

## **Environmental Advisory Committee**

FY 2019 – 2020 Q1 Mtg. Notes

09/26/2019

Graytown Park on the San Antonio River

Wilson County

New members:

Ms. Janis Bush, Bexar

Ms. Connie Waters, Goliad

Ms. Glynis Strause, Karnes

Mr. Joe Baker, Karnes

Introductions

**Mr. Steven Schauer (SS)** delayed in arriving, **Mr. Charles Lorea (CL)** begins

### **CRP Basin Highlight Report Summary – Mr. Charles Lorea**

**(CL)** Texas Logperch, have been detected in the Mission Reach section of the San Antonio River.

**(CL)** The presence of Texas Logperch is significant, as they are thoroughly intolerant of pollution, and thus, their presence indicates a habitat which is relatively low in pollution.

**Ms. Connie Waters (CW)** If the San Antonio River Authority (River Authority) biological sampling team is having difficulty with access to sampling locations in Goliad County, SWCD might be able to assist.

**Mr. Joe Baker (JB)** offered that he may be able to assist the River Authority Biological sampling team with access to sampling locations in Karnes County.

### **San Antonio River Authority Revenue Strategies Presentation – Mr. Steven Schauer**

**(SS)** gave a short presentation and handed out a brochure about the W.A.T.E.R. Initiative. An educational webpage is in development and will soon be posted to the River Authority's website in order to educate the public and accept public feedback. Highlights of the presentation include:

The River Authority is exploring an opportunity to secure a permanent funding source to support a more comprehensive commitment to providing safe, clean, and enjoyable creeks and rivers throughout the San Antonio River Basin. With more than 1 million new residents expected in our area by 2040, the W.A.T.E.R. Initiative will ensure that vital natural water and land resources are protected in this rapidly growing region and that the quality of life for area residents is preserved. In order to help prevent degradation to surface and drinking water quality, mitigate the damaging impact of flooding, and preserve a high quality of life for area residents, the River Authority is exploring this new funding source

because we believe our community should be proactive about implementing projects now before the anticipated 1 million new residents relocate to this area.

The W.A.T.E.R. Initiative will increase the River Authority's capacity to meet unmet needs and service demands of citizens in the fast-growing region it serves throughout Bexar, Wilson, Karnes, and Goliad counties by supporting projects and programs related to: **Water** quality of creeks and rivers; **Aquifer** and drinking water protection; **Trails** and parks; **Environmental** restoration; and **Resilient** communities and infrastructure.

Begin a regional agency, the River Authority is very adept at working closely the cities and counties throughout our four-county district. The River Authority will continue its long-standing governmental collaboration with the cities and counties throughout Bexar, Wilson, Karnes, and Goliad counties to ensure that the benefits of the W.A.T.E.R. Initiative will be efficiently and effectively aimed at protecting and improving vital water, land, and ecosystem resources within the interconnected water resources of the San Antonio River Basin.

The River Authority has demonstrated, long-term success in managing the delivery of highly-visible, complex construction projects and delivering exceptional scientific and technical leadership and programs throughout the basin. Given this successful track record of project delivery and water quality expertise, the River Authority is well-positioned to assume the funding and implementation of these regional, multi-benefit programs.

The River Authority's current operation and maintenance tax funding source is Legislatively capped at 2 cents per \$100 valuation and is restricted to supporting planning, operations, and maintenance costs. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 tax rate was set by the River Authority Board of Directors at 1.858 cents per \$100 valuation and this is projected to generate \$33.6 million in revenue, which is restricted for planning, operations, and maintenance costs.

Chapter 49 of the Texas Water Code allows the River Authority Board of Directors to seek voter approval through a district-wide election for the authorization to collect a property tax providing new funding for the River Authority to directly implement capital projects and support the expansion of successful environmental protection programs throughout the district. If approved by district voters of Bexar, Wilson, Karnes, and Goliad counties, revenue from the expanded authorization granted by the Texas State Legislature in the Chapter 49 tax will enable the River Authority to construct capital improvements.

The W.A.T.E.R. Initiative would seek voter approval to establish a maximum tax rate of 2.5 cents per \$100 valuation property tax. The current average homestead value in the River Authority's four county district is \$209,544. After a \$5,000 homestead exemption, a maximum 2.5 cent per \$100 valuation tax would equate to a \$4.26 per month cost to the average homeowner and approximately \$45.2 million could be collected annually, based on current taxable value in the district.

Following the basic presentation as highlighted above, the group moved into an open discussion about the types of projects that may be funded by the W.A.T.E.R. Initiative throughout the basin. Questions that arose from the EAC during the open discussion include:

**Ms. Glynis Strause (GS)** Referring to the City of San Antonio's existing sales tax collection that funds Edwards Aquifer protection, known locally as Prop. 1, the question was asked, "What happens to land purchased over the Edwards Aquifer?"

**(SS)** The land is managed to protect recharge of the aquifer. The City of San Antonio has collected sales tax for nearly 20 years to fund the protection of property located over the Edwards Aquifer through the purchase of conservation easements and fee simple acquisition. Development restrictions apply to conservation easements and the land purchased through fee simple acquisition is remaining rural and undeveloped to protect the aquifer recharge.

**(GS)** What are the two taxes?

**(SS)** The River Authority's current operation and maintenance tax funding source is Legislatively capped at 2 cents per \$100 valuation and is restricted to supporting planning, operations, and maintenance costs. Chapter 49 of the Texas Water Code allows the River Authority Board of Directors to seek voter approval through a district-wide election for the authorization to collect a property tax providing new funding for the River Authority to directly implement capital projects and support the expansion of successful environmental protection programs throughout the district.

Clarification was also provided to help the EAC members understand that the City of San Antonio currently collects a sales tax to fund aquifer protection and the development of linear creekway trails. The City is undergoing its own internal discussions about whether to seek voter approval to continue collecting sales tax for those purposes or to repurpose the use of that sales tax to potentially support a transportation initiative.

**Mr. Joedy Yglesias (JY)** Who is in opposition?

**(SS)** There is no known opposition to this initiative, and to date, there have only been two online news articles and one television news story about it. The River Authority recognizes that a tax initiative will not be popular with some constituents, but it is important to have an open and transparent dialog about the challenges the district will face as more people move to the area. The River Authority's belief is that prevention is the best way to help protect surface and aquifer water quality as well as the communities we serve from flood risk. A report by the Texas Comptroller reported that investing in flood preparation and mitigation activities has a four-to-one payback ratio, supporting the River Authority's assertion that the most cost-effective way to prepare and respond to the impact of the more intense storms that are likely to come into our area is prevention. While having a conversation about taxes will not be easy, the River Authority believes it best to at least have the conversation with the public now before the 1 million new residents come to the area. The River Authority board will still have to decide whether to call the election, and if it's called, the citizens will have a chance to vote for what they think is best.

**(JB)** Was the current tax approved by voters?

**(SS) (SS)** The Texas Legislature granted the River Authority its current taxing authority in 1961. The exact date the citizens of the district approved it was unknown to SS, but he thought that also occurred in the 1960s. The River Authority board of directors set the tax rate at zero for decades. In 2000 / 2001 the River Authority Board of Directors decided to start collecting the current authorized tax, which is capped at 2 cents per \$100 valuation. After nearly 20 years of collecting the tax, it has yet to reach its cap, and

has been raised and lowered over the years by the board, demonstrating fiscal responsibility in setting the tax rate.

**(JY)** If approved for the ballot, would it be on the four counties of the River Authority jurisdiction only?

**(SS)** Yes, it will be a district wide vote held concurrently in Bexar, Wilson, Karnes, and Goliad counties. The board has not yet decided if it will call the election, but the election date in November 2020 is being discussed as a potential date for consideration.

#### **Enable Policy, Projects, and Actions Goal Leader Presentation - Ms. Hillary Lilly**

**Ms. Annalisa Peace (AP)** Is the River Road (Restoration) Project taking in the Catalpa ditch?

**Mr. Shaun Donovan (SD)** No, it's not a part of that project.

#### **Advance Science & Engineering Expertise and Data Goal Leader Presentation - Mr. Shaun Donovan**

**(AP)** Regarding Site – Scale Modeling, could it be used to identify high priority load areas that might greatly impact water quality?

**Mr. Barry Walker (BW)** Yes, in fact, it is being used in just that way. The River Authority's webpage regarding the Watershed Wise Rebate, contains a map of areas in San Antonio that have been identified (using the modeling technology) as high priority load areas.