FY 2014

TXFWCO Activity Report: December

Uvalde County Road 416 Low Water Crossing Replacement Project

Texas Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office December Activities

- Uvalde Low Water Crossing Replacement (NFPP)
- San Antonio River Logjam Removal Project (NFPP)
- Ottine Dam Removal Project (NFPP)
- Alamito Creek (DFHP)
- Big Bend Reach Science Team Meeting
- Clear Creek Gambusia Sampling
- January Calendar

National Fish Passage Program (NFPP)

Uvalde County Low Water Crossing

The Uvalde County Road Department has continued to make progress on the low water crossing on County Road 416. The only remaining work is forming and pouring the concrete for the road surface and slopes on the east side of the low water crossing.

Uvalde County has made progress on the low water crossing at CR 416.

San Antonio River Logjam Removal Project

The TXFWCO has worked with the San Antonio Bay Foundation and the Guadalupe Blanco River Authority to develop the San Antonio River Logjam Removal Project. The project seeks to remove 1.5 miles of logjam from the river that has created a fish passage barrier that is causing overbank flooding, increased water loss due to evaporation, resulting in decreased flows into the estuaries of the San Antonio Bay. The National Fish Passage Program will supply $150,000 towards the project, and the partners are building support to raise even more money for this large project. The Guadalupe Blanco River Authority will remove the logs from the river using heavy equipment and barges. The logs will be dried and burned after removal. The project will benefit multiple species such as blue crab and oysters, which in turn will benefit the endangered whooping crane. The San Antonio Bay Foundation has submitted a grant application to the Texas General Land Office, Coastal Management Program for the funds needed to complete the project. The project is continues to undergo a section 7 consultation with the Corpus Christi Ecological Services Field Office.

The logjam covers over 1.5 miles of the San Antonio River and impedes flow into the San Antonio Bay estuaries.

Ottine Dam Removal Project

The dam removal project has been delayed several times due to contracting issues, flooding, and equipment delays. The rental contract for the heavy equipment needed for the removal is again open for bidding. The original contractor did not have the specified equipment that they were contracted to provide. .

On 17 December 2013, Mike Montagne conducted a site visit to the dam to place a combination lock on the gate that will allow access to the river from the east side. Abe Moore, a video producer for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), is video documenting the removal effort, accompanied Mike and took some video footage of the dam in its current state and conducted an interview with Mike. When the project is completed, the footage will likely be run on the TPWD Sunday morning program.

Desert Fish Habitat Partnership (DFHP)

Alamito Creek

The TXFWCO has partnered with the Trans Pecos Water and Land Trust (TPWLT), TPWD, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFWP), and others to restore habitat on the Alamito Creek Preserve (The Preserve). TPWD has recognized The Preserve's segment of Alamito Creek as meeting the criteria as an Ecologically Unique River and Stream Segment. The Preserve has been named by the National Fish Habitat Partnership as one of its ten "Waters to Watch" in 2012.

The Alamito Creek Preserve Team seeks to restore the grassland in the Alamito Creek watershed by removing approximately 100 acres of mesquite and other non-natives, and reseeding with native grasses where needed. The invasive vegetation is thought to be lowering the water table and reducing flows in the creek. The Preserve hopes to showcase a healthy West Texas stream environment and inspire other protection and restoration efforts by expanding outreach in the region to the public, adjoining landowners, regional decision-makers and other key visitors, to participate in a watershed cooperative with conservation as its goal.

To date, the team has conducted four mesquite removal trips. Unfortunately, the

monitoring wells had been destroyed by a flash flood (20,000 cfs from 0 cfs) a few months earlier in Alamito Creek. We were able to find only one of the six wells and it was completely silted in, making it useless. The team tried to dig down to the water table in the creek and survey the ground water level, but were unable to reach water. It is likely that the wells would have been dry and un-functional even had they not been destroyed by the high flow event. The team is discussing possibilities for a different monitoring system to verify the results of the project.

Mesquite removal at Alamito Creek.

Big Bend Reach Science Team

On 4 December 2013, representatives from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), the National Park Service (NPS), and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) (the Agencies) met in Alpine Texas to discuss future monitoring efforts on the Rio Grande and begin to build a framework for future monitoring. In attendance were Kenny Saunders (TPWD), Jeff Bennett (NPS), Pete Diaz (USFWS), and Mike Montagne (USFWS). Other partners were invited but could not attend. The framework developed at this meeting will be sent to the partners for review and comment.

The team developed the framework within the bounds of available funding to the agencies and partners who work on the Lower Rio Grande in Texas. The team developed both core tasks that the Agencies can achieve, within staffing and funding restrictions, and tasks that are wider reaching and could be tasked to partners if funding or opportunities become available. The three agencies have accepted the responsibilities of monitoring the Big Bend Reach of the Rio Grande despite lack of direct funding to do so. The core framework described within this document includes work that the Agencies have agreed to work together on to accomplish, as well as recommendations that they would like to see accomplished, probably by partners, based upon the availability of funding.

The Agencies have determined this work on the Rio Grande to be important in that it is an international border river with equivalently protected areas in Mexico (Monumento Del Rio Bravo), the state has designated it as an ecologically significant stream segment, and has been designated as a Wild and Scenic River.

Clear Creak Gambusia Genetic Sampling

On 19 December 2013, the TXFWCO and Kenny Saunders (TPWD) conducted a sampling trip to Wilkinson Spring in Menard Texas. Genetic samples (fin clips) were collected from Clear Creak gambusia (*gambusia heterochir*) specimens that visually appeared free of hybridization with *gambusia affinis*. Genetic samples were also collected from what looked to be pure *gambusia affinis* to aid in the genetic analysis. The samples were submitted to Dijar Lutz-Carrillo (TPWD) for genetic analysis to determine the extent of the introgression with *gambusia affinis* .

Tentative January Schedule of Activities:

6-10 January 2014: Alamito Creek Project (DFHP)

13 January 2014: Paddlefish Reintroduction Project Conference Call

14 January 2014: Pecos Pupfish Conservation Agreement Conference Call

27-29 January 2014: Pecos pupfish monitoring in Salt Creek

27-31 January 2014: Rillito Spring Restoration