

THE TEXAS WATER SOURCE

UPDATING COMANCHE, CORYELL, AND HAMILTON COUNTY LANDOWNERS ON LAND MANAGEMENT AND WATER ISSUES

December 15, 2018

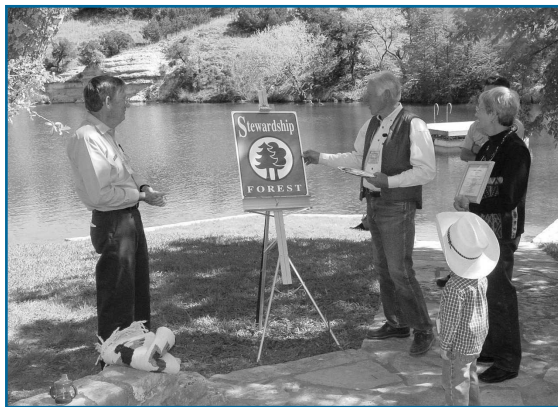
STEWARDSHIP MANAGEMENT PLANS

Long-term care of private land is critically important to Texas. Sound management practices increase land productivity and enhance ecosystem services provided by forests. These critical benefits include clean air and water, improved wildlife habitat, and additional opportunities for quality outdoor recreation.

Texas A&M Forest Service (TFS) promotes land stewardship to landowners all over Texas—from the Pineywoods of East Texas to the West Texas Panhandle. Professional assistance is tailored to your individual needs.

A written plan for your property is the foundation of good land stewardship. TFS foresters are available to help you develop a written 10-year course of action, outlining step-by-step measures that will enable you to meet your goals and objectives for your property.

A TFS forester will meet with you on your property to discuss your land objectives and how to meet those objectives. A multi-purpose Stewardship Plan addresses numerous resource elements including timber, water, wildlife, forest health, and more.



Natural resources in the Central Texas region are threatened by poor land management, fire exclusion, invasive species, oak wilt, and rapid population growth. As a Texas landowner, you have the ability to conserve Central Texas trees and natural resources for future generations.

TFS is available to help address your interests in trees, wildlife, recreation, and water, as well as concerns about drought, wildfire, forest health, and diseases such as oak wilt. Call your local TFS office or a private consulting forester for information on obtaining a Stewardship Plan for managing your property.

Successful implementation of a written Stewardship Plan can result in being nominated and recognized as good stewards of the land with the Certified Forest Steward award. This award is presented to any Texas landowner that owns at least 10 acres, has a written Stewardship plan, and implements aspects of that plan while using Best Management Practices that protect soil and water. Recipients receive a metal sign for their property and a certificate signed by the State Forester.

For more information:

- <http://tfsweb.tamu.edu/LandownerAssistance>

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Organization Spotlight



Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts

The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) organizes the entire state into soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs); currently, there are 216. Each SWCD is an independent political subdivision of state government and is governed by five directors elected by fellow rural landowners.

To bring a district into existence, a minimum of 50 local agricultural landowners had to petition the TSSWCB requesting the creation of a district. Following the filing of the petition, the TSSWCB held a hearing on the question of desirability and necessity for a district. If facts presented at the hearing determined a favorable need, the TSSWCB conducted an election within the proposed district on the proposition of creating a conservation district. At least two-thirds of the votes cast by local agricultural landowners must have been positive in order to create a new district.

To assure geographical representation on the district's governing board, SWCDs are divided into five subdivisions. A district's governing body, a board of directors, is made up of agricultural landowners, one from each of five subdivisions. Each district director must live in the district, own land in the subdivision he or she represents, and be actively engaged in farming or ranching.

SWCDs work to bring a widespread understanding of the needs of soil and water conservation. In addition, they work to activate the efforts of public and private organizations and agencies into a united front to combat soil and water erosion and to enhance water quality and quantity in the state.

It is the purpose of SWCDs to instill in the minds of local people that it is their individual responsibility to do the job of soil and water conservation. SWCDs receive assistance from many sources; however, even with all this

help, farmers, ranchers, communities, and others must exercise a voluntary initiative in applying a conservation program compatible with their own objectives.

Through a chartered, legally established SWCD, local farmers and ranchers are given the opportunity to decide for themselves how they are going to solve local soil and water conservation problems.

The **Upper Leon SWCD** serves Comanche, Erath, and Eastland counties. It meets on the 4th Wednesday of the month at 1:30 p.m. at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office in Comanche. The NRCS office, which also serves as an office for this SWCD, is at:

301 Hwy. 3381

Comanche, TX 76442

Phone number: (325) 356-5186

E-mail address: upperleon@swcd.texas.gov

The **Hamilton-Coryell SWCD** Serves Hamilton and Coryell counties. It meets at 9:00 a.m. on the 2nd Wednesday of the month. They rotate meeting locations each month between Gatesville and Hamilton NRCS offices; please use contact information below for meeting locations and other information:

P. O. Box 31

Hamilton, TX 76531-0031

Phone number: (254) 386-3913

E-mail address: hamiltoncoryell@swcd.texas.gov

For more information:

- <https://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/swcds/area5>

WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLANS

With water quality being a major issue of concern in Texas, the 73rd Legislature passed Senate Bill 503. This bill created the Water Quality Management Plan Program to provide agricultural and silvicultural (forestry) producers with an opportunity to comply with state water quality laws through traditional, voluntary, incentive-based programs.

A water quality management plan (WOMP) is a site-specific plan developed through and approved by Soil and Water Conservation Districts for agricultural or silvi-

cultural lands. The plan includes appropriate land treatment practices, production practices, management measures, technologies, or combinations thereof. The purpose of WOMPs is to achieve a level of pollution prevention or abatement determined by the TSSWCB, in consultation with local SWCDs, to be consistent with state water quality standards.

Landowners and operators may request the development of a site-specific water quality management plan through their local SWCDs.

WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SUCCESS STORY

High levels of bacteria prompted the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to add the Leon River (in 1996) and Pecan Creek (in 2006) to the Clean Water Act (CWA) section 303(d) list of impaired waters for not supporting the primary contact recreation use. Local stakeholders expressed interest in taking an active role in developing management strategies to reduce bacteria loadings in the watershed and sought to initiate the development of a Watershed Protection Plan (WPP). The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) provided CWA section 319 funding to the Brazos River Authority (BRA) through an EPA grant to facilitate the development of a WPP for the Leon River.

The Problem: *E. coli* is a bacteria normally found in the intestines of humans and other warm-blooded animals. Studies conducted by the EPA suggest that *E. coli* is a good indicator of fecal contamination of water and the presence of harmful pathogens which can cause intestinal illness or gastroenteritis. Frequent sources of *E. coli* can include sewerage overflows, malfunctioning septic systems, direct deposition by wildlife or livestock, and runoff from rainfall events.

Plan Development and Implementation: The Leon River Watershed Protection Plan was developed by local citizens. The stakeholder group consisted of representatives from Commissioner's courts (i.e., county governments), agricultural producers, wildlife interests, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), the dairy industry, cities, and various other interests in the watershed. A technical advisory group made up of representatives from federal, state, and local agencies; universities; and others, was formed to provide expertise to the stakeholder group. Several outreach and education programs were implemented in the city of Hamilton to inform local stakeholders of Best Management Practices (BMPs). A draft WPP was published in 2010.

The TSSWCB, partnering with local SWCDs, certified and

implemented 13 Water Quality Management Plans (WQMPs) in the impaired watersheds. The Upper Leon SWCD in Comanche and Erath counties implemented eight WQMPs on 1,857 acres. The Hamilton-Coryell SWCD implemented five WQMPs on 1,097 acres near Pecan Creek. These plans included alternative water sources, prescribed grazing, cross-fencing, grassed waterways, nutrient management, and grass planting.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) worked with landowners in both sub-watersheds to implement conservation practices on over 2,800 acres using Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding and another 1,840 acres using Agricultural Water Enhancement Program funding. The conservation practices implemented included prescribed grazing, grass and range planting, nutrient management, residue management, conservation cover, water wells, water troughs, and ponds.

Results: Water quality monitoring data show that the long-term *E. coli* counts now meet the state water quality standard for contact recreation in a portion of the Leon River and all of Pecan Creek. Consequently, the entire length (11.9 miles) of Pecan Creek was removed from the state's list of impaired waters in 2010, and a 3.9-mile segment in the upper portion of the Leon River from the confluence of Walnut Creek upstream to Lake Proctor was removed from the impaired waters list in 2012. Stakeholders within the watershed voluntarily implemented Best Management Practices (BMPs) and conducted public outreach and education. Through these efforts water quality was improved.

For more information:

- <https://goo.gl/jxa8qy>
- <https://goo.gl/RrXZFN>

HELPFUL ONLINE TOOL FOR LANDOWNERS

An online tool called "got LAND?" has been added to the **Texas Forest Information Portal**, a web-based application (see <http://texasforestinfo.tamu.edu>).

Whether you're looking to purchase land for the first time or you just inherited property, this online application can help new landowners during the initial stages of acquiring property.

Based on the answers to a few short questions, management information and resources are provided to help

you better care for your land and reach your property goals. Questions on property ownership goals, desired or current water features, past land uses, desired tax valuations, region of the property's location, and amount of acreage help the app to generate a report that gives you information that applies to your particular case. In order to see the report make sure pop-ups are enabled in your browser.

Get started at <https://gotLAND.tfs.tamu.edu>.

Texas A&M Forest Service
offices serving you:

Renee Burks - Comanche/Hamilton Co.
Hamilton office (254) 386-3361
rburks@tfs.tamu.edu

Karl Flocke - Coryell Co.
Austin office (512) 339-7807
karl.flocke@tfs.tamu.edu

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Lori Hazel - Water Resources Forester
Temple office (254) 541-8798
lhazel@tfs.tamu.edu

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Drinking Water Protection

The USDA Forest Service "Forests to Faucets" project uses GIS to model and map the land areas across the United States that are most important to surface drinking water sources. It also identifies forested areas important to the protection of drinking water and areas where drinking water supplies might be threatened by development, insects and diseases, and wildland fire. The results of this assessment provide information that can identify areas of interest for protecting surface drinking water quality.

To prioritize Texas watersheds by forest importance to surface drinking water for source water protection, four main factors were considered:

1. Watershed importance for surface drinking water,
2. Forest importance to surface drinking water,
3. Threats to forests, and
4. Potential for partnership.

Please refer to the Forest to Faucet methods paper, "From the Forest to the Faucet: Drinking Water and Forests in the US," by Emily Weidner and Al Todd (2011) for background and technical details. [Go to <https://goo.gl/E6NkBs> for this publication.]

Find an interesting graphic on how the Texas watersheds were prioritized by going to: <https://goo.gl/AyPPAZ>.



Texas A&M Forest Service
Water Resources
P. O. Box 310
Lufkin, TX 75902-0310

Email: dwork@tfs.tamu.edu

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