

Meeting of the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Steering Committee and Partnership

Wednesday August 30, 2006
4:00 PM – 7:00 PM

The Texas A&M Citrus Research Center – The Rio Red Classroom
312 N. International Boulevard
(FM 1015 north off Hwy 83)
Weslaco, Texas 78596

4:00 Social Gathering and Refreshments

4:30 Opening - Laura De La Garza and Dr. Jude Benavides

- Welcome
- General House-keeping (facilities, refreshments, breaks, meeting format)
 - Introductions
 - Lower Rio Grande Valley Storm Water Task Force Representation on Steering Committee – Proposal for Joe Hinojosa to replace Don Medina

4:40 Presentation of Draft Plan - Laura De La Garza and Roger Miranda

- Proposed Enhanced Wastewater Treatment Systems – Roger Miranda
- Education and Outreach – Laura De La Garza
- Strategies for Implementing Load Reduction Measures – Laura De La Garza

5:45 Break

6:00 Update on Aeration Structures – Dr. Jude Benavides

6:10 Partnership Direction - Dr. Jude Benavides

- Question of Forming a Non-profit organization under 501(c)(3)

6:30 Upcoming Grants – Laura De La Garza

- Targeted Watershed Grant

6:50 Meeting Closure – Dr. Jude Benavides

- Questions and Comments
- Expected Outcome for Next Meeting

**Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership
Steering Committee and Partnership Meeting
Meeting Summary – August 30, 2006**

ATTENDEES

AARON	WENDT	TEXAS STATE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD
ANDY	GARZA	TEXAS STATE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD
BRAD	COWAN	TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
CARLA	GUTHRIE	TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
CECILIA	WAGNER	TEXAS WATER RESOURCE INSTITUTE
CLARE	LEE	U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
DAVE	BUZAN	TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
JOE	HINOJOSA	CITY OF BROWNSVILLE
JOHN	WALLACE	USFWS LAGUNA ATASCOSA NWR
JUDE A.	BENAVIDES	UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS BROWNSVILLE
LAURA	DE LA GARZA	TAMU TEXAS SEA GRANT
LISA	WILLIAMS	THE NATURE CONSERVANCY
MELISA	MCEVER	VALLEY FREEDOM NEWSPAPERS
PAUL	BERGH	COALITION TO SAVE THE ARROYO COLORADO/LLMF
RANDY	BLANKINSHIP	TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
RAY	PREWETT	TX CITRUS MUTUAL
RICHARD	EYSTER	TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
ROGER	MIRANDA	TEXAS COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
RUBEN	SALDANA	TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
TERRY	LOCKAMY	TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS:

Laura De La Garza opens the 12th meeting of the Steering Committee at 6:30 PM with a reminder to sign in. Self-introductions were then made and Laura announced that several of the regular attending members notified her that that were unable to attend including Mary Lou Campbell, Rocky Freund, Tony Reisinger, Neil Haman, and Rick Reyes.

Laura announced that Joe Hinojosa was nominated to replace Don Medina as representative of the LRVG Storm Water Task Force and asked if there were any objections. No objections were made and Joe Hinojosa was acknowledged as a new Steering Committee member.

Laura asked if there were any comments on the last newsletter, if it was too long or too short. One individual said it was fine, no other comments were received. Laura stated that the TCEQ was in process of printing 5000 new Arroyo Colorado “The Little Waterway

with a Big Job” brochures and that they would be available in September. She said that we should acknowledge and thank the TCEQ for the production of the additional brochures.

PRESENTATION OF DRAFT PLAN

Paper copies of the draft plan were distributed. Laura stated that a few sections are to be added and will be distributed to the Steering Committee. Different organizations will be contacted for additional details, i.e., the IBWC can help with total miles of levees. The plan is not available on the Arroyo Colorado website however it will be after review by the Steering Committee and technical advisors.

Laura reviewed the education and outreach portion of the plan. She began with an overview of the process; SUMA/Orchard conducted twenty one-on-one stakeholder interviews, four focus group meetings, and phone interviewed 250 people with the watershed. The first recommendation by the consultants (White Hat Creative and SUMA/Orchard) was to brand the initiative. It is now branded and the logo was refined at the request of several members. Logo lapel pins and campaign buttons were produced with the final funds.

Laura said the basic finding of the social market survey is a great lack of awareness of the Arroyo Colorado; what its problems are, where it is located, and associated issues. She said the consultants identified a need to engage as many partners as possible and that an effective way is with public service announcements (PSAs) via television and radio. Laura said that discussions have been initiated to begin work on PSAs that could be aired in the Valley with TCEQ Small Business Environmental Assistance in a program that supports all state TMDL watersheds.

Laura next briefly reviewed pages 93-101 of the draft plan. She pointed out the need to emphasize engaging ecotourism vendors through partnership with area chamber of commerce. Joe Hinojosa suggested looking at economic development leaders and planning development leaders. Laura stated that she has made contact with metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and that they are interested in partnering with us. She pointed out specific tasks for the watershed coordinator listed on page 100-101. Laura ended the presentation stating that she thought that plan has a strong outreach component. Paul Bergh said he want to take camera ready art and make hats, shirts, bumper stickers, etc. and that he thinks there will be a market for these items. There were no objections to this effort.

Roger Miranda next discussed the wastewater infrastructure component of the plan. He reviewed the near-term, load reductions measures/projects identified in the plan, stated that 5 new wastewater treatment plants are in process of being built or planned for construction, 16,928 connections to sewer from colonias will be made, enhancement ponds will be added to wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) and a 500 acre wetland is planned. The near-term measures include a WWTP being built by East Rio Hondo Water Supply near Arroyo City, and upgrades to the Mission WWTP. Wastewater infrastructure

improvements planned for 2010-2015 (long-term), include more colônia connections, ponds, and another regional wetland (300 ac) and enhanced treatment. Roger said that 319 funding will be used for four of the five proposed systems in the near-term and that we are moving ahead with implementation; these include ponds for the cities of La Feria, San Benito, San Juan, and Mercedes.

Dr. Jude Benavides asked everyone to look over the document carefully and give comments to Laura or him, that we should be looking for continuity and consistency, and that we will be looking for comments the next 3-4 weeks. Jude also advised the group to think about engaging public attention to the report, to think about wording, whether it is too technical or not technical enough and this was an opportunity to add favorite photos of the Arroyo Colorado. Jude provided his email address jbenavides@utb.edu.

Laura asked for comments from the agriculture community because a couple of sections have not been review or discussed. She also stated the need to get public support to facilitate work in regards to the possibility of needing funds from future rate hikes for elements of the plan.

Jude asked for serious discourse about the plan before its release to the public. Aaron Wendt asked if the comments from the last meeting were incorporated in the report. Laura said yes and referred the group to page 77. She explained that originally, there were nine top strategies and two strategies (improve drainage ditches and reduce channel and streambank erosion) were combined leaving eight top strategies.

Randy Blankinship recommended that on page 70, we reference the supporting documents found on page 14.

UPDATE ON AERATION STRUCTURES

Next Jude proceeded to give an update on the aerations structures. He said a special task group meeting was called on July 14, 2006 and that the group wanted to make sure the structures would cause no harm and that the responsible agencies did what they needed to do. Jude commended the responsible parties and agencies for their patience and willingness to work together to address the expressed concerns.

Jude asked Randy Blankinship to provide additional information. Randy began by stating that there are three proposed structures in Harlingen and the plan was developed by NRS Consulting Engineers. Randy said that the sponsors contend that the rock rubble weirs will increase physical reaeration and aesthetics and that he was not certain if sediment capture is still a goal; that the plan was submitted to the IBWC and that NRS needs to coordinate with resource agencies, i.e., USFWS, TPWD, and TCEQ. Randy said that TPWD developed a multidivisional response and sent a letter to NRS. The letter included addressing concerns to the impediments to aquatic life movements, that the structures should create a riffle and not a waterfall and the center portion should be slightly lower to facilitate passage of paddlers and aquatic life.

Laura said she received comments from Dr. Kim Jones with concerns about rebar in the recycled road material and relayed the comments to project supporters. Project sponsors said they would ensure that all precautions would be taken.

Jude said that Randy facilitated work on the issue and that NRS responded well. He said that this was good practice for working together in partnerships. As a final comment on the topic, Laura said that exact field locations have not been pinpointed but project sponsors said they would site the structures in stream segments that were most impacted by the invasive water plant, giant cane, and that this would be an opportunity to establish native vegetation.

A break was called for at 5:45 PM.

PARTNERSHIP DIRECTION/UPCOMING GRANTS

Jude stated that the Steering Committee needs to start thinking on how to organize the Partnership to maintain a committee in perpetuity. He asked if we wanted to form a 501(c)(3) or if the group thought we should join an existing coalition. Paul Bergh asked if one of the reasons for success of the Partnership has been the ability to include state agencies and asked if state employees could still participate. Roger said that organizations under 501(c)(3) status have a board of directors and individuals representing state agencies could participate but not on the board. He also said that forming a 501(c)(3) organization might increase funding opportunities. Randy said that a state employee might participate as director but could not lobby. Joe Hinojosa said that group needs to be autonomous, that the Partnership needs to keep its focus and that we would probably lose it if we joined an existing group. Jude agreed with Joe.

Laura said that we needed to think about this in the context of grants and that currently there is a request for proposal for the EPA Targeted Watershed Grant Program; \$16 million is available for 20 watershed projects around the country. Aaron Wendt and Cecilia Wagner said that the Governor's requirement is due sometime in October and that this year the state can pass through all proposals whereas before only two proposals were forwarded. The question was raised concerning who would apply for this grant. It was agreed that we could not form a 501(c)(3) in time and Roger suggested that Laura together with Texas A&M apply for the Targeted Watershed Grant.

Roger suggested the Partnership make it a priority to form the organization. It was suggested that we look at the possibility of affiliating with groups and Partners such as Valley Proud. Andy Garza suggested contacting Ray Allen of Coastal Bend Bays and Estuary Program for suggestions on organizing. Aaron said NRC RCD3 might be examples.

Jude suggested forming a group to look into what would be involved in forming an organization. Roger stated that the Steering Committee needed a good explanation of what is involved in forming an organization be presented at the next meeting. Jude stated

that many people from the SC were absent and that an email be sent to everyone, soliciting members of a subcommittee to explore the formation of a 501(c)(3).

Laura asked that we discuss projects for the targeted watershed grant. Roger suggested considering the big regional wetland project. With that, Paul suggested partnering with the Valley Land Fund who had funds for wetland restoration work. Roger said the thought that there will be other interested parties such as the irrigation districts, the Nature Conservancy, and the IBWC for streambanks stabilization projects in the Llano Grande area. Roger suggested Laura talk with Gilbert Anaya from the IBWC El Paso office on the possibility of eliminating the pilot channel.

In closing it was agreed that Laura take the lead on the grant application with Texas A&M and for Laura to look for partners. November 13, 2006 is the national deadline with the need to go to the Governor's office probably in October.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Paul Bergh said that the Education and Outreach work group needs an active/full time leader other than Laura because she cannot handle it with her other responsibilities. Laura said we would aim towards the end of September for the next SC meeting. Meeting was adjourned at 7:04 PM.