

The Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Project

By Ward Ling, Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Watershed Coordinator

According to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) water quality in almost half of the streams, rivers, and lakes in Texas is “impaired”. An impaired waterbody has pollutant levels above established standards that limit important uses such as recreation and fishing, or that may be harmful to aquatic life. Unfortunately, two local waterbodies are impaired, Geronimo Creek and Alligator Creek. Both creeks have elevated concentrations of *E.coli* bacteria which create risks for any type of contact recreation that might result in ingestion of water, such as wading and swimming. Monitoring also has found elevated levels of nitrate-nitrogen which can contribute to algal blooms and ultimately, to fish kills.

Fortunately, in 2009 a group of local citizens formed the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Watershed Partnership. And working together and with state and federal agency support, the Partnership developed the Geronimo and Alligator Creeks Watershed Protection Plan (WPP). The plan identifies potential sources of pollution and provides a basic strategy to restore and protect water quality in Geronimo and Alligator Creeks. The plan and information about on-going activities in the watershed can be found on the Partnership’s website at <http://geronimocreek.org>.

Plan Development

The Geronimo and Alligator Creeks WPP was developed by and for local citizens with extensive stakeholder input throughout the process. Two public information meetings were held in 2009 to form the Partnership and organize a 25 member Steering Committee. Over the next 29 months, the plan was developed through 12 Steering Committee meetings, 2 watershed tours, 9 work group meetings, and 2 public comment meetings. All meetings were advertised and the public was encouraged to participate. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority helped the Partnership prepare the plan with funding from the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board.

The Geronimo and Alligator Creeks WPP was completed and approved by the Steering Committee in August 2012, and was officially “accepted” by the Environmental Protection Agency on September 13, 2012. EPA acceptance is critical because it allows the watershed to receive special federal funding to support plan implementation.

What Has Happened So Far

Since fall of 2012, implementation of the WPP has been actively underway. All implementation activities are voluntary, so individuals and businesses can identify actions that fit them best. In many cases, simple changes in habits or actions, when adopted by everyone involved, can make a big difference.

One great example of community action was the first Annual Geronimo Stream Cleanup on April 6, 2013. Over 100 local groups and citizens participated. Volunteers collected 2,960 pounds of refuse including 110 bags of trash, 26 tires, and large items such as stoves, air conditioners, and car batteries.

For some efforts, funding is essential. And already, the Partnership has obtained over \$748,000 in state and federal funding to help the watershed. These funds are targeting specific needs such as removing failed septic systems, helping farmers and ranchers implement water quality practices, and eliminating feral hogs. More information about these efforts will be in future articles.

Getting Involved

Public involvement is essential to improve and protect water quality in Geronimo and Alligator Creeks. The “public” includes every individual citizen, landowners, businesses, and city and county officials. And to get more people involved, we will be publishing monthly articles in the Seguin Gazette and New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung. The purpose is to provide information about the watershed, on-going activities, and recommendations on how to better manage potential sources of bacteria and nutrients. When you see these articles, pass them on to friends and neighbors.

One of the best ways for you to get involved is by becoming an active member of the watershed Partnership and participating in quarterly Partnership meetings. These meetings provide important updates on current activities and offer great opportunities to share ideas for improving water quality in the watershed. The next partnership meeting is scheduled for January 14, 2014 at the GBRA River Annex, 905 Nolan Street, in Seguin starting at 5:30 pm. In the meantime, you can contact Ward Ling (Project Manager) at 979-845-6980 or by e-mail at wling@ag.tamu.edu or Debbie Magin, Director of Water Quality Services/Regional Laboratory at 830-379-5822 or dmagin@gbra.org. And don't forget to visit the watershed's webpage at <http://www.geronimocreek.org/> to learn more.

Remember, your watershed is counting on you. Let's work together to protect Geronimo and Alligator Creeks and all your local water resources.