The Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Watershed Newsletter

June 2013

Our First Newsletter

Welcome to the first issue of the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Watershed newsletter! The purpose for the newsletter is to inform and engage local stakeholders in helping to improve and protect the quality of water in Geronimo and Alligator Creeks. We are taking suggestions for the new newsletter name (see the sidebar on page 2). 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.

First Annual Cleanup Event Was a Success!

The first annual Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Cleanup event was a huge success and made a real impact by removing trash and debris from the creeks. The event held Saturday, April 6, was coordinated by the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Partnership, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority, as part of implementation efforts for the area's watershed protection plan. Almost 100 participants met at the Navarro High School parking lot and the New Braunfels Airport parking lot at 9 a.m. for a light breakfast, safety briefing and event instructions.

Event t-shirts, trash bags, certificates, gloves, and pick-up tools were available to those who came out to help clean up the creeks. "The response from the community was unbelievable. We had support from the City of New Braunfels and the City of Seguin, Continental Corporation, Alamo Group, Guadalupe County Commissioner Seidenberger, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, Geronimo Creek Resort, and many citizens—all wanting to give their time and resources to make a visible difference," said Debbie Magin, GBRA's Director of Water Quality Services. The City of New Braunfels donated the use of three large disposal containers to collect the trash and tires, and provided disposal free of charge for the event.

Cleanup efforts were focused at seven locations where roadways cross Geronimo and Alligator creeks and their contributing streams, and the large storm water

In this issue:

"We plan to make next year's cleanup even better."

Volunteers for the Cleanup Event met at the Navarro High School and the New Braunfels Airport.

The Continental Cleanup Crew at the storm water detention pond behind Creekside.

Help name this newsletter! Send in your suggestion by 6 pm Monday, June 10th or bring it with you to the meeting. We will vote on the new name during Monday's meeting. Author of the winning name will win a prize! You may send in one or more suggestions to Ward Ling at wling@ag.tamu.edu or call 979-255-1819.

Visit the Texas Well Owner Network webpage at http://twon.tamu.edu/

detention pond behind the Town Center at Creekside. "Volunteers collected 2,960 pounds of trash, that included 110 bags of trash, 26 tires, and large items such as a stove, air conditioner, car battery, and a toilet," said Ward Ling, AgriLife Extension Program Specialist. The City of New Braunfels recycled the tires and the metal materials collected were sent to recycling centers, as well. "We are so grateful for the overwhelming support from the community for this first event—we plan to make next year's cleanup even better!" said Ling.

A Local Perspective, by Frank Dietz

It has been a pleasure as a resident of Comal County to participate as a "land owner" representative on the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Steering Committee done by GBRA and Texas A&M AgriLife. The study is helpful to any of us in the watershed! I commend it for review and possible challenge to enlist new and responsible behaviors for all of us who value our safe and clean waters into the next generations.

No subject is more critical and timely in Texas than WATER. The study looks at the contexts for the watershed from Alligator Creek at its source points in our part of Comal County and follows the pathway to Geronimo Creek and ultimately the Guadalupe. It is a privilege to live in such an important and life-sustaining area with its creeks, rivers, springs and aquifers!

The Creeks study helps those of us along the way to think more critically and sensitively about runoff and measures to enhance the quality of the water flows and the reduction of natural and man-made contaminants. It makes one resist any thought of dumping waste and, instead take measures to prevent runoff. Also, we should begin to plant grasses appropriate to the area and channel flows in a helpful manner where possible.

It is heartening to have science meet and interact with those of us on the ground to enhance stewardship of the land and water for future generations. This can and will make a difference!

Hopefully school, church, and community groups-----particularly of young people----will take to heart the efforts to keep clean and pristine our creeks in the watershed! I, for one, am ready to do what I can and want to reach out to others as well.

I am grateful for the opportunity to learn and discover in this way.

"Well Educated" Training was Well Attended

The first Texas Well Owner Network (TWON) educational training offered by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in cooperation with the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and GBRA was held in Seguin this past January. The TWON program is for Texas residents who depend on household wells for their drinking water needs. Forty-seven well owners who wanted to become familiar with Texas' groundwater sources, water quality, water treatment, and well

maintenance issues attended the one day training event. If you are a water well owner and missed this training, please visit http://twon.tamu.edu/ to learn more about how to manage and protect your drinking water source, as well as to learn about future trainings and well screenings. Under the Publications tab of the web page you can access many helpful fact sheets on topics such as: water well basics; well owner drought response; bacteria, copper, iron, arsenic and other potential contaminants; and solving water quality problems in the home.

New Feral Hog Tab Added to Project Webpage

Because feral hogs have no sweat glands, they commonly wallow in and near water sources to keep cool.

Feral hogs cause an estimated $52 million in damage to agriculture annually in Texas and are increasing in numbers across the state. Feral hogs are also identified in the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks WPP as a potential source of bacteria and nitrate nitrogen loading to area streams and creeks, contributing to the water quality problems.

To help address this problem, the website's feral hog page now includes a link to a statewide feral hog reporting system that allows the public to provide information on hog sightings and damage. These data will help scientists and managers better address feral hog problems in watersheds. In addition, the website has links to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's publications on feral hog management, and contact information for Jared Timmons, the new AgriLife Extension Associate specializing in the control and management of feral hogs who serves the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Watershed.

Jared will keep the Partnership informed about feral hog education opportunities as they are scheduled. Also, Jared is always willing to provide presentations to community groups such as Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, and other local groups. His presentations provide an overview of feral hog biology and habitat, population growth trends, how they can negatively impact water quality, and resources to help control growing populations.

Feral Hog Control Options

Trapping is one of the most common management practices that land owners utilize to control feral hog populations. There are two main types of trap options available: corral traps and box traps. Each of these choices comes with particular advantages and disadvantages.

Corral traps are effective for capturing large groups of hogs, while being friendly to deer—deer can escape, while the hogs cannot. However, due to their size and construction, materials can be expensive, building the trap can be time consuming, and the traps are not portable. As a result, corral traps should be placed in key areas hogs will return to in the future.

Box traps are relatively easy to move and set with minimal time required. Their small size makes them ideal for easy relocation via a pickup truck or small trailer. For this same reason, most can be handled and moved by one person to target areas of fresh hog activity. However, their small size limits the number of hogs that can be captured at any one time to only one or two adult pigs. Due to this limitation,

Feral hogs in a box trap.

many box traps are required to reduce hog numbers. Also, wildlife, livestock, or other non-target animals can be accidently captured so traps must be checked regularly.

Extension has developed a comprehensive library of publications to educate and assist in the management of feral hogs. For more information about these two trap options, go to:

http://feralhogs.tamu.edu/publications/

If you experience issues with feral hogs, Jared is your local resource. He will meet with land owners and inspect the property to view any damage. Jared also can provide information on local factors affecting population growth, and offer advice on appropriate control techniques, such as trapping, and where to locate those controls on the property.

For further information, contact:

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www.geronimocreek.org/FeralHogs.aspx
and
http://feralhogs.tamu.edu/

Summertime Lawn Watering

If thoughts of the drought have you concerned about how you are going to maintain your lawn this summer, you are not alone. Even after the drenching rains the area received recently, residents need to know and understand what, if any, water restrictions are in place.

To answer this, both the City of Seguin and New Braunfels Utilities (NBU) have dedicated web pages that inform their customers of any current water restrictions. For Seguin residents, go to:
http://www.seguintexas.gov/

Look on the right hand side under Public Notices to view current water restrictions. There you will also find *a requirement that any above ground swimming pool that is over two feet deep will require a permit.*

For NBU customers, go to:
http://www.nbutexas.com/Conservation/WaterUsage/CurrentWaterRestrictionStatus/tabid/370/Default.aspx
to view current water restrictions, or you can call (830) 608-8925 to hear a brief recorded message. *You may also leave a voice mail at this number that alerts NBU to possible watering violations.* NBU will contact that individual or business and remind them of the ordinance requirements and request their compliance. NBU has an easy to read brochure that explains the landscape watering regulations at:

http://www.nbutexas.com/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=j3VzLb9kXZg%3d&tabid=374

Lawn Watering Calculator

After viewing these web pages and seeing when you are allowed to

water your lawn, you may still have questions about how much to water and how often.

AgriLife Extension has developed an online calculator to help citizens determine their water requirements. Start by going to: http://texaset.tamu.edu/index.php Select the nearest online weather station (San Antonio North). On the next page, select either home watering, turf/landscape irrigation, or crop irrigation, and then provide the needed information. For example, for home watering first scroll down to "Select Turf Growth Conditions (Step 1)" and provide the sun exposure level (Full, Part, or Shade) that generally characterizes your lawn.

Step 2 is where the calculator has totaled the last 7 days of rainfall and compares that to the irrigation requirement for your particular grass type and sunlight exposure level. This can be manually entered/ changed to account for local variations.

Step 3 input your sprinkler precipitation rate. This is a value determined by you through a quick and easy exercise. Simply place rain gauges or straight-edged cans in several places around your sprinkler. If a multi-zone irrigation system is being used, each zone should be tested. Run the sprinkler (or system) for a defined period of time (15, 30, 45 minutes or even 1 hour). Read the volume in the rain gauge or measure the amount of water collected in the straight-edge cans using a ruler. By knowing the time and the amount of water collected in the cans or gauges, the sprinkler precipitation rate can be determined. For example, if the water level is ½ inch after watering for 1 hour, then your precipitation rate for that sprinkler is ½ inch per hour. This is the value to input on line 4, Step 3.

The final step is to click "calculate" to determine total run time and number of irrigations/week.

Other factors to consider when developing a watering schedule include age of the lawn, new plantings in the landscape, ground slope, soil type, and outside temperatures. Both Seguin and NBU customers need to know that currently, all watering (except hand watering) must be done before 10 am or after 8pm.

For more information on how to best meet the water needs of your lawn and conserve precious water resources, go to: http://twon.tamu.edu/media/385870/lawn%20water%20management.pdf and http://www.twdb.texas.gov/publications/brochures/conservation/doc/WaterGuide.pdf

Septic System Maintenance

Septic systems have long been a common way to process and dispose of waste products in areas that are not served by a sanitary sewer collection system. With a septic system, the wastewater is treated on-site, rather than collected and sent to a wastewater treatment facility.

Typical septic systems are composed of two main parts: the tank and the drain field. The tank is a watertight container made of concrete, fiberglass, or polyethylene that is buried underground. It holds the wastewater as it is being generated, long enough to allow the solids to settle, and allows for decomposition of the materials. Effluent (liquid) flows out to the drain field for final treatment in the soil.

However, like any engineered, man-made system there is always the potential for system failure for a variety of reasons. When septic systems fail, they can contribute to groundwater or surface water pollution. It is the system owner's responsibility to maintain, and when

necessary make repairs, to keep the system operating properly.

Common causes of system failure include improper location of the system, improper design, faulty construction, improper operation, system overload, and poor or no maintenance of the system. If you suspect your system is failing, contact your local service provider. To report a suspected septic system violation in Guadalupe County, contact the Guadalupe County Environmental Health Department at (830) 303-4188 extension 250. To report a suspected septic system violation in Comal county, contact the Comal County Engineer's office, Environmental Health Department at (830) 608-2090.

The Geronimo and Alligator Creeks WPP identified failing septic systems as a potential source of pollution for both bacteria and nitrate nitrogen. There are an estimated 2,303 septic systems in the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks watershed. Failure estimates for the watershed ranged from 5 to 15%, depending on location and age of the system. The cost to repair a system can vary substantially depending upon the type of system and cause(s) of failure.

Septic system owners in Guadalupe County with newer technology aerobic systems are required by county ordinance to maintain a maintenance contract with a licensed service provider. Comal County residents do not have this requirement, but do have more stringent requirements such as larger lot size, a permit for all systems, flood plain determination, sewer line sizing, and restrictions on items that can be placed within the surface application spray area. GBRA has developed online training modules that illustrate the components of both conventional and aerobic systems. The modules allow users to manipulate the systems to function properly or cause a system malfunction. To view the modules go to:

http://www.gbra.org/flash/education.aspx

Partnership Meeting Monday June 10th

The Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Watershed Partnership will meet on June 10th, in the GBRA River Annex in Seguin.

Refreshments will start at 5:30 with the meeting beginning at 6pm. The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department Kills and Spills Team will have a table set up in the atrium with informational materials prior to the meeting.

The Partnership includes all individuals with an interest in learning about and doing more to improve and protect water quality in the Geronimo and Alligator Creek's watershed.

Agenda topics include a presentation explaining work performed by Navarro High School students in and around Geronimo Creek as part of a Healthy Habitats grant, a summary and forecast on drought conditions by the Senior Service Hydrologist from the National Weather Service office in New Braunfels, and a recap of the first annual Geronimo and Alligator creeks cleanup event held in April.

Come see and hear about local water issues and get involved. We hope to see you there!

Upcoming events

- ***Partnership Meeting June 10, 2013 at the GBRA River Annex at 905 Nolan Street, Seguin.***
- ***Riparian Workshop September 17th— details coming soon!***
- ***Free septic system homeowner trainings this fall—details coming soon!***
- ***Nonpoint Source Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO) Workshop coming this fall— details coming soon!***

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