a chance to review the comments because of the submission deadline and Memorial Day weekend. The workgroup agreed with the comments submitted.
- We also received comments from Laura De La Garza (Comitee Resources) and Christine Rakestraw.

Shrimp FarmJaime Flores, TWRI

- The workgroup agreed that it is a good project but questioned it's feasibility; also brought up the fact that it is too far down the AC to do any good in the AC. Jaime reminded the group that all of the AC water ultimately flows to the LLM and that if the project helped clean up the water before entering the LLM, it could still be very beneficial. The workgroup agreed and said it would support the project if it ever got off the ground.
- Edited in follow-up via email from Cecilia Wagner:
we all realize and agree with you that a 2400 acre constructed wetland adjacent to and maybe even part of the Laguna Atascosa Wildlife Refuge would benefit a portion of the Arroyo Colorado and more importantly, the Lower Laguna Madre. We also realize and agree that one of the main purposes of protecting and restoring the Arroyo Colorado is to protect the Lower Laguna Madre.

However, another purpose is to remove the Arroyo Colorado from the 303d list and that is where the statement, too far down the AC to do any good in the AC, came into play. We were basically reviewing the purpose of the implementation of the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan and were discussing leveraging the WPP to obtain funding and discussed that while a wetland that far downstream would be a benefit, it does not fit exactly or match a top priority in the plan.

With all that said though, our consensus during the meeting was this is a viable and worthy project and at the same time, a monstrous undertaking that will require multi-entity and multi-funding to get off the ground. We want to see it happen just like you do and we are still talking about and trying to figure out how to get that done. By saying, we "support the project if it ever got off the ground" simply means that we need to search further and find someone to take it on. The Arroyo Colorado watershed Partnership is exactly that - a partnership - consisting of local stakeholders interested in protecting the watershed. We need scientists, agencies and NGOs to support this and be willing to implement it before anything can

happen. Jaime has baited the partnership with this information and all we have heard is the LLMF is interested in participating should they be contacted.

I am not well-versed in land acquisition, foreclosure, or in wetland development and to my knowledge, neither is Jaime so we need your assistance to get this going. What do you recommend should be our first step? Who should be the key players (individuals and organizations) that we should involve? Is there a researcher or entity willing to help us lead this? These are the questions I was hoping we could answer at the habitat meeting and while we didn't get there at the last meeting does not mean we are giving up. If anybody has suggestions or guidance, please email Jaime or me.

Available Grants/Potential Studies Cecilia Wagner, TWRI

- Dr. Jones informed the workgroup about the ACWP/TAMUK wetland inventory/mapping grant that they are working on. Martin Alcalá, a PhD student, will be using Lidar data to delineate the best sites. Currently focusing on San Benito WWTP site and Alan Johnson property.
- Dr. Jones informed the group about the ACWP/TAMUK plans to submit a NSF grant to study the effects of Solar bee technology in the turning basin of the Port of Harlingen. TAMUK thinks there is some real scientific knowledge that can be gained from this project. They also think that this data can be applied to other similar watersheds in Texas and the U.S. The workgroup supports the grant.
- Coastal Management Program
 - o Just missed the pre-proposal deadline (June 24, 2009)
 - o Full proposal not due until October 14, 2009. Can still submit something.
- Coastal Impact Assistance Program – no word for 2009 funding
- National Wetland Program Development Grant – requires a multi-state program.
- Regional Wetland Development Grant – no word for 2009 funding

Other Business..... Jaime Flores, TWRI

- Arroyo Grant Writing Workshop (Aug 11/12) at City of Pharr

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

- October 22 or January 21.