

The Geronimo Flow

November 2013



Your Newsletter

The Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Watershed Partnership was formed in 2010 to restore and protect water quality in the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Watershed due to elevated levels of bacteria and nitrate-nitrogen. The Partnership completed a Watershed Protection Plan in 2012 and is now working toward full

implementation. The purpose of this newsletter is to inform and engage local stakeholders in helping to improve and protect the quality of water in Geronimo and Alligator Creeks. For more information about the project visit our website: www.geronimocreek.org

In this issue:

<i>1st Year Implementation</i>	<i>pg 1</i>
<i>City of Seguin Grant</i>	<i>pg 2</i>
<i>SWCD Grant</i>	<i>pg 3</i>
<i>Feral Hog Workshop</i>	<i>pg 3</i>
<i>Newspaper Articles</i>	<i>pg 4</i>
<i>Septic Systems</i>	<i>pg 4</i>
<i>Proposition 6</i>	<i>pg 5</i>
<i>Next Meeting</i>	<i>pg 7</i>

1st Year Implementation Highlights

On September 13, 2012 EPA accepted the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Watershed Protection Plan. Since that time, implementation of the WPP has taken off. Here are some of the highlights of the first year:

- The first annual Creek Cleanup Event in April 2013 resulted in 100 volunteers removing nearly 3,000 pounds of debris from the creeks. Next year's event is promising to involve more volunteers and clean up a larger area.
- Grant was awarded to the City of Seguin to help homeowners in Oak Village North decommission septic systems in an area adjacent to Geronimo Creek. This will reduce potential bacteria and nutrient loading to the creeks from failing systems in the neighborhood. (See pg. 2 of the newsletter.)
- Grant award to the Comal-Guadalupe SWCD to employ a district technician to assist farmers and ranchers with development of Water Quality Management Plans for their operations. These site specific plans reduce or eliminate nonpoint source pollution from these operations. (See page 3 of the newsletter.)



The OVN project will decommission approximately 150 septic systems.



Volunteers unloading trash removed from the creeks during the first annual Creek Cleanup Event.

- Seguin High School's Project Based Learning Academy focused on Geronimo Creek and developed fun and informational placemats, brochures, and stickers that were distributed to local restaurants to spread the word about the project.
- A Texas Well Owner Network Workshop was hosted by GBRA and educated 48 private water well owners on how to protect their drinking water supplies.
- A Texas Riparian and Stream Ecosystem Workshop was held to explain the value and natural function of riparian zones, which included a tour to Geronimo Creek at the Seguin Outdoor Learning Center.
- AgriLife Extension conducted a 40 Gallon Challenge Event, a Range and Wildlife Field Day, spring and fall Weed and Brush Control Workshops, a Brush and Forage Conference, a Water Fair for elementary school children, and Nutrient Management workshops.

Quarterly Partnership meetings are opportunities to hear updates on implementation activities and to provide input to the process. Please take advantage of these meetings and get involved!

City of Seguin Receives Grant Award

The City of Seguin recently received a grant award from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to help homeowners in Oak Village North (OVN) decommission their septic systems. Homeowners will transition from their septic systems to a new sanitary sewer collection line that is being extended to the neighborhood. Many OVN homeowners have experienced recurring failures of their septic systems due to system age, poor soil suitability, a seasonally high water table, and other factors.

Decommissioning abandoned septic systems is required by state law. The process requires the contents of the tank to be pumped out, and the tank to then be filled to ground level with

fill material.

Failing septic systems were identified as potential sources of bacteria and nutrient loading to the creeks during development of the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks WPP.

The City of Seguin began work on the OVN sewer project in 2012 as part of an agreement when the city annexed the area.

Homeowners in the OVN subdivision will continue to receive construction project updates and information from the City of Seguin through the biweekly newsletter the city has been providing since the project was initiated.

Comal-Guadalupe SWCD Receives Grant Award

The Comal-Guadalupe Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was awarded a grant from the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board to hire a district technician who will assist farmers and ranchers in developing Water Quality Management Plans for their individual operations. The grant also provides funding for over \$150,000 in financial incentives to help producers implement approved practices.

Nutrient and bacteria loading from agricultural operations are identified in the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks WPP as potential sources of pollution in area creeks. A site specific WQMP is developed by working with a land owner to identify, design, and implement practices that will protect water resources. The plan includes appropriate land treatment practices, production practices, management measures and technologies.

Examples of key practices include

prescribed grazing, fencing, watering facilities, pipelines, wells, grassed waterways, pasture/hayland/rangeland planting, riparian buffers, filter strips, and a few others.

There is no cost to the landowner for development of the WQMP. However, there may be costs for implementing certain practices, but financial assistance is available in most cases.

The district is currently accepting applications for the district technician position through November 25, 2013. Please contact Beverly Hartwick at 830-379-0930 ext 3 for more information.

For more information, contact the Comal-Guadalupe SWCD at comalguadalupeswcd@tx.nacdn.org or your local Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board Field Representative, Tony Franklin at tfranklin@tsswcb.state.tx.us

Feral Hog Workshop Coming Spring 2014



Whether you reside in a suburban neighborhood or on a tract of land outside of town, feral hogs can affect you. Feral hogs are an exotic invasive species that threaten both land and water resources throughout the state.

“Evidence of feral hog activity is observed frequently in many watersheds throughout Texas” Jared Timmons, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agent at San Marcos said. “At least 134 million acres in Texas

have the potential to be impacted by an estimated 2.6 million feral hogs.”

Residents of Guadalupe, Comal, and surrounding counties are invited to attend the first feral hog workshop offered in the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks watershed. The workshop is tentatively planned for May 23, 2014, so please pencil this into your schedule.

The workshop will feature speakers from multiple state agencies along with wildlife specialists from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. Topics to be discussed include: Basic Biology of Feral Hogs and their Implications to the Watershed, Population Dynamics of Feral Hogs, Texas Laws and Regulations for Hunting Feral Hogs, Water Quality in

A watershed protection plan (WPP) is a comprehensive management plan developed by local citizens to resolve complex water quality problems.

Do you have something you would like to contribute to the newsletter? Or, would you like to see us provide information on a particular topic? Suggestions can be sent to Ward Ling at wling@ag.tamu.edu or call 979-255-1819.

Southeast Texas, Agricultural Regulations Regarding Feral Hogs, Feral Hog Control, Feral Hog Safety and Disease Concerns, and Movement of Feral Hogs in Texas.



Attendees will learn how they can help reduce the negative impacts of feral hogs, and about regulations designed to protect humans and other animals from potential disease concerns.

Program attendees will earn a total of 5 hours of CEU Credits; two hours in Integrated Pest Management, one hour in Laws and Regulations and two hours in general.

The workshop will be sponsored by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, GBRA, and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board.

For more information about the program, please contact Jared Timmons at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at:

254-485-4886

jbtimmons@ag.tamu.edu

Newspaper Articles

In our continuing effort to increase public awareness and involvement in implementing the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks WPP, we began publishing monthly educational articles in the Seguin Gazette and New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung last month. With special funding from the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, the plan is to provide local readers with information about the watershed and water quality concerns, and

recommendations on how to better manage potential sources of pollution such as bacteria and nutrients. Articles will cover all three potential pollution source categories: urban, agriculture, and wastewater nonpoint sources. Through this process, we hope to reach and engage a broader audience across the watershed.

When you see these news articles, please be sure to pass them on to friends and neighbors!

Septic System Workshops

The first round of Homeowner Maintenance Septic System workshops on November 12th and 13th resulted in over 40 attendees learning about septic system operation and maintenance procedures. Feedback at the workshops indicated the need for a more comprehensive course. We are making plans to offer a 6 hour course in the spring of 2014 focused upon aerobic system maintenance and

operation. Watch for email notices after the holidays announcing these new classes.

Also, with the holiday season fast approaching, now might be a good time to schedule an inspection or have your system pumped out if it hasn't been done in the past 3 or 4 years. With holiday parties and out-of-town guests, septic systems can experience overload and can fail at the most inconvenient times.



Pumping out a septic tank should be a regular part of your maintenance activities.



Upcoming events

- *Partnership Meeting January 14, 2014 at the GBRA River Annex at 905 Nolan Street, Seguin.*
- *Nonpoint Source Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO) Workshop coming in Spring 2014—details coming soon!*
- *First Feral Hog Workshop in the Alligator and Geronimo Creeks Watershed May 23, 2014*

Nonpoint source pollution is the leading cause of water quality problems, according to the EPA.

Voters went to the polls last month and approved Proposition 6. The following is a brief overview of what it means to Texans, taken from the Texas Water Development Board website.

What is Proposition 6?

Proposition 6 creates and constitutionally dedicates two new funds: the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas (SWIFT) and the State Water Implementation Revenue Fund for Texas (SWIRFT).

Where will the money come from?

When voters approved Proposition 6, the legislature authorized a one-time, \$2 billion investment from the Economic Stabilization Fund (also known as the Rainy Day Fund) to the SWIFT. These funds are designed to make the financing of water projects more affordable and to provide consistent, ongoing state financial assistance for water supplies.

What will this program do for Texas?

The funds created through Proposition 6 will help communities develop and optimize water supplies at cost-effective interest rates. The upfront costs on water infrastructure can often make it difficult for some communities to build what they need. The SWIFT provides the economic opportunity for communities to overcome this hurdle by providing low-cost, flexible financing options for water projects. This financial assistance will enable local communities to begin needed water projects.

How would the program be used to ensure adequate water supplies?

The funds will be used to provide low-cost financing for projects in the

state water plan—a plan created by local and regional entities, with the assistance of the state, to meet future water demands. Every five years, 16 regional water planning groups assess the projected population and water demands and supplies in their areas over the next 50 years. Each region then compiles a regional water plan, and those plans are rolled up into the state water plan. The state water plan also includes important information on statewide trends and policy issues, and it lists the water supply strategies identified to meet the regional water shortages over the next 50 years.

The 2012 State Water Plan contains numerous strategies to meet water needs during drought. Those strategies are the water supply projects that would be eligible for funding through the SWIFT and SWIRFT.

Is my community represented in the state water plan?

Yes. Every community and every water user group in Texas is planned for. Water user groups include cities, rural water users, agriculture, livestock, manufacturers, mining, and steam-electric power. The 2012 State Water Plan addresses the needs of roughly 3,000 water user groups.

How does Proposition 6 help rural communities and Texas farmers?

Rural and agricultural stakeholders serve as part of the water planning process. This process identifies water supply projects that go into the state water plan. TWDB's planning process helps identify water projects that are needed by

rural and agricultural interests. Moreover, the legislature made serving these interests a priority: directing the TWDB to undertake applying not less than 10 percent of the funds to projects serving rural communities and Texas farmers.

What water supply projects would be supported by these funds?

Projects in the state water plan would be eligible for support from the SWIFT and SWIRFT. These water projects range from conservation and reuse, to desalting groundwater and seawater, to building new pipelines and developing reservoirs and well fields, and include many other kinds of projects as well. Through the regional water planning process, local and regional water experts recommended these projects as the most efficient and viable ones for their communities.

How does this program support water conservation?

The legislature has recognized the importance of water conservation and reuse strategies in managing and protecting the state's water resources. The legislature directed the TWDB to undertake applying not less than 20 percent of SWIFT financial assistance for water conservation and reuse projects. The TWDB is also directed to undertake applying an additional 10 percent for projects to serve rural areas, including agricultural conservation projects. Emphasizing the importance of conservation will help ensure communities use their water wisely and extend the life of their current supplies.

Could these funds be used to

build reservoirs?

Since all water supply projects in the state water plan will be eligible, reservoirs will be eligible for support from the SWIFT and SWIRFT if they are strategies in the state water plan. Reservoirs make up approximately 15 percent of the total financial assistance requested in the 2012 State Water Plan.

How will the funds be disbursed?

Communities and utilities will apply to TWDB for financial assistance, and funds will be disbursed for projects in the state water plan. The TWDB will evaluate and prioritize projects for assistance based on a state and regional process. Many factors will be considered in this evaluation, including the number of people served, the urgency of the project, the ability of the local and regional sponsors to support the project, and the degree of conservation achieved—just to name a few prioritization criteria.

How would the SWIFT and SWIRFT work?

The SWIFT allows for more cost-effective water projects, ultimately saving Texas and Texans money on water. Money in the SWIFT may be used to provide financial assistance for state water plan projects through the following TWDB programs: the Rural Water Assistance Fund, the Water Infrastructure Fund, State Participation, and the Agricultural Water Conservation Fund, as well as the proposed SWIRFT. The SWIFT can support low-cost financing for projects in the form of reduced interest rates, longer repayment terms, and deferred repayment periods of interest and

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principal.

Will this program affect groundwater rights?

No. The SWIFT will not affect groundwater rights or other private property rights in any way. Further, the SWIFT will not affect how groundwater conservation districts manage local groundwater supplies.

Will this program change how surface water is regulated?

No. Surface water (water from lakes and rivers) is governed by an entirely separate set of statutes that will not be affected by this program.

Who benefits from this program?

Texas. Cities, counties, water districts, river authorities, irrigation districts, regional water authorities, and nonprofit water supply corporations across this state are all eligible to use TWDB's financial assistance programs to address implementation of state water plan projects.

For more information, go to:
<http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/news/media/swift/faq.asp>

Next Partnership Meeting

The Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Watershed Partnership will meet on January 14th in the GBRA River Annex in Seguin. Partnership meetings are open to all individuals with an interest in learning about how to improve and protect water quality in the Geronimo and Alligator Creek's Watershed.

Refreshments (sandwich fixings, chips, drinks) will start at 5:30 with the meeting beginning at 6pm. Agenda topics include a presentation by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) Mussel Watch Program. Believe it

or not, there are mussels in our local creeks! We will also discuss the upcoming Feral Hog Workshop tentatively scheduled for May 23, 2014, begin planning the 2014 Creek Cleanup Event, discuss the upcoming NEMO workshop, look at the latest water quality monitoring data, and provide updates on other project efforts.

Come find out how you can get involved. We hope to see you there! For more information contact Ward Ling at 979-845-6980 or wling@ag.tamu.edu