

Arroyo Colorado Education and Outreach Workgroup Formed Under The Arroyo Colorado Watershed Steering Committee

Meeting Summary – January 5, 2006

ATTENDING WORK GROUP COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Paul Bergh
Tony Reisinger
Holly Bjorum
Laura De La Garza

Video-conference Attendees from the TCEQ in Austin
Earlene Lambeth
Dave Buzan
Karen Ford
Susan Poag
Cathy Schechter

Laura De La Garza called the twelfth meeting of the Education and Outreach work group to order at 5:20 pm. The meeting was held in Classroom 157 of the Texas A&M Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Weslaco, Texas. Video conferencing was established with the TCEQ offices in Austin, Texas.

Introductions were made and the first order of business was the solicitation of comments on the last two meeting summary notes. Positive comments received on summary notes as written and approved for posting on the Arroyo website.

The meeting was turned over to Karen Ford and Cathy Schechter for review and discussion of the written summary of the O&E work done to date. Karen opened the discussion and asked if we had a chance to review the previously distributed copy of summary report. The majority of the group had and the discussion was turned over to Cathy who began the discussion by expressing that a lot of good work has been done by the watershed coordinator and O&E Work Group that lays the foundation for a good O&E campaign.

Attachment A is the “Summary of Education and Outreach Subcommittee of the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership”. Cathy walked through the report. Paul Bergh pointed out that many cities were missing in the demographic profile section and that the cities/communities of San Juan, Donna, Alamo, Mercedes, La Feria, Progreso, Alton, Palmview, Palmhurst, and Granjeno should be added.

Cathy discussed the EPA “Training and Environmental Education Materials”, (TEEM) report and pointed out that the people surveyed in that report were willing to travel 150 miles for a conference. Tony Reisinger questioned that based on personal experience with area water conferences. He said that they are generally poorly attended. Laura agreed. Cathy said that generally, attendance depends on the topic, price, availability of food, and if personal benefits are expressed to the attendees. Earlene asked about recent water conference on South Padre Island sponsored by Texas A & M Kingsville (TAMUK) and the Storm Water Task Force. Laura said that there were approximately 250 in attendance, 80 of whom were speakers, many TAMUK students, and a number of participants from Mexico and the upper LRGV.

Tony said that in general, apathy is widespread in the Valley, that students are more interested, most conferences are like “preaching to the choir”, and that it has been tough getting people to meetings. Cathy said she had learned that we want to “preach to the choir” so they can take information back to family and friends. She referred to them as “spark plugs” and that we want to talk to interested and motivated people who can take the message home. Cathy also said that word-of-mouth and small group meetings are the best way to get the message out here in the Valley.

Tony questioned some of the data and recommendations and pointed out that a website is important to the “choir”. Cathy agreed. Susan Poag reminded the group that SUMA/Orchard is not recommending anything at this point and that they are summarizing completed relevant work to date.

In regards to the developing phone survey, Cathy asked if any cities listed were not vital to the watershed area. Laura said all were important. Paul recommended that the list of cities be updated.

Next, the consultants reviewed the results of the stakeholder interviews presented in PowerPoint format. See Attachment B for points discussed.

In regards to the stakeholder interviews, the consultants provide the following additional impressions:

- No blanket denial from different stakeholders concerning their contribution to problem.
- Given a little “finger pointing”, the wastewater group appeared more sensitive, more of “we are in compliance with permits”. Some farmers pointed out that homeowners generally use more fertilizer than needed.
- People did not have a strong sense of impact of pollution issue.
- Many believe the red-tide was naturally occurring with no association to the Arroyo.
- The term “watershed” is unknown by many. Term must be defined.
- Important to tie Arroyo issues to health.
- Important to identify impacts to individuals and the benefits of taking action.
- The issue of impacts is important.

Conclusions given by consultants:

- Define “Arroyo Colorado Watershed.”
- Define “impaired waterway.”
- Explain impact to area.
- Make clear calls to action that can be done by many people.
- Reach out to community groups of all kinds to create “spark plugs” or people who can carry the message with credibility to their groups.
- Create tools for promotoras and others to use when explaining issue.
- Maintain relationships with local reporters to keep AC Watershed Partnership in the news on a regular basis as a way to reach influentials.
- Carry a consistent, strong, simple message. SIMPLICITY IS THE KEY.

The discussion was opened up to questions. Bergh asked if all the slides reflected comments from the interviews. Cathy said yes, except for the conclusions which were their conclusions. In reference to consultant’s comments on the word “watershed” as jargon, Buzan asked if there was a better word to use. Karen said that the term “watershed” just needed to be defined and gave example an Austin area campaign which used maps and signage and people were let known that what happens in a watershed effects them; a matter of definition.

The Spanish for the word for watershed, “la cuenca”, was discussed and that it translated to “drainage basin”. It was asked if drainage basin or a Spanish name would be a better communication tool. Again, Karen said there is a need to define terms. It was recommended that we try using “drainage basin” as it may relate better to our neighbors across the border.

Tony asked about ethnic background of the groups interview and if that impacted feedback. Cathy said that that was not looked at, this was not a quantitative survey, and no particular responses were related to a particular ethnicity. All interviewed were educated professionals and they were focused on their expertise and their role in the process. The consultants said that they talked to many passionate and interesting people and they had a lot to bring to the table. Each was very passionate on the issue and many expressed a deep love of the Valley. Lots of childhood memories were expressed and that they heard a hope for eco-tourism. It was recommended to look closer at eco-tourism. One person interviewed asked about the possibility of routing barge traffic to another near-by port like the Port of Brownsville.

Tony pointed out that if we look at Hispanic culture, recreational use is a hook. Cathy pointed that much of the water curriculum is about bayous and not lagoons. In regards to curriculums, James Matz and Valley Proud were in process of creating one, also in process is the UTB Gorgas Science Society.

Next there was discussion about targeted audiences for the focus group meetings. Final recommendations included targeting farmers, business and recreation groups, and the most impacted downstream users (South Padre Island). Specific groups

named included the sugarcane and cotton associations, the Valley Sportsman Club, the different leadership groups, and Valley Chamber of Commerce Partnership.

Concerning short-term promotion of the Arroyo Colorado WPP, Karen said to be sure and highlight what has been done to date including cost-sharing. Branding of the campaign was important and that she would be available to present at the upcoming Steering Committee meeting.

The final discussions were over the suggested projects to date and the pricing of such projects. The meeting ended promptly at 7 PM when video connection ended.