

Arroyo Colorado Agricultural Issues Workgroup

January 24, 2008

10:00 am-12:00 pm

MEETING SUMMARY

ATTENDEES:

Richard Eyster, TDA

Aaron Wendt, TSSWCB

Pamela Casebolt, TSSWCB

Cecilia Wagner, TWRI

Narayanan Kannan, AgriLife Research

Enrique Perez, AgriLife Extension

Geraldo Tapia, AgriLife Extension

Martin Ramirez, TCEQ Border Affairs

Xavier Peries, AgriLife Extension

Cory Horan, TCEQ

Juan Enciso, AgriLife Research

Alex Nunez, TPWD

Arturo Ibarra, NRCS

Laura De La Garza, TWRI

Ray Prewett, Texas Citrus Mutual

Sonny Vela, NRCS

Os Longoria, NRCS

Welcome and Introductions..... Andy Garza, TSSWCB

Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan

Review of Components Addressing Agricultural NPS Pollution.....Aaron Wendt, TSSWCB

- Currently on track in terms of land (acreage) under WQMPs & cost share implemented

Targeted efforts to address Ag NPS:

- Ray Prewett brought up the discussion of do we have maps generated of where we need to target, do we have a targeted outreach plan for specific producers in the AC? Do boundaries matter?
- Aaron said yes, boundaries matter.
- Most education activities are at county level rather than broad watershed scale. TSSWCB initially targeted producers through letters notifying them of the Arroyo Ag project.
- Is there additional targeting that we can do besides money for cost sharing? (e.g. results of loadings from practices.) Ray stated he does not believe BMPs are in the minds of the producers the way it should be or like it is in other areas where there are impaired waters. Perhaps instead of providing education to all groups – do a targeted effort.
- What can we do to reach growers?
 - Emphasize AC boundaries on web site or in education activities
 - Post AC maps with impacted acreage in local offices (FSA office, SWCD office, Cotton Gins, Irrigation districts, etc.)
 - Rather than posting a large map – a poster would be better as you are limited in size of what you can post.
 - Simple outreach to producers that frequent these offices could be a 11x14 map that can handed out (e.g. brochure with map on one side and info on the other)
 - You have to get specific for these growers.
 - Do we have the number of growers? Or list of the growers? Do we contact them about the AC? Growers can be identified through USDA records
 - Use a newsletter (Maybe yearly or bi-yearly to target growers). Work with Rod Santa Ana to get into local media
 - Use the FSA newsletter;

- Commodity Newsletters: Ray Prewett has a newsletter (Texas Citrus & Vegetable E-Weekly). IPM Newsletter for Lower Rio Grande Valley (Manda Cattaneo); citrus newsletter.

Watershed Protection Plan Implementation Status.....Laura De La Garza, TWRI

Physical model of AC watershed Demo locations:

- Mercedes Stock Show in March
- Citrus Meeting for last Thursday in March

The North Main Drainage Ditch “The Big Ditch”

- Was brought up as a possible issue or something the ACWP should address. Specifically, it conveys a high volume of water from McAllen, Edinburg, and drainages from a number of other upper Valley cities north of US 83. Flow volume and quality is unknown. It contributes significant freshwater to the Lower Laguna Madre.
- Cory said he’d bring this up at the CRP meeting.
- Fish & Wildlife also have an interest in the “Big Ditch” and TPWD have fish kill data as this has occurred in the past (often in winter).

4 City Wetland Project

- La Feria (9 AC) & San Benito (20 Ac) are in design phase; San Juan (10 AC) is to begin construction this spring, Mercedes (10 AC) is sitting back and waiting on permit updates for current plant expansion.
- Cory will check with Permit people at TCEQ regarding status of permitting

WWI

- Per WPP, a top priority is to convert all 30/90 plant to 10/15.
- The city of Alamo is the final city to begin taking action. The Military Highway Water Supply Corp is currently working with Alamo on a planning grant with TWDB to handle this

Project Updates/Discussion:

Best Management Practice Implementation Andy Garza, TSSWCB

- In third year of project; Certified 96 WQMPs covering 4700 acres; \$556,000 obligated and \$445,000 paid out to producers for the following practices: 49 % for land leveling, 24% irrigation pipeline, 17% pasture planning and 10% other (cross fencing, etc.).
- Total funds expended per county is 70% Cameron and 30% Hidalgo
- Current trend is a lot of crop land is being converted to pasture or hayland on multiple small tracts (10 to 20 AC) of land that is being sold to non-farmers. This has potential to reduce erosion, improve infiltration. Trend is happening quickly (NRCS suggested 3,000 to 4,000 ac annually) that is being sold. Yet, production acre-wise has gone up due to the movement of farming operations away from the developing areas; producers now farming less productive land (once abandoned fields) in northern Hidalgo and Cameron Counties

Best Management Practice Education Geraldo Tapia, TCE

- Introduced Geraldo Tapia (new Extension Education Technician)
- Soil testing campaign was just conducted (NRCS, TSSWCB contributed). It was kicked off Oct 9 at a nutrient management program.

- They publicized the campaign through Irrigation Districts, gins, and media of the benefits of soil testing. The FSA office in Cameron County also publicized it in the FSA newsletter.
- Total participation was down from last year. Total number of soil testing campaign (not including samples that go to NRCS – these are just the ones that came through the Extension office): Cameron County – 44 participants - 201 samples received through the office ; Hidalgo County – 289 samples received; Willacy County – 18 participants – 172 samples received;

Agricultural Nonpoint Source Assessment.....Juan Enciso, TCE

- Presentation by Xavier Peries
- Currently obtaining irrigation numbers for Valley – what percent is drip; what percent is furrow; Of the surface, what percent is polypipe, gated, etc.?
- Once obtained, these numbers need to be posted to Web site.
- All 6 growers that are going to be monitored have a WQMP.
- Sampling will begin in February.

SWAT Model Simulation of the Arroyo.....Narayanan Kannan, TAES-Blackland

- Presentation by Kannan
- Needs data on Fertilizer application (Rates and tentative dates for different crops)
- Needs irrigation data (timing, number of irrigations, water applied)

Discuss/Prioritize Future Funding Needs and Sources Cecilia Wagner, TWRI

- Sustainable Ag Society – Laura said they are managing a demonstration site and are seeking funds to support site.
- FQPA Grant – Group decided to at least discuss submitted a proposed work plan to the project. Could continue funding for Geraldo; ACWP to work with Enrique & Brad to develop a work plan

Other Business..... Andy Garza, TSSWCB

- Wes Rosenthal retired and is no longer working on the project
- AgriLife Extension Nutrient Mangement Program won Superior Service Award
- Aaron brought up the bacteria issue of AC:
 - Do we want to try to address the bacteria issue?
 - NRCS stated that cattle not an issue on the AC. Rather, colonias or septic systems are probably the primary contributor as there are no large CAFOs or wastewater applied to fields.

Next Meeting Date.....In conjunction with next Partnership Meeting

- July 24, 2008
- Pam suggested a field tour in conjunction with next meeting.

Nomination of Pamela Casebolt as Co-Work Group Leader.....Andy Garza, TSSWCB

- Nomination supported by group

Meeting adjourned