

Public Participation Plan for Brownsville Resaca Watershed-Based Planning



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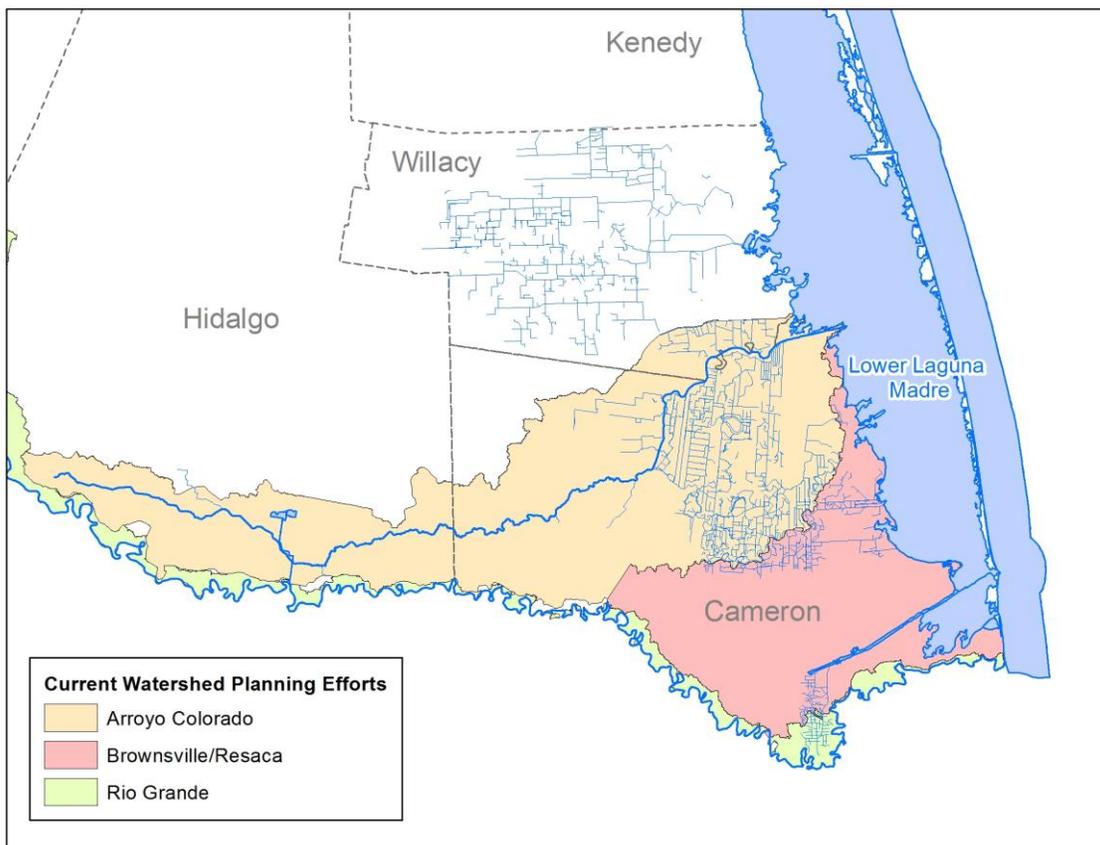
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Project Overview

The Brownsville Resaca watershed is the area south of the Arroyo Colorado watershed and north of the Rio Grande watershed. The Brownsville Resaca contributes approximately 25 percent of the freshwater inflows to the Lower Laguna Madre and is located almost completely within Cameron County with a small portion extending into Willacy County (Figure 1). This watershed includes the City of Brownsville, Port Isabel, Laguna Vista, Bayview, Los Fresnos, Rancho Viejo, La Paloma as well as numerous colonias in the rural parts of the watershed. This watershed has a population of approximately 350,000 and is expected to increase over the next 20 years. Throughout the watershed, there are numerous Resacas that were formed by the meandering Rio Grande River and give the watershed its name. This watershed contributes approximately 25% of the freshwater into the Lower Laguna Madre primarily through the Brownsville Ship Channel.

Figure 1: Map of Lower Rio Grande Valley watershed planning efforts



1.2 Water Quality Concerns and Impairments

The Brownsville Resaca watershed mostly flows into the Lower Laguna Madre Bay assessment unit (AU) 2491_03 which has a concern for low dissolved oxygen levels. The Lower Laguna Madre AU directly north of the area that the Arroyo Colorado flows into is impaired for low DO and bacteria. The Brownsville/Resaca watershed includes several TCEQ classified segments: Brownsville Ship Channel (2494), Port Isabel Fishing Harbor (2494A), drainage ditches draining directly to the Lower Laguna Madre (2491A), and South Bay (2493). The Brownsville Ship Channel and Port Isabel Fishing Harbor are currently listed as having bacteria impairments. Before the amount of bacteria that contributes to the impairment in the Brownsville Ship Channel and eventually the Lower Laguna Madre can be addressed, potential causes and sources must first be determined.

1.3 Initial Project:

The initial project is being financed through a Clean Water Act Section 319(h) grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). The Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI) is the local lead with the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) and the Texas Institute for Applied Environmental Research (TIAER) assisting with various tasks. All three agencies are providing 40% matching funds for the project.

Limited data has been collected to assess the watershed's impairments, concerns, and determining the contributing sources for these impairments. There is a lack of water quality data collection regarding the Resacas (ancient distributary channels of the Rio Grande River).

Information and partnerships from this project will provide the foundation for future development of a watershed-based plan. One goal of this project is to identify existing data and data gaps to characterize the hydrologic, land use, and water quality circumstances in the watershed. This characterization is needed to help identify a path forward in selecting an analytical method for estimating pollutant loads. The ultimate goal of this project is also to engage, educate, and solicit input from stakeholders on what they believe the goals, objectives, and indicators should be for addressing the water quality impairments and concerns.

Watershed characterization will start by collecting existing data from various sources, identifying the causes of water quality impairments and issues, identifying of sources of pollution, quantifying pollutant loadings from these sources, and developing an inventory of the data from the watershed. This data will be analyzed to identify indicator parameters that can be used to assess current conditions and measure progress toward meeting water quality goals. A conceptual model will be developed to show the linkage between the water quality problems and sources of impairments. This analysis will include a spatial and temporal exploration of water quality problems and source(s) of pollution in the watershed. Overall, identification and analysis of existing data will assist in determining data gaps and what data needs to be collected. Contingent upon the results of the analysis, water quality monitoring will be conducted in an effort to minimize data gaps that exist. Additionally, new data collected under this project and a subsequent project will drive the selection of the analytical method that will be used for estimating pollutant loads which will be identified through this project. A report providing descriptions for all of the above will be developed and included in the Final Report.

Stakeholders will be engaged to provide the local input needed to identify goals, objectives, and indicators that will help in the watershed planning process. The project team will identify and meet with key individuals to inform them of the water quality issues and solicit their input on the most appropriate methods for proceeding. Public stakeholder meetings will be held in an effort to develop and refine goals that will meet the water quality standards; identify issues and concerns of the stakeholders; solicit input on major deliverables; and gain public acceptance of the project. Further, project information will be disseminated through public outreach and educational opportunities as well as through media sources, events, and a project website.

1.4 Public Participation Plan (PPP) Purpose

This PPP has several important purposes for the project. It identifies key stakeholders in the watershed and provides a format for their participation in the Watershed Characterization process. The PPP also helps raise public awareness and outreach for the project. Finally, it develops a structure for continued input and interaction with the public and stakeholders for this project.

1.5 Project Time Frame

The timeframe for this project is from February 2014 through December 2016. The table below is a draft timeline of some major events during the first stage of the watershed-planning process. Stakeholders will be sent updates to the timeline as needed. Following the initial stakeholder meeting future meeting dates, locations, and potential topics will be determined by stakeholders.

October 2014	Data Acquisition began
February 2015	1 st Stakeholder meeting planned
July 2015	Begin Monthly Monitoring
September 2015	Possible presentation of initial data review results to stakeholders
November 2015	Watershed Stewards Workshop
January 2015 – December 2016	Additional stakeholder meetings will be planned during this period.
October 2016	Draft Partnership Coordination Report
November 2016	Stakeholders to decide by this date regarding the next steps to be taken for the project.
December 2016	Initial Data Review Project Ends

2.0 Lead Agencies Roles & Responsibilities

2.1 Stakeholder Facilitation

TWRI & UTB will work with Cameron Co. and the Cities of San Benito, Los Fresnos, Bayview, Laguna Vista, Port Isabel and Brownsville to recruit a diverse group of stakeholders, both ideologically and geographically throughout the watershed, that are representative of the people that live in the watershed and have an interest in improving the water quality. TWRI will work with previous stakeholder committees such as the Cameron County Coastal Cities Task Force (Coastal Task Force) and the Lower Rio Grande Valley Stormwater Task Force (Task Force) that have been engaged in the development of stormwater management practices. The Coastal Task Force consists of cities that are not required to have stormwater permits but have been working to develop plans to deal with stormwater management. The Task Force consists of cities and entities that are required to have a stormwater permit. Cameron County and the City of Brownsville are both members of the Task Force. TWRI will also engage the Irrigation districts, Drainage Districts and Agricultural producers in the watershed. The project team will select stakeholders from existing groups as well additional stakeholders that have roles and interest in the watershed.

TWRI with the assistance of UTB, the City of Brownsville and Cameron County will facilitate the stakeholder meetings and activities. TWRI's Project Manager will function as the facilitator and primary point of contact with the stakeholder group. The TWRI Project Manager, with the assistance of UTB, the City of Brownsville and Cameron County, will set up meetings, create awareness about the project throughout the community, and maintain working relationships with stakeholders.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

TIAER with the assistance from UTB and TWRI will be responsible for data collection and analysis to include:

- Assemble existing data and information
- Analyze existing data and information
- Identify additional data collection needs
- Identify analytical method for estimating pollutant loads
- Watershed Characterization – Data Evaluation Report
- Water Quality monitoring – UTB with the assistance of TWRI will conduct monthly monitoring at 2 locations for 24 months. The locations will be identified with stakeholder input

2.3 Report Writing

TIAER with assistance from UTB and TWRI and input from the Stakeholder Group will write the Watershed Characterization and Water Quality Monitoring Reports. The reports will be written in such a manner that all stakeholders will easily be able to understand the information and be able to use the reports in order to make decisions regarding next steps and management measures. The Project Report

will satisfy portions of the EPA's 9 Elements of Watershed-Based Plans, as laid out in EPA's, "[Handbook for Developing Watershed Plans to Restore and Protect Our Waters](#)".

This project should complete Element A and address large portions of Element B for the impaired watershed area with regard to estimating source loadings and potential load reductions based on BMP implementation. Using information developed through this project, the stakeholders will decide the next steps to take in the watershed planning process and whether they want to develop a full Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) or pursue a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and associated Implementation Plan (I-Plan) to address water quality concerns and pollutant loadings in the watershed.

3.0 Project Partners

3.1 Partners List

TWRI (Lead Agency)

UTB (Assists with Stakeholder Group Facilitation and Technical Assistance)

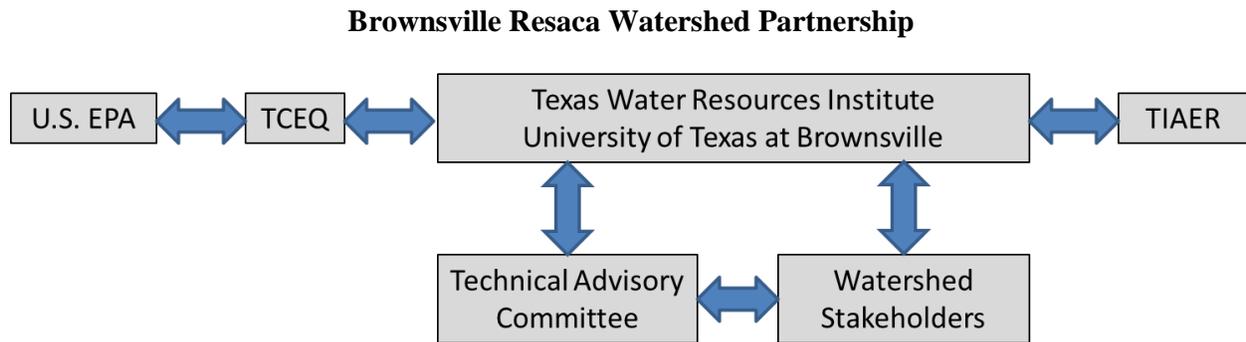
TIAER (Technical Assistance Only)

TCEQ

Texas State and Soil Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB)

EPA3.2 Project Organization Chart

The Brownsville Resaca Watershed Stakeholder Group is a coalition of organizations and stakeholders committed to restoring and protecting the aquatic resources of the Brownsville Resaca Watershed and Lower Laguna Madre. The Stakeholder Group consists of funding agencies, project partners, stakeholders and technical advisors as outlined below.



3.3 Partners Roles & Responsibilities

All partners involved agree to cooperate and work beside all other agencies to reach the goals of the project. Each partner should work to accomplish each responsibility it took upon itself to assure the success of the project.

3.4 Partners Communication Protocol

Individuals are not permitted to speak on behalf of the Watershed Partnership or Stakeholder Committee as a whole unless authorized by the Partnership or Committee to do so. Members of the Partnership do not speak for TWRI, UTB, TIAER, TCEQ, TSSWCB, or other Partnership members. If a Partnership/Committee spokesperson is needed, they will be selected by the Partnership.

An open line of communication will exist between members of the Partnership and the TWRI Project Manager. In order to keep partners informed, all press releases, public notices, and any media communications that may relate to the project will be distributed electronically and placed on the project webpage.

4.0 Watershed Stakeholder Group

4.1 Stakeholder Group Structure

All stakeholders involved in the planning process will fall under the structure of the Watershed Partnership. Within the Watershed Partnership there will be two types of committees with the following roles and responsibilities. Since this is the initial watershed planning phase of WBP development, a Steering Committee and Work Groups will not be needed during this project. Steering Committees and Work Groups will be added for future projects (as needed) for development of a WBP.

- Stakeholders Committee: Stakeholders will participate in meetings and contribute information and ideas to be considered for the project.
- Technical Advisory Group: A Technical Advisory Group consisting of state and federal agencies that specialize in natural resources will provide guidance to the Stakeholder Group.

4.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Each Stakeholder Group member should attend meetings and is expected to participate fully in all group deliberations. Members will offer insights, suggestions, and concerns from a community, environmental, or public interest perspective. Committee members are expected to work together to achieve a consensus. The decision making process is further described in Section 4.8.

4.3 Potential Agencies involved as Stakeholders

Agencies and organizations that are considered potential stakeholders are listed below.

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Texas Water Resources Institute
Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership
Cameron County
City of Brownsville
City of Port Isabel
City of Bayview
City of Los Fresnos
City of San Benito
Port of Brownsville
Brownsville Public Utilities Board
Brownsville Chamber of Commerce
Port Isabel Chamber of Commerce
Bayview Chamber of Commerce
Los Fresnos Chamber of Commerce
San Benito Chamber of Commerce
Brownsville Independent School District
Port Isabel Independent School District
Los Fresnos Independent School District
San Benito Independent School District

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Texas Department of Transportation
Texas AgriLife Extension Service
Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board
Sierra Club – Rio Grande Valley Chapter
Keep Brownsville Beautiful
Cameron County Texas Master Naturalists
Cameron County Master Gardeners
University of Texas at Brownsville
University of Texas Pan American Coastal Studies Lab
Texas A&M-Kingsville

4.4 Potential Citizens (by interest type) involved as Stakeholders

The project partners have identified major land uses and business types in the watershed for inclusion in the stakeholder process as listed below.

Rural landowners and ranchers
City Residents
Local Land Developers
Local Homebuilders
Local Home Owners Associations
Local Engineering Associations/Local Engineering Consultants
Major Business Owners (represented by area Chamber of Commerce)

4.5 Stakeholder Membership Selection

Stakeholders are defined as those who make and implement decisions, those who are affected by decisions made or those who have the ability to assist with the implementation of decisions.

Anyone who falls within these broad categories or has an interest in improving water quality within the Brownsville Resaca watershed can become a stakeholder in the Watershed Partnership. The Stakeholder Committee will be composed of representatives from a diversity of interests and geographic locations in the watershed. The members represent stakeholder groups who will be most affected by this project. Based on the interest groups and organizations listed in Sections 4.3 and 4.4, the Project Team has identified a list of potential stakeholders. Solicitation and recruitment of Stakeholder Committee members to promote an even geographical and topical representation within the watershed will be based on 3 methods: 1) consultation with the TCEQ, TWRI, Cameron County and the Cities of San Benito, Los Fresnos, Bayview, Laguna Vista, Port Isabel and Brownsville and local and regional governments, 2) meetings with various stakeholder interest groups and individuals including the Port of Brownsville, and 3) self-nomination or requests by various stakeholder interest groups or individuals.

4.5.1 Replacements and Additions

The Stakeholder Committee may add new members if (1) a member is unable to continue serving and a vacancy is created or (2) important stakeholder interests are identified that are not represented by the existing membership.

4.5.2 Alternates

Members unable to attend Stakeholder Committee meetings (an absentee) may send an alternate. Absentees may also provide input via another committee member or send input via the TWRI Project Manager, as the facilitator for these meetings. The facilitator will present such information to the committee.

4.5.3 Absences

All Stakeholder Committee members agree to make a good faith effort to attend all meetings. However, the members recognize that situations may arise necessitating the absence of a member. Please notify the facilitator of planned absences or alternates attending for your interest group.

4.6 Goals Development

The Brownsville Resaca Watershed Partnership will assist with developing the goals, mission statement and vision for the project. The Partnership will also identify and prioritize programs and practices to achieve the goals. The stakeholders are ultimately responsible for the implementation of the project. The ultimate goal of this project is to describe relevant watershed characteristics; identify the causes and sources of water quality impairments and issues; and estimate pollutant loadings from these sources in order to meet water to meet water quality standards for pollutants that threaten or impair the physical, chemical, or biological integrity of the watershed. The goals for this project will be to lay the groundwork for selected elements of a WBP.

4.7 Decision Making

The Stakeholder Committee is the decision making body for the Partnership. The Stakeholder Committee will strive for consensus when making decisions and recommendations. Consensus is defined as everyone being able to live with the decisions being made that will have an impact on the watershed. It is understood that to reach a consensus in such a diverse group of stakeholders will require compromise and negotiation from the project partners.

4.7.1 Stakeholder Input

Topics, ideas, and opinions of stakeholders regarding the characterization of the watershed will be welcomed at stakeholder meetings. Additionally, TWRI will have an open door policy to information, opinions and feedback from stakeholders throughout the project. However, stakeholders are encouraged to provide constructive input during meetings providing information for the benefit of the Partnership as a whole.

4.8 Meetings

4.8.1 Ground Rules

All meetings are open to the public and all interested stakeholders are encouraged and welcome to participate. Participants should be able to freely express their opinions at the meeting, to get all the viewpoints onto the table. A series of guest speakers, who are experts in certain areas of the project, will be invited to present and provide information at some of the meetings to ensure all participants are fully informed on relevant topics involving the project.

4.8.2 Frequency

The Stakeholder Committee meetings will occur at least twice a year throughout the project. Meeting times will be set in an effort to accommodate the attendance of all Committee members. The TWRI Project Manager will notify members of the Stakeholder Committee of meetings dates and times.

4.8.3 Materials Distribution

TWRI as the lead agency with assistance from UTB will be responsible for the creation of documents and paperwork relevant to the project. TWRI will be responsible for the distribution of materials via email and United States Postal Service (USPS). Electronic or email will be used preferentially, although if requested, participants will receive documents via USPS. TWRI will be responsible for posting the materials to the project webpage. The project webpage is located at this address:

<http://arroyocolorado.org/brownsville-resaca-watershed-characterization/>. Materials will include meeting agendas, education materials and PowerPoint presentation handouts to be distributed prior to each meeting and meeting summaries to be distributed following each meeting.

Distribution will occur via mail (as requested), email and the project webpage. To encourage equal sharing of information, materials will be made available to any interested party or stakeholder that wishes to receive the materials. Those who wish to distribute materials to the Stakeholder Committee will ask the TWRI Project Manager to do so on their behalf. The Partnership will work to establish a partnership with the City of Brownsville and Cameron County that would allow them to post a link to the Partnership's webpage on their respective websites.

All meeting minutes will be documented and posted on the project webpage. The documentation of topics, ideas and opinions discussed at meetings will allow stakeholders to see how their involvement has affected the planning process over time.

4.8.4 Meeting Notifications

Future meeting dates will be discussed at each stakeholder meeting to give stakeholders an opportunity to provide input on scheduling. Meeting notifications will be sent out at least two weeks prior to the meeting date to ensure all stakeholders and citizens are aware and had appropriate notice. Notification methods will include:

- Email
- Letters (to stakeholders that do not use email)
- Phone calls to Committee Members
- Project Web Page
- Media

4.9 Media Protocol

The TWRI Project Manager and UTB Professor, Dr. Jude Benavides, will be responsible for communications with the media.

If Partnership or Stakeholder Committee members have an issue regarding the watershed planning process, they will voice their concerns to the TWRI Project Manager instead of exploiting media outlets.

5.0 Public Outreach and Education

An outreach and education campaign will be initiated to create public awareness for the Watershed Planning Project. A variety of methods will be utilized to distribute information about the project and ways in which individuals can become involved. The program will educate citizens about local water quality issues, NPS pollution, watershed functions, and how individual actions can have an effect on local water quality.

TWRI and the and the Cities of San Benito, Los Fresnos, Bayview, Laguna Vista, Port Isabel Brownsville and Cameron Co. as project partners, will work closely with stakeholders to communicate project goals, activities and findings to ensure that decision-making regarding the waterbody is stakeholder-driven. To communicate project goals, activities, results and accomplishments to affected parties, TWRI and UTB will facilitate public stakeholder meetings. Educational efforts will also occur with affected city councils (San Benito, Los Fresnos, Bayview, Laguna Vista, Port Isabel and Brownsville) and Cameron County commissioners' court and all irrigation district managers as well any AG producers in the watershed. The Project Team will develop and disseminate educational materials to watershed stakeholders through methods listed below.

1. Project Webpage (TWRI responsibility)
2. Electronic mail (TWRI responsibility)
3. Direct mail (TWRI responsibility)
4. Local Newspapers (TWRI responsibility)
5. Public notices (TWRI responsibility)

TWRI, with input from project partners, will identify education and outreach goals for the project. The outreach goals will be specific, measurable, action-oriented, and time-focused by:

- Developing general strategies to reach targeted audiences that include specific outreach activities, workshops, trainings and social marketing techniques;
- Developing an evaluation component that measures success qualitatively and quantitatively to ensure the needed impact is generated through the education and outreach program and that the education and outreach goals of the project are met. TWRI, with cooperation from UTB, will develop the evaluation component.

As part of this project, TWRI and UTB will create an effective plan to reach the target audiences with specific information and social marketing solutions to inform the public, garner support and change behaviors throughout the watershed. Activities may include:

- Partnerships with schools to conduct outreach water quality education;
- Campaigns to distribute water protection brochures and market the outreach plan;
- Urban growth /Low Impact Development workshops;
- Texas Watershed Steward training;
- Texas Stream Team education events and trainings;
- Septic system workshops;
- Campaigns regarding illegal dumping and litter

5.1 Media Relations

5.1.1 Proactive Media Outreach/Response

The TWRI Project Manager in cooperation with the project partners will be responsible for identifying the proactive opportunities for media outreach. The TWRI Project Manager will use press releases to announce partnership meetings, events, general information and opportunities for public involvement.

5.1.2 Protocol for Inquires, Misinformation

In order to ensure consistency, well informed answers will be provided to the media outlets. All media inquiries regarding the Watershed Planning Project should be directed to the TWRI Project Manager. Members of the Partnership or Stakeholder Committee should not speak on behalf of the Partnership. Misinformation issues should be handled on a case by case basis. Members of the Partnership should stay informed of public opinion and all news regarding the Watershed Planning Project.

5.1.3 Media List

The TWRI Project Manager will be responsible for maintaining a regularly updated contact list of all media coverage regarding the project. The database will include names of major media outlets that reach residents in the area directly affected by the project. The media list includes local news papers, radio, television, organizational newsletters and online sources as listed below. Additionally, Rod Santa Ana III, Texas A&M AgriLife communication specialists, who writes and submits articles to all of the newspapers in the project area as well as a being a contributor to AgriLife news will assist the TWRI project manager to use press releases to announce upcoming meetings and outreach and education workshops.

Local newspapers include:

- Brownsville Herald
1135 E. Van Buren St.
Brownsville TX, 78520
956-542-4301
- Valley Morning Star
1310 S. Commerce
Harlingen, TX, 78550
956-430-6200

Local radio stations include:

- Harlingen - KMBH 88.9 FM
1701 Tennessee
Harlingen, TX 78550
956-421-4111

Local television stations include:

- KMBH-TV Channel 60 (PBS)
1701 Tennessee
Harlingen, TX 78550
956-421-4111
www.kmbh.org

- KVEO-News Center 23
NBC Network Affiliate for South Texas
394 N Expressway 77
Brownsville, TX 78521
Tel: 956-544-2323
Fax: 956-544-4636
news@kveo.com

- KGBT-Valley Central Channel 4
CBS Network Affiliate for South Texas
9201 W Expressway 83
Harlingen, TX 78522
Tel: 956-366-4444
lmartinez@valleycentral.com

- KRGV-News Center 5
ABC Network Affiliate for South Texas
900 E Expressway 83
Weslaco, TX 78596
Tel: 956-968-5555
my5@krgv.com

5.1.4 Press Kit

The Project Team will develop a standardized press kit that will communicate the key elements of the project. It will be a working document that can be easily adapted and can meet the needs and answer specific questions for the media, elected officials and interested citizens. It should include fact sheets, maps, graphics, press releases and documents designed to answer local water quality questions.

5.1.5 News Releases

News releases will be developed on a regular basis to communicate key points regarding the project, announce meeting dates and times and Outreach & Education events/workshops. Press releases will be produced by the Project Team and will be issued on the project web page. The TWRI Project Manager will also email press releases to stakeholders.

5.1.6 Public Participation in Project beyond Stakeholder Group

Including all of the key stakeholders in the project is essential for the success of the project. The project team needs to consider the general public as a stakeholder group. Including the general public with news releases and public notices will increase awareness of the project. This will allow for the project to reach more residents in the watershed so that they become familiar with the issues effecting them and begin to develop a sense of ownership for the project/watershed.

5.2 Designated Spokespersons

The Project Team will assign a primary and secondary spokesperson to represent the Watershed Partnership. The spokespersons will share a unified message regarding the watershed planning process and issues the plan will address. They will communicate both technical and general information to interested parties.

5.3 Internet

TWRI currently maintains a website for the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership (ACWP). TWRI has created a webpage for the Brownsville Resaca Partnership on the Arroyo Colorado Partnership's website. The project webpage is located at this address: <http://arroyocolorado.org/brownsville-resaca-watershed-characterization/>. The webpage will provide an overview of water quality concerns within the watershed and links to project partners. It will also contain information regarding the project; including media coverage, maps, factsheets, photos, meeting agendas and meeting minutes. TWRI will maintain the project webpage on its website.

5.4 Advertising

The use of advertising may be used to promote events and activities related to the project. It will be used to ensure appropriate information is being released to the public and that public participation is encouraged at every opportunity.

Times when advertising may be required include:

- Public Notices - properly inform public of upcoming notices
- Events - To raise awareness for forums or other events that offer the public an opportunity to obtain accurate info about the project and have concerns addressed.
- Education issues - To help communicate specific points that may come under particular scrutiny or be a focus of misinformation.
- Emergency Action - when crisis issues need to be addressed immediately via advertising.

6.0 Glossary

AU - Assessment Unit

ACWP - Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership

BMP - Best Management Practice

BRWP – Brownsville Resaca Watershed Partnership

EPA - Environmental Protection Agency

GIS - Geographic Information System

LDC - Load Duration Curve

NPS - Nonpoint Source

PPP - Public Participation Plan

QAPP - Quality Assurance Project Plan

Stakeholder - those who make and implement decisions, those who are affected by decisions made or those who have the ability to assist with the implementation of decisions.

SWMP - Storm Water Management Program

TCEQ - Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

TIAER - Texas Water Resources Institute

TMDL - Total Maximum Daily Load

TPWD - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

USPS – United States Postal Service

UTB – University of Texas Brownsville

WPP - Watershed Protection Plan