

Arroyo Colorado Steering Committee/Partnership Meeting

Texas A&M Kingsville, Citrus Center

Rio Red Classroom

312 N. International Blvd, Weslaco, Texas 78596

October 25, 2007

4:30 pm-7:00 pm

MEETING SUMMARY

ATTENDANCE:

Rocky Freund – Nueces River Authority
Tony Reisinger – Texas Sea Grant Extension
Lee Clapp – TAMU Kingsville
Joe Hinojosa – Brownsville/LRGV TPDES Storm Water Task Force
Rick Reyes – US International Boundary and Water Commission
Eric Ellman – Los Caminos del Rio
Brianna Carlson – TPWD for Mark Lingo
Lisa Williams – Texas Nature Conservancy
Ernesto Reyes – US Fish and Wildlife Service
Neil Haman – Harlingen Waterworks System/Arroyo Resident
Ronnie Ramirez – TSSWCB for Andy Garza
Jim Tabak – Valley Land Fund
Laura De La Garza – TWRI
Dr. Jude Benavides - UTB

Conference Call Participants:

Cecilia Wagner – TWRI
Cory Horan – TCE
Clare Lee – USFWS for John Wallace
Sky Lewey - Nueces River Authority

5:00 Welcome and Introductions.....Dr. Jude Benavides, Chairman

- Thanks to City of Brownsville for providing the snacks and refreshments
- Introduce Amy Rangel, Grant Writer/Data Manager – Bio
- Eric Ellman, Executive Director of Los Caminos del Rio
Opportunity to create a whitewater training park on Arroyo Colorado south of Mercedes – there is a 3-5’ waterfall on the Arroyo at that location. The closest such training is available is Brownsville. Mr. Ellman had a letter that he sent that proposed this and had more detail. Laura will send the letter in the next bi-weekly update. Benefit to the Partnership is that this site would be an ideal demonstration site & a pull for recreational activities.

5:10 Valley Land Fund (VLF) Presentation.....James “Jim” Tabak, VLF

James “Jim” Tabak – Valley Land Fund

Mr. Tabak is a volunteer Board Member of the Valley Land Fund. He is a financial planner with a background in urban planning. Mr. Tabak provided information on the upcoming

photo contest and invited group to become a member of the Valley Land Fund. He also presented a brief overview of the Valley Land Fund and its association with the Arroyo Colorado Partnership:

What the partnership is doing with water – they are doing with land. They currently hold ~11,000 ac with the desire to grow (up into Corpus Christ). They are identifying resources as a private organization and because they are private – they possibly have access to resources that we as a public group do not have. Big task is identifying land that would be suitable for easements for wildlife thoroughfare, habitat, etc. Valley Land Fund are working with a group called The Conservation Fund on a “Green Infrastructure Approach” to identify which lands should be set aside and which lands need/should be developed and how to incorporate green space within the developed lands. For instance, could the Arroyo become a major thoroughfare for wildlife to pick up what we lose other places? The potential for partnership between the Arroyo Partnership and the Valley Land Fund is great.

5:20 New Steering Committee Member NominatedDr. Jude Benavides, Chairman

- Nominated Mr. Jim Tabak as a new Steering Committee member. There were no objections. Mr. Tabak is now a steering committee member.
- Wastewater Infrastructure Work Group nominated Dr. Lee Clapp and Laura De La Garza as work group leaders. No objections.

5:25 Highlights of TAMUK Watershed Conference.... Joe Hinojosa, Storm Water Task Force

The MS4 permit is an unfunded mandate requiring public and civic involvement. Each city will have an individual permit. February 2, 2008 is the permit deadline. The LRGV TPSES Storm Water Task Force provides an opportunity for the smaller communities to come together. The October 17-19 conference was very informative with about 160 people in attendance.

5:35 Work Group Updates:

Agricultural Issues Ronnie Ramirez, TSSWCB

- Arroyo Ag Assessment:
 - kickoff meeting held in July
 - Xavier (Dr. Enciso) have identified 6 testing sites.
 - The QAPP is currently at TSSWCB and required a few minor changes. Once these changes are incorporated - it will go to EPA for approval
 - Upon approval of the QAPP, the LULC map will be updated and monitoring and evaluation activities will commence
- SWAT Model Simulation of the AC Watershed
 - Just started as the contract was signed and approved on July 26.
 - QAPP was submitted to TSSWCB and is currently awaiting approval at EPA.
 - A major portion of the data assembly is complete and we are waiting on QAPP approval to finalize data collection, set up, calibrate and validate the model.
- Education of BMPs in the AC Watershed
 - Education programs continue: ~215 producers were reached during the last quarter, which brought the total number of individuals who have attended education programs through this project to 4,155.

- We kicked off the soil testing campaign (319 money pays for soil testing)
- Other activities
 - A proposal to provide programs on pesticide best management practices and integrated pest management practices was developed and submitted to Coastal Management Program.
- Cost Share/WQMP program status
 - Developing/Implementing WQMPs (almost halfway through the funds allocated)

Habitat IssuesDr. Kim Jones, TAMUK
Tony Reisinger, Texas Sea Grant

- 2 CMP Grant Submissions:
 - TWRI/ACWPP submitted proposal for Rio Hondo outreach and education center. Plan to include a wetland to treat some of the wastewater. (James Matz and partners are very interested in having a planning/outreach effort so even if funding does not come through, it still might be possible to have the community planning effort).
 - TAMUK submitted proposal for regional treatment constructed wetlands planning and site suitability evaluations
- Plans for more site evaluations; West side of Hwy 77 targets for additional submissions - La Feria Sand Pit location; other sites in non-tidal areas near Arroyo
- Dr. Kim Jones is using one PhD student (Martin Alcala) to evaluate the GIS database and continue to develop some workplans for wetland mapping and site evaluation

Education and Outreach.....Laura De La Garza, TWRI

- Physical Model Delivered. Draft Demonstration Script developed and was distributed to Steering Committee for comment. This model was funded by Clean Rivers Program through Nueces River Authority (NRA) and is owned by NRA. It is on permanent loan to Partnership as long as the model is used for outreach/education. The model will be housed at UTB.
- A Draft Resolution was distributed. Comments were requested. One comment was received – in the first line, instead of “world class” – say “major”.
- VISTA grant – Need to secure funds, \$10,000 to actually propose and acquire students. Therefore, we decided to delay seeking until Partnership is further established
- Upcoming Events –
 - Project Rio Reforestation
 - Spooky Science Group, Estero Llano Grande
 - Harlingen Birding Festival, Coastal Expo, Ocelot Festival

Wastewater Infrastructure.....Laura De La Garza, TWRI

- David Garza of the City of Pharr asked that we encourage the TCEQ to think out of the box and allow treated wastewater to be discharged into irrigation canals.
- The group was reminded that TCEQ has not given up on a TMDL for the AC and that it is still recourse.
- Four city wetland projects are progressing. Cities were required to add another discharge outfall that would go into the enhanced treatment wetlands. Still awaiting final permit. Wetlands are being designed. Laura had informed the group that the City of Mercedes had withdrawn from project but they are still pursuing possibility. Mercedes had to

permit a new outfall so there have been issues with that. San Juan is very excited about his project and the potential for educational opportunities.

- Dr. Clapp and Laura will review permit commitments with the cities. Dr. Clapp and Laura will schedule one-on-one meetings as this seems to be the most productive method to obtain updates. The progress will be documented, needs identified and commitments revised.
- Cities are doing additional monitoring of effluent (nitrates, phosphates, TKN) to reduce uncertainty of models. We are hoping to have this available as a database on our Web site so we can better track loading from these point discharges.
- Cities are working to improve the quality of water discharged, but we need to be thinking about new entities/permits and consider allowances for future growth. This may be a hard issue to tackle – one way, may be to do through CCN/wastewater ETJ.
- Possible thesis project for Dr. Clapp's new PhD student is the quantitative assessment of NPS pollution migration resulting from colonia hook-up efforts.
- Also want to have a field trip to Victoria (a wetland is there that CH2MHill developed)
- Someone asked who had jurisdiction in regards to treating wastewater. Laura said that the cities do for the most part and that the boundaries are identified through Certificates of Conveyance and Necessity (CCNs). There are county rules regarding septic systems.

6:00 Long-Term Sustainability of PartnershipDr. Jude Benavides, Chairman

- Long-term sustainability is key!
 - Umbrella under existing organization – benefits and liabilities
 - Potential umbrella organizations: LRGVDC
 - James Matz said Valley Proud does not have the structure and resources to take this project on. He recommends that we go through the LRGVDC. That was the path his organization took.
 - The LRGVDC may be the best possibility as others have formed under them.
 - Ken Jones could not make the meeting but is still interested in the prospect. Any objections to pursuing this option?
 - Jim Tabak said that the Valley Land Fund is not willing to take on the liabilities. But that they are very interested in partnering on projects because it is a way to address water quality and land issues.
 - Laura & Jude will set up a meeting with Ken Jones to discuss future with LRGVDC and issues there.
 - Or establish our own 501(c) 3
 - Mr. Tabak discussed funding options
 - Formation process was briefly discussed.
 - Cory asked if anyone has a preference to establish own or go under a parent group? It was said the SC really does not know enough at this point to make the decision.
 - The SC will need to review the self sustainability document to form an opinion.
 - TCEQ was pleased to see that this was brought up so early in the contract period.
 - Are there examples of similar watershed groups in Texas that have become self-sustaining? Yes, Cory knew of one group, which pursued the option of becoming a 501(c)(3) and even got the legal help necessary, but the process failed.
 - Make sure that we keep an open mind of how we can raise revenue for our sustainability. In other words, think outside of the box.

- Do we need a special task group meeting to research/pursue this goal.
 - Jude Benavides
 - Eric Ellman
 - Laura De La Garza
 - Jim Tabak
 - Cecilia Wagner

6:35 Discuss/Prioritize Future Funding Needs and Sources..... Cecilia Wagner, TWRI

- 3 CMP Proposals submitted
 - Education and Outreach Center in Rio Hondo, TX
 - Pesticide Best Management Practices/Integrated Pest Management
 - Wetland Site Suitability Study – TAMUK/UTB
- TWRI led the effort/submittal on 2 of these grants, but in the future, until the Partnership becomes a stand alone group or falls under some sort of umbrella group, it would be ideal for the partnership to assist other lead organizations such as cities/counties, etc.
- Will continue to solicit SC approval for drafting letters of support (LOS) and additional individual LOS may be asked of SC members
- Review Grants Table
 - NAWCA Grant is possibility.
 - Regional Facility Planning Grant through TWDB
 - Who should be the lead on this type of grant? Pharr and McAllen are interested in possibly working together to develop a constructed wetland system. Amado Salinas with Military Highway Water Supply may be a good candidate in a partnership to study the potential for regional wastewater treatment. Could Ken Jones – LRGVDC lead the effort? Laura and Lee will be meeting with LRGVDC.
- Other Funding Options
 - Wetlands Mitigation Banking
 - Port of Brownsville were involved in wetland mitigation
 - Potential for wetland mitigation banking will be further investigated

6:55 Other BusinessLaura De La Garza, TWRI

- Website is almost finished. The new site is at the same address: <http://www.arroyocolorado.org>. Let us know your thoughts
- How to handle vendors on a fair and equitable basis? Laura gets occasional solicitation. Should we invite some to present to group?
 - Laura will send their information to the Steering Committee and we can then evaluate their legitimacy and decide if they should be demonstrated.
- An offer by EcoTex, Inc and Jet Streamer Technology to demo a technology in the Arroyo at no cost.
 - Potentially can handle 11 million gallons/day
 - Technology designed to increase DO

Next meeting scheduled for January 24, 2007

7:00 Adjourn.....Laura De La Garza, TWRI