

**Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership  
Steering Committee and Partnership Meeting  
Meeting Summary – January 19, 2006**

**MEETING ATTENDEES**

ALAN	MOORE	CAMERON COUNTY IRRIGATION DISTRICT #5
AMADO E.	SALINAS	MILITARY HIGHWAY WSC
ANDY	GARZA	TEXAS STATE SOIL WATER CONSERVATION BOARD
BRAD	COWAN	TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
BRIAN	KOUCH	TEXAS STATE SOIL WATER CONSERVATION BOARD
CHRIS	HIGGINS	TEXAS STATE SOIL WATER CONSERVATION BOARD
CLARE	LEE	U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
D. J.	DAVIS	TECQ REGION 15
DARRELL	GUNN	CITY OF HARLINGEN
EARLENE	LAMBETH	TEXAS COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
ERNESTO	REYES	U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
JOHN	WALLACE	LAGUNA ATASCOSA NWR
JUDE	BENAVIDES	U. T. BROWNSVILLE
KAREN	FORD	WHITE HAT CREATIVE
KAY	JENKINS	TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
KEVIN	WAGNER	TEXAS WATER RESOURCE INSTITUTE
KIM	JONES	TEXAS A & M KINGSVILLE
LAURA	DE LA GARZA	TEXAS A & M / TEXAS SEA GRANT
MARY LOU	CAMPBELL	FRONTERA AUDUBON/SIERRA CLUB
NEIL	HAMAN	TX WATER DEVELOPMENT BOARD
NIKKI	DICKSON	TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
NOCHEL	E.	TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OLIVIA	GOMEZ	TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
RANDY	BLANKINSHIP	TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
RICHARD	EYSTER	TX DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
RICK	REYES	INTL BOUNDARY WATER COMMISSION
ROCKY	FREUND	NUECES RIVER AUTHORITY
ROGER	MIRANDA	TEXAS COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
STEVE	BEARDEN	VALLEY SUGAR GROWERS ASSOCIATION
TERRY	LOCKAMY	TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
WOODY	WOODROW	TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

**CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS:**

Laura De La Garza, the Arroyo Colorado (AC) Watershed Coordinator (TX Sea Grant) opened the meeting with a welcome to all participants and self-introductions were made. Laura informed the group that Steering Committee Member, Jim Chapman would no longer be able to attend Steering Committee meetings and that he requested that Mary Lou Campbell take his place representing the Sierra Club. Dr. Jude Benavides asked for any objections. No objections were

made and Mary Lou Campbell was identified as a new Steering Committee member replacing Jim Chapman.

Laura turned the meeting over to Dr. Benavides. Implementation schedule matrices were distributed summarizing the proposed plan goals, strategies/tasks, partners, potential funding, measures/indicators, and milestones. The work group leaders proceeded to review the matrices developed for the major components of the plan.

## **REVIEW OF MAJOR PLAN COMPONENTS**

Roger Miranda discussed the strategies and tasks for the **Wastewater Infrastructure** component of the plan. One broad goal is to update wastewater treatment in the Rio Grande Valley to a certain standard. He explained that there are treatment plants with 10/15 (10 mg/l BOD and 15 mg/l total suspended solids) permit limits. Others have 20/20 permits, and other have 30/90 permits. The goal is to eliminate the 30/90 permits by 2010 and 20/20 permits by 2015. He said that great strides have been made towards this end and that the approximate cost for the 2006-2010 and 2011-2015 improvements are \$36 million and \$19 million, respectively. Neil Haman of the Texas Water Development Board stated that this estimated is low and Roger acknowledged that these cost numbers can and will change.

Roger stated that two cities are proposing to treat their wastewater to 5/7 which is the highest level of treatment that can be expected. Many treatment plants going up in capacity are hooking-up colonias; therefore the amount of pollutant loading is offset by the hook-ups. Roger explained that the bench-line is the year 2000 to start tally on what is happening (in terms of loading) and what can be projected forward. Cities under contract for upgrades and what they are planning are listed in the wastewater component of the plan.

The wastewater component of the plan also identifies enhanced treatment of effluent as a strategy to reduce nutrient loading. Not all of the eighteen facilities propose some type of enhanced treatment, but most do. Seven systems are planned to be designed during 2006-2010 and 4 systems between the years 2011-2015. Roger stated that the City of La Ferial has started construction of a 4 acre wetland as part of a Nature Center and plans to convert their existing lagoons to polishing ponds. The plan also calls for regional wetlands to treat multiple sources where 50% of the pollutant load from the 18 wastewater plants at 10/15 permit limits can be mitigated by enhanced treatment projects. Roger acknowledged the plan as ambitious with two-thirds of the participating cities giving verbal agreement.

Dr. Benavides pointed out that a “pachanga” is listed as a strategy stating that the recognition of the players that meet their targets is very important. Dr. Benavides then asked for any comments to be sent to him and that this aspect of the plan has been pretty much finalized, however comments will still be received this month.

Next, Kevin Wagner presented the strategies of the **Agricultural Issues** component of the plan. He stated that they were shooting for a long-term target of getting 50% of farmland in the Valley under some type of management plan. The Texas Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Natural Resource Conservation Service would lead the effort. Another task/measure identified in

the agricultural component of the plan is an education program with the Texas Cooperative Extension as lead. The plan also proposes to further assess agriculture's contribution to pollutant loading into the Arroyo Colorado and Kevin explained that they are putting together a project proposal for additional water quality monitoring.

Farmland Preservation is also identified as a component of the plan. Kevin stated that Laura was given a contact by one of the Arroyo Partners and is to follow-up to determine program benefits.

Kevin stated that they were close to finalizing the plan and that they would re-send to the Agricultural Issues Work Group, that there are plans to update the land use layer developed by the USGS in 2000, and Dr. Wes Rosenthal was to capture the current acreage under Water Quality Management Plans for the updated model.

Next, Kay Jenkins reviewed activities of the Habitat Restoration work group and the strategies recommended by Alan Plummer and Associates, Inc. to improve habitat that benefits water quality. The strategies address both agriculture and wastewater sources. The recommended actions include:

- Conduct feasibility study, perform final engineering and construct a demonstration wetland in sub-basin 5 at Las Palomas Wildlife Management Area for treating wastewater from Weslaco wastewater treatment plant (WWTP).
- Conduct feasibility study for the development of a regional collective wetland treatment system in sub-basin 5 using Weslaco wastewater combined with area storm water runoff.
- Conduct feasibility study, final engineering and construction of a wetland in sub-basin 4 or 5 for combined treatment of wastewater from Donna and Weslaco WWTP.
- Conduct feasibility study, final engineering and construction of a wetland in sub-basin 3 for combined treatment of wastewater from San Juan and Pharr WWTP.
- Conduct feasibility study, final engineering and construction of a wetland in sub-basin 8 for combined treatment of wastewater from Harlingen 1 and 2 WWTP.
- Conduct feasibility study, final engineering and construction of a wetland in sub-basin 8 for combined treatment of San Benito and Military Hwy WSC effluent.
- Conduct feasibility study, final engineering and construction of collective treatment system in sub-basin 5 of Progresso WWTP flows, colonias, irrigation return flows, and agricultural runoff through the installation of a series of wetland cells in a drainage ditch.
- Conduct feasibility study, final engineering, and construction of extended detention shallow wetlands in sub-basin 9 for industrial and agricultural runoff from area east of Arroyo Colorado.
- Conduct feasibility study, final engineering, and construction of series of wetlands in drainages in sub-basin 6 for agricultural runoff from area south of Arroyo Colorado.
- Construct vegetated filter strips in sub-basin 3 to treat agriculture irrigation return flow and runoff.
- Conduct feasibility study for modifying the drainage channels in sub-basin 3 to maintain moist soils to sustain wetland plants for treatment of agricultural irrigation return flows and agricultural runoff.

It was stated that the bank stabilization projects would require more studies so not to impact the flood zone and that all recommendations did something to reduce loading; cannot double loading without enhanced treatment.

Amado Salinas (Manager, Military Highway Water Supply Corporation, (MHWSC)) reminded the group that 30-35 years ago, the now TCEQ, wanted flows from wastewater treatment plant to go into the Arroyo Colorado instead of the Rio Grande and back then they did not worry about water quality. Now 30/90 permits are going to 10/15 permits and that they might need to go to reuse. He stated that it is a matter of economics and if what we want to do is produce drinking water out of the WWTPs, someone must pay; “what you are doing is imposing rate effects on everyone in the Valley and something needs to be done”.

Roger Miranda said that he has been working in the Valley a long time and has seen tremendous improvement in wastewater treatment, and now, non-treated sewer. The Texas Water Development Board and MHWSC have hooked-up more than a 1,000 residents. Roger reminded the group that this is a voluntary plan and not the TCEQ who gets the benefits, but that valley residents do.

Laura De La Garza next reviewed the recommended measures identified by the Education and Outreach (E&O) Work Group. The basic goal is to increase awareness of the water quality issues associated with the Arroyo Colorado. The first task is to complete the market survey and short-term promotion of the watershed protection plan. From this information, a long-term plan will be developed which will outline specific actions. Other proposed education and outreach activities include:

- Initiate storm drain marking project and translate to other participating cities.
- Initiate Texas Watch Volunteer Monitoring on the Arroyo Colorado.
- Publish and distribute Arroyo Colorado Watershed Curriculum.
- Produce an educational video.
- “You Dump It, You Drink It” and “Up to You” campaigns.

Randy Blankinship asked the E&O work group to remind target audiences, including the general public, to support the effort of farmers and groups working on habitat restoration and conservation.

## **PRESENTATION BY KAREN FORD – BRANDING OF CAMPAIGN**

Next, the meeting was turned-over to Karen Ford of White Hat Consultants. She stated that she has worked 15 years for the public good and worked on the “You dump it. You drink it.”, “Rios Limpios”, and the “Up to You” campaigns, and today she was here to help brand the Arroyo Colorado campaign. Karen told the group that her firm and partners were following the “Getting in Step” social marketing program and that they were doing research, including one-on-one interviews with stakeholders. Very good information was received from those interviews and next week, they would begin focus group meetings with farmers, businessman, Chambers of Commerce, and the Valley Sportsman’s Club.

Karen described other work they are doing for the Arroyo Colorado Partnership which included short-term promotion with influencers, development of a stakeholder brochure and a pledge card to take action, and looking at the economic relationships of the project. She explained that she is here today to test logos and tag lines for the watershed protection effort and the Partners are the creative respondents. Karen distributed boards showing different designs and tag lines, and note sheets. She asked that there be no initial dialogue while she passed around the different designs and asked that notes be written down for later discussion.

A stakeholder reminded us that even in Harlingen, where the Arroyo Colorado runs through the middle, many people don't even know it as the Arroyo Colorado.

A short break was taken and upon return Karen asked that the note sheets be turned in. Next there was a discussion on what people liked and disliked about the different logos. A stakeholder stated that there needed to be something people could relate to like fish and birds. A Kingfisher and Osprey were recommended and to forget the flower and sun designs. A lively discussion ensued and many good recommendations noted. During the discussion a stakeholder said that we need to prepare the constituents that it is going to cost money to improve the Arroyo Colorado, that cities are raising bills and that the people need to know why. Karen concluded the branding part of the meeting stating that they would revise at least a couple of designs and would test them at the focus group meetings.

## **PRESENTATION BY BILL NORRIS – ARROYO COLORADO AERATION STRUCTURES**

Bill Norris of NRS Consulting Engineers began his presentation by passing out pictures of the type of aeration structures they were talking about constructing. Four pictures showed an existing structure located on the Arroyo Colorado south of Donna, Texas. Rock rip-rap had been placed in the water that drops water about one foot. Bill said knowing the Arroyo Colorado is lacking of oxygen, anything that adds oxygen is a plus.

Bill said that the proposed aerations project has been going on for about 9 years by a group of civic leaders from Harlingen, including members of the Valley Sportsmen Club, and that NRS Consulting Engineers have not charged for any of their services. The project has the initial approval from the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) and the structures will not impact flooding. Concerns were raised because people did not get a chance to comment on the permit required by the Army Corps of Engineers. Bill said that they next needed final approval from the IBWC and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Final approval has been received from the Texas Historical Commission.

Norris explained that they were trying to keep it simple, to use the rock rip-rap to raise the stream one foot with a one foot drop in water and that the water would stay within the normal banks. The project promoters were looking for the blessings to go forward, they were not looking for funds, all engineering services were voluntary, and existing concrete pieces from torn-up roads would be used in the installation. Norris said that they were looking to achieve aeration and aesthetics. At one time, the structures were planned for sedimentation however they found that they would do very little sediment control for the Port of Harlingen.

Roger Miranda asked if the aeration structures would impede navigation. Norris replied yes but that one could portage a canoe or kayak. A member suggested putting in chutes. Costs were mentioned as an issue. Randy Blankinship asked about the movement of aquatic organisms and that that was probably the larger concern. He stated that a chute would address that concern.

A member asked if the purpose was to create a pool. Bill Norris replied no, that the structures would extend straight across along 60 feet with a 20 foot approach, extend 40 feet, and that a chute was not a big deal. John Wallace, USFWS, asked where the design came from. Bill said there was no design, that there is literature out there showing how to create fish habitat and aerate water. Kay Jenkins asked what the purpose is. Bill said aesthetics, that the sound of rushing water is pleasing to the eyes and ears. Mary Lou Campbell said that the Valley Sportsman did it to improve fishing. Ernesto Reyes asked how much oxygen would be added, that it could not be bad if it added some oxygen, and agreed that a gap is needed. He recommended consulting with recreationalist. Laura asked if the group wanted a field trip. The members responded with a yes.

There were additional discussions concerning the need to endorse such a project. A couple of members said they appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on the aeration structure project. A concern expressed was that this project would distract from other priority plan projects. Bill Norris said that this project would not take resources away, that the structures would benefit the Arroyo Colorado, the rock rip-rap would be placed and not just dumped, and that the structure would allow flow to move through the rocks, that it was not a solid structure.

Randy asked if dissolved oxygen varied along the stream. Roger said yes and depending where you are, DO ranged between 5-6 mg/l, that this was not hard to model with the right model. Randy asked what the next step is. Dr. Benavides said that an email would be sent to the Steering Committee asking if this project should be formally accepted as part of the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection.

## **AVAILABLE GRANTS DISCUSSION**

Laura announced the availability of two grants:

- Natural Resources Conservation Service, Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG), FY 2006, proposal due March 20, 2006.
- Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6, Regional Geographic Initiative (RGI), proposal due February 24, 2006.

The Sustainable Agronomic Education Association expressed interest in partnering with the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership in applying for the CIG to test agricultural BMPs. Dr. Benavides asked if the group had any objections. No objections were made.

Dr. Benavides next discussed the RGI grant and said that he would take the lead on that grant if no one objected. No objections made.

## **CLOSING COMMENTS**

Laura passed around a copy of the new bi-lingual brochure titled, "Get to Know the Arroyo Colorado", "Conozca al Arroyo Colorado", for review and approval to distribute. The brochure was approved by the committee.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.