



Partners combining resources to improve flood control and water quality.



NEWS RELEASE

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WATERSHED PROTECTION PLAN LAUNCHED TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY IN THE UPPER SAN ANTONIO RIVER

SAN ANTONIO – An important step in the process of improving water quality in the Upper San Antonio River was taken this week as local water agencies kicked off the public participation phase of a new Watershed Protection Plan (WPP). The public meeting was held Nov. 29 in the board room at the San Antonio River Authority (SARA).

The WPP, begun this year with \$400,000 in funding from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and SARA, is a proactive study designed to assess and improve water quality in the Upper San Antonio River. The WPP study area reaches from North Loop 1604 to Loop 410 South in San Antonio. The plan to address bacteria is being developed by the Bexar Regional Watershed Management (BRWM) partnership in cooperation with the San Antonio Water System (SAWS) and the Edwards Aquifer Authority.

About 50 people attended this week's meeting, many of whom live near the Upper San Antonio River. Dr. James Miertschin, of James Miertschin &

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Associates, is the consultant contracted by SARA for the WPP project. He shared the results of his studies with the audience. His presentation included a discussion on bacterial pollution sources and potential water quality improvement practices for the study area's watershed. Some of the pollution is generated by migratory birds, livestock and exotic animals at the San Antonio Zoo, according to Miertschin's report. As a result of these findings, partners in the WPP have been working cooperatively with the zoo to find ways to reduce its part of the pollution. Miertschin provided several options for pollution-reduction projects that will be evaluated. The WPP could serve as a model for future water quality projects in San Antonio, Miertschin said. Meanwhile, weekly water quality sampling by SARA staff is continuing at the zoo and three other sites at Hildebrand, South Alamo and Mitchell Street. Other sites will be added in January 2006 along Alazan, Apache and San Pedro creeks.

The amount of bacteria in the river has decreased significantly, said Steve Lusk, Environmental Services Department Superintendent at SARA. "The hard work by SAWS, the City of San Antonio and SARA to manage thousands of miles of sewer lines, wastewater treatment plants and stormwater runoff has reduced pollutants to the point where we are close to meeting the state stream standards in our project area," Lusk said. "However, efforts such as the WPP are needed to help bring us the rest of the way. The public component of the plan will allow us to inform interested citizens of the activities that are planned and solicit their input."

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Feedback from the public meeting and the progress of the WPP will be reported to the TCEQ. Two more public meetings will be held in the future. For more information on water quality in the San Antonio River, go to www.bexarwatershed.org and click on Water Quality/Water Quality Studies. For information on WPP public meetings, click on News and Events/Events.

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BRWM is a collaboration of the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, the San Antonio River Authority and 18 suburban cities to improve flood control and water quality within Bexar County.